65th General Assembly

Statement by Turkish Representative

Situation in the Middle East/Question of Palestine

November 30, 2010

TURKEY: Thank you Mr. President. We are once again at a pivotal moment in the Middle East. There are two paths ahead. One is to a bright future, the other to more of the same. Much depends on which path is taken. History will not judge lightly those who pay lip service to peace but act to perpetrate conflict.

Turkey welcomes the resumption of direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority back in September. Since then, we have been deeply concerned that no tangible progress has been possible. Turkey continues to support the efforts exerted to ensure a resumption of the direct negotiations. We are cognizant of the inherent difficulties, but too much time, energy and political capital have been invested in this process to let it fail now.

On the other hand, negotiations cannot realistically continue in good faith as long as the rampant illegal settlement activity continues unchecked, potentially undermining the whole notion of a two-state solution. Turkey, like countless other nations, call on Israel to adhere to its roadmap obligations and cease and desist from all settlement activity including East Jerusalem.

The patience and the will of the international community on this score should not be tested. Ultimately, there will have to be consequences. The Security Council and the quartet cannot remain silent forever. At this point, let me underline that the status of Jerusalem is one of the core issues of the peace process, along with borders and refugees, and subject to final status negotiations. Therefore, we reiterate the importance of preserving the status as well as the social culture and religious fabric of Jerusalem and call on Israel to refrain from any provocative acts in the city.

On the other hand, the unlawful blockade on Gaza has turned. The relevant UN Security Council resolutions must be implemented without delay. How can we effectively combat the spread of anti-Semitism in the Middle East while the unjust and inhumane collective punishment of a civilian population ensues in Gaza. The Security Council has stated clearly that the situation in Gaza is unsustainable and yet it continues. Like the settlement issue, this has become a matter of credibility for the international community and the UN.

Mr. President, with the hope that once resumed, the direct negotiations can make rapid progress, it is also important to continue to uphold the basic framework for peace as embodied in relevant Security Council resolutions, Madrid principles, Arab peace initiative and the roadmap obligations. It's clear that there is an international consensus on these fundamental parameters. A comprehensive peace based on two states, Israel and an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian state living side by side in peace and security with agreed borders based on those of 1967, Jerusalem as the capital for both states and a just settlement for refugees. The reaffirmation of these standards will serve to bring about a timely solution that addresses the concern of all.

On the other hand, all the issues in the region are interlinked and this is why a comprehensive peace is necessary in order to ensure stability prevails in the region. Therefore, meaningful progress in the Syrian and Lebanese tracts will be crucial as well. In this regard, we call for the full implementation of all relevant Security Council resolutions.

Mr. President, in order for there to be popular support for direct negotiations and ultimately the realization of a two-state solution, the conditions of occupation have to be eased and a positive environment created on the ground that allows for the state-building exercise in Palestine to make progress. We welcome the World Bank's pronouncement that at the current peace and performance, the Palestinian Authority is well positioned for the establishment of a state at any point in the near future.

In order for the Palestinian Authority to become economically viable, obstacles to private sector development and sustainable growth have to be lifted. Palestinians need to be able to use more of their land. They also have to enjoy their fundamental rights and freedoms. In short, as the basis for a state is rollout, the measures of occupation must be rolled back.

In the meantime, the considerable progress already made by the Palestinian Authority in state building must continue to be supported by the international community. Mr. President, developments in Lebanon are crucial to peace and security in the region. Turkey attaches great importance to maintaining the political independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon and we support the efforts of the government.

Turkey has been concerned about rising tensions, as evidence by Prime Minister Erdogan's visit to Lebanon last week. We will continue to work to help promote calm. The special tribunal for Lebanon is an independent body established by the Council at the request of Lebanon. Its work is of a legal nature and should not be used to further political agendas.

The hard-won internal peace and stability in Lebanon and the rule of law must be preserved and respected by all. Turkey will continue to play its part in a bilateral and regional context to diffuse existing tensions. Mr. President, six months have passed since Israel attacked an international humanitarian aid convoy at high seas killing nine civilians and wounding many others. Turkey continues to cooperate fully with the panel of inquiry established by the Secretary General in accordance with the Security Council presidential statement of 1, June.

After having received the Turkish interim report, the panel submitted its first progress report to the Secretary General in mid-September. However, four months after the establishment of the panel, Israel is yet to present its own findings. Meanwhile the international, independent fact-finding mission tasked by the Human Rights Council has issued its report which contains alarming findings, compelling legal arguments and striking conclusions. We continue to expect Israel to live up to its responsibilities, acknowledge its mistake and to act accordingly.

Mr. President, in closing, let me emphasize our conviction that the Israel/Palestinian conflict lies at the heart of all the problems in the Middle East and that as such the current pause in direct negotiation between the parties cannot last forever. There is no acceptable alternative to a just and comprehensive settlement. The status quo is not viable. The relative security that prevails cannot be taken for granted. Uncertainty breeds instability and the time is running out. The people of the region need leadership, not brinksmanship. The time to act is now. Thank you Mr. President.