

**Statement by Ambassador Asoke K. Mukerji, Permanent Representative at the Open Debate on the Situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question in the United Nations Security Council on July 23, 2015**

**Foreign Minister Mc Cully, President of the Council,**

1. Thank you for convening of this quarterly open-debate on the situation in the Middle East including the Palestinian Question. I also thank today's briefers for their comprehensive briefing.

**Mr. President,**

2. This quarterly debate is important in that it gives us an opportunity to take stock of developments in the Middle East Peace Process. But more important however is the response by the Council. We have seen that the Council has at best been a standby witness to phases of escalation and relative calm which has become characteristic of this unsettled issue. The effectiveness of the Council has consequently been brought into question. We join others in urging the Council to step up its efforts and take the lead in resolving this problem.

**Mr. President,**

3. India's deep association with and continuing commitment to Palestine is rooted in our modern history that goes back to our own struggle for independence. India's position on the issue of Palestine has always been firm and clear. India re-affirms its support for the cause of Palestine and solidarity with the Palestinian people for their struggle for a sovereign, independent, viable and a united State of Palestine within secure and recognized borders side-by-side and at peace with Israel with East Jerusalem as its capital.
4. Apart from political support to the Palestinian cause, India continues to support the development and nation-building efforts of Palestine by consistently extending technical and financial assistance to Palestine. Earlier this month, a new School for Girls, Jawaharlal Nehru Secondary School for Girls in Asera Al-Shamalyeh was inaugurated. This is a part of India's larger capacity building initiatives in Palestine.

5. India contributes US \$ 1 million annually to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). India pledged and contributed US\$ 4 million in response to the National Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan for Gaza. We are undertaking important bilateral development projects in health, education, skill development, vocational training as well as providing budgetary support to the Palestinian Government. We are also implementing development projects in Palestine, jointly with Brazil and South Africa within the framework of IBSA, and have pledged US \$ 1 million for a new project to reconstruct the Atta Habib Medical Centre in Gaza.

**Mr. President,**

6. The current debate is happening a year after the unfortunate escalation of the Gaza conflict last year. We are particularly worried that since last year there has been a downward trend in the Peace Process despite efforts for serious negotiations between the parties which remained inconclusive. Unilateral actions by the parties unfortunately are moving them further apart. India remains firmly convinced that dialogue remains the only viable option that can effectively address the issue. The imperative need is for restraint, to avoid provocation and unilateral actions and to return to the peace process. We remain hopeful and urge both sides to resume the peace process soon, for a comprehensive resolution of the Palestinian issue.

**Mr. President,**

7. We express our deep concern with the activities of proscribed outfits, radicalized and extremist groups in the Middle East region especially in northern parts of Iraq and Syria which are critically impacting on peace and stability in the region. The violence perpetrated against the civilians especially against women and children, on the basis of religion, ethnicity as well as sectarianism strikes at our common humanity. Efforts must be taken by all parties and stakeholders in the region to curb these dangerous trends. We believe the consolidation of political processes and solutions while building durable state institutions will be the effective way of addressing such extremism and radicalism in the region.
8. We are also concerned at instances of targeting of UN peacekeepers in the region by proscribed terrorist groups. Security Council resolutions that proscribe terrorist groups

operating in this region need to be fully implemented. The early and effective prosecution of such groups is essential. Only such action endorsed by the Council will deter such groups in other parts of the world from committing acts of terror.

**Mr. President,**

9. With new flash points as in Yemen, the Middle East region is becoming more volatile and stability of the region is being threatened. Besides having implications for peace and stability as well as humanitarian situation, the conflicts also impose serious economic costs for the region and the whole world. Particularly with major shipping lines passing through the strait of Bab-el-Mandeb the situation in Yemen has a considerable impact on the cost of shipping and in turn the regional and global trade. This is apart from the pressing humanitarian situation and the loss of lives we are witnessing. We, therefore, urge all parties in Yemen to return to the negotiating table forthwith.
  
10. India welcomed the conclusion of negotiations on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on the Iran nuclear question on 14 July 2015. Now the Security Council has also endorsed it. India has maintained that diplomatic dialogue is the only effective way to resolve issues.
  
11. On Syria, we reiterate our support to a Syrian-led, comprehensive political solution to the ongoing crisis, in alignment with the Geneva Communiqué of 2012. The humanitarian crisis arising out of the situation has to be addressed effectively. It is with this conviction we pledged and contributed US \$ 2 million to the UN Syrian Humanitarian Response Plan in 2014 and pledged another US \$ 2 million during the 3rd International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria held in March 2015 in Kuwait. We are also hopeful and supportive of the efforts made by the UN Special Envoy on Syria Mr. De Mistura to carry forward the political process. We urge all parties to demonstrate the requisite political will, exercise restraint, and commit to seeking common ground in accommodating their differences.

Thank you.

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