

REMARKS BY
THE HONOURABLE DATO' SRI REEZAL MARICAN NAINA MARICAN,
DEPUTY MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF MALAYSIA
AT
THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF SOLIDARITY
WITH THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE
INSTITUTE OF DIPLOMACY AND FOREIGN RELATIONS (IDFR)
8 DECEMBER 2015

His Excellency Dato' Ibrahim Abdullah

Deputy Secretary General (Bilateral) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia

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Deputy Secretary General (Multilateral) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia

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Director General of Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations (IDFR)

Excellencies, Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh and good morning.

Foremost, allow me to warmly welcome you to today's event to mark the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. I would like to express my gratitude and thanks to the NGOs and the Embassy of Palestine in Malaysia for their cooperation in ensuring the success of today's event.

2. At the outset, I would also like to seize this opportunity to convey our heartfelt congratulations to the State of Palestine on the historic adoption of Resolution 69/320, which saw the flag of the State of Palestine being raised at the recent United Nations General Assembly in New York in September 2015.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

3. Malaysia is proud to stand together with our Palestinian brethren in the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which falls on 29 November every year. It was also on that fateful date in 1947 that the UN General Assembly decided to adopt Resolution 181, partitioning the land of Palestine into two states, an Arab State and a Jewish state. However, after nearly seven (7) decades only one State has come into being, while the Palestinian people are still struggling for dignity, justice, peace and an independent and sovereign state of their own.

4. Sadly, international efforts at finding a just solution to this issue have remained largely unsuccessful or unimplemented. Countless resolutions passed by the United Nations have been totally ignored by Israel, and sadly the UN, in particular the UN Security Council and the world powers seem powerless or unwilling to reprimand Israel for its intransigence. United Nations special investigative team also was unable to access the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), as the Israeli Government has not

granted access and has not formally responded to UN's requests for access to Israel and the OPT.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. Recently, the world was again horrified by the brutal and inhumane aggression on Palestinians in West Bank that have now been ongoing for the past three months. The continuous provocations and escalating violence in particular in and around the Holy Sites of Jerusalem cannot continue to go on. We call on the relevant parties to exercise restraint and return to the negotiating table to work together to reach a comprehensive and lasting solution to address the conflict. Lives of innocent Palestinians including children, women and the elderly who were defenceless against the military might of Israel were slaughtered without mercy in the name of self-defence. Appalled by these brutalities, the Government of Malaysia on 16 September 2015 had issued a statement condemning Israel's brutal military aggression against the vulnerable and defenceless population. Malaysia also supported the Security Council's statement on the clashes in West Bank on 17 September 2015.

6. Recently, on 22 October 2015, I was at the United Nations in New York to deliver a strong statement on behalf of Malaysia on the issue of Palestine during the Open Debate on the Situation in the Middle East at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

7. I conveyed Malaysia's increasing scepticism on the long-standing insistence by the international community that the best way to achieve the two-state solution is only through direct bilateral negotiations between Palestine and Israel. Whereby, the approach has failed for the past 20 years since the Oslo Accords. The possibility of achieving the two-state solution based on direct bilateral negotiations appears more remote than ever, particularly due to the continuing expansion of illegal Israeli settlements and construction of the illegal Apartheid Wall by Israel.

8. I urged the international community to take bold actions to salvage the two-state solution and to be prepared to look beyond the Security Council for a solution to the conflict.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

9. The current developments reflect a situation that is deeply alarming. The crisis in war-torn Gaza is deepening. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, there are daily infringements of Palestinian rights as land is increasingly lost to illegal settlements. In Gaza, nine months after the Operation Protective Edge, 12,600 homes were totally destroyed during the 2014 hostilities, but since then not a single one has been rebuilt in Gaza. Multiple factors affect the slow reconstruction in Gaza, including unfulfilled donor pledges. The blockade, now in its eighth year, imposes severe restrictions on Palestinian movement, imports and exports and has left Gaza dependent on international aid and with soaring unemployment. The bottom line remains that, if Gaza is to recover from the damage wrought by multiple rounds of hostility and a shattered economy, the blockade must be lifted. The people deserve help and realisation of their human rights, not collective punishment.

10. During the International Conference on Palestine: "Reconstructing Gaza", last year held in Cairo, the Government of Palestine has presented the National Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan, which assessed the total cost of reconstruction efforts at USD4 billion -- of which USD414 million is required for immediate relief, USD1.2 billion for early recovery, and USD2.4 billion for reconstruction. The 50-day conflict that started on 8 July resulted in half a million internally displaced people. Schools, educational institutions and cultural heritage suffered significant damage. The education system in Gaza, already suffering from a shortage of at least 200 schools prior to this crisis, has been badly

affected. 26 schools have been completely destroyed, and 122 others have been damaged during the conflict, 75 of which are United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) schools also serving as shelters for IDPs.

11. UNRWA plays an active part in addressing both urgent humanitarian needs and longer-term recovery of Gaza. Through the National Recovery Plan, as well as the United Nations Gaza Crisis Appeal and the Support Plan for the transformation of the Gaza Strip (2014-2016), the Organization is aiming to improve the safety and the protection of the Palestinian refugees. With the support from UNESCO, part of the effort is concentrated on improving education environment in schools and higher education institutions; provide educational materials and facilities for most vulnerable university students; and address psycho-social and other special educational needs of teachers and learners.

12. In this regard, I am pleased to announce that this year, Malaysia is contributing an additional USD100,000 monetary support on top of our annual commitment of USD25,000 to UNRWA efforts. Another USD50,000 have also been allocated for United Nations Register or Damages (UNRoD), whose mandate is to serve as a record in documentary form, of the damage caused to all natural and legal persons concerned as a result of the construction of the Wall by Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in and around East Jerusalem. As a regular donor country to the Palestinian cause, I hope that this small but yet meaningful contribution will be able to help to alleviate the burdens of our Palestinian brothers and sisters. It is in this respect too that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides assistance to Palestinian through NGO such as the CAKNA Palestin. The two (2) Palestinian students who will share with us today their learning experience both in Palestine and Malaysia are perfect examples of our efforts in capacity building through training and education.

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

13. I sincerely believe that education is the foundation of any society. To invest in education is to invest in peace and stability. For this, the humanitarian community needs the ability to quickly bring in materials and equipment required for the repair, reconstruction and building of schools in Gaza on a large scale. A solution also needs to be found for the 330,000 people forced to find refuge in schools - 70,000 of whom have nowhere to go after their homes were destroyed - and to support longer-term, extensive rehabilitation and refurbishment of damaged school buildings.

14. Majority of the schools in Gaza are severely damaged that they can no longer be used. Among those still standing, 103 have been turned into collective shelters for some 330,000 displaced people, half of whom are children. The education sector was already in a crisis point prior to last year's escalation, suffering from a shortage of almost 200 schools, with nearly 80 per cent of classes running double shifts to deal with the high number of students. The ongoing blockade in Gaza has prevented desperately-needed new schools from being built, and it will impair reconstruction efforts if urgent action is not taken.

15. Based on the United Nations Gaza Crisis Appeal, an estimated USD8.4 million is required for the interventions proposed by UNESCO, while a total of USD121 million is required for the overall reconstruction of the education sector. It is critical that urgent funding for education is provided as soon as possible to ensure the normal continuation of the new school year and the construction of new schools and learning spaces to absorb the out-of-school population. Rapid reconstruction of infrastructure and services is essential at the local level, as prolonged interruption of these services could further have a damaging impact on the education system and, more broadly, on local economic development.

16. This irresponsible and unjust action by Israel only strengthen our resolve to work harder and in concert with our friends in the United Nations, Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and other regional organizations to address the Palestinian question. Malaysia has been steadfast and consistent in supporting the Palestinian cause and supports a comprehensive solution to the conflict based on the Quartet Roadmap and the UN Security Council resolutions with Israel and Palestine living side-by-side in peace and security.

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

17. Undoubtedly much more needs to be done by the international community towards ensuring our Palestinian brothers achieve their aspirations to live in peace and in security in a state of their own. The Palestinian cause is a just and noble cause, and a shared responsibility that all of humanity must shoulder. Malaysia believes that unity and moderation is the most effective mean to overcome the adversity that the Palestinians have endured for so long, and for the peace negotiation to be successful. It is therefore regrettable when Israeli reprehensible brutalities and injustices against a defenceless people are supported by some as an act of self-defence for the security of Israel.

18. Allow me quote the statement made by The Honourable Dato' Sri Najib Tun Abdul Razak at the 70th General Assembly of the United Nations in New York in September 2015 – Surah 'Abasa, the 80th chapter of the Qur'an, opens with God criticizing the Prophet Muhammad – whom we Muslims regard as God's beloved – because he frowned and turned his face away when one of his followers, a poor blind man, interrupted to ask him a question while he was occupied preaching to a rich and powerful believer. If God promptly rebuked the Prophet Muhammad, how much more will we, the community of Muslim world leaders especially, stand to be rebuked by our Creator if we "frown and turn our faces away" from our fellow-Muslim poor and marginalised.

19. Finally, it is my fervent hope that the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people will heighten public awareness of all aspects of the Palestinian question and promote wider international support and assistance to the Palestinian people. The international community cannot and must not fail the Palestinians.

Thank you.