Statement by Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri, Permanent Representative of India at the UN Security Council Open Debate on the Middle East on 26th July 2011

Thank you, Mr. President.

At the outset, I would like to welcome you, Mr President, to New York and thank you for chairing this Open Debate. I would also like to thank Special Coordinator Robert Sherry for his comprehensive briefing and the Permanent Representative of Israel and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for their statements which have carefully noted.

2. Since our last Open Debate in this Council, Mr President, the Palestinian factions signed an agreement. The main elements of the agreement include reform of PLO, holding of election by May 2012, establishment of unified agencies, national reconciliation and joint committee to implement the agreement. The unity between the Palestinian parties should not only end the division between the West Bank and Gaza, but also create state institutions in Gaza. To this end, we hope that the Palestinian parties would succeed in speedy implementation of the reconciliation agreement. We also hope that Hamas will not only accept the State of Israel as a reality, but also cooperate with the Palestinian Authority to deal with Israel’s security concerns.

4. Stalemate in peace talks, however, appears to be giving rise to a sense of desperation in the Palestinian territories. For more than four months now, the monthly debates on the Palestinian issue in this Council have hinged on a hope that the Quartet would put forward a set of practical steps, which could enable Palestinians and Israelis to resume talks. This hope was yet again belied when the Quartet meeting Washington on 11th July ended without any statement.
3. Over the last few years the Palestinian authority has made significant progress in building state institutions, improving the economy of the West Bank and rapprochement with various factions including Hamas. This progress has invited commendation from the international community at large. The state building efforts of the Palestinian Authority have, however, reached their geographical and institutional limits. Any further progress would require resumption of talks on final status issues.

4. The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, meanwhile, remains a cause for serious concern. The blockade on Gaza is not only adversely affecting the population but also driving militant elements to vent their frustration through violence, thereby further complicating the situation on the ground and increasing Israel’s vulnerability and security concerns.

5. The stalemate in peace talks and grim humanitarian situation can further complicate an already fragile situation. We concur with the sense of the international community that freezing of settlement activity in the Palestinian territories could enable the peace talks to resume. We, therefore, call upon Israel to implement Prime Minister Netanyahu’s address to Knesset in May this year wherein he said that Israel could consider territorial compromise in return for security and recognition. Putting a stop to settlement activities should be the first step in this process.

6. Unless this essential step is taken and peace talks resume, the growing desperation may lead the parties to actions that can spiral out of control. As the month of September 2011 approaches, it is important to realize that there is limited time for Palestinians and Israeli to seize the opportunity.

7. Other issues relating to Arab lands that remain under Israeli occupation are equally important. Progress in the Lebanese and Syrian tracks constitute the essential core to achievement of a comprehensive and durable peace in the region. In a region witnessing protests movements all around, continuing impasse in peace talks could have destabilizing effect on a much larger area. In this context, events of 15 May and 5 June show how fragile the situation is and how easily violence can be incited on a larger scale, destabilizing the whole region. We, therefore, afraid that if the peace talks do not recommence quickly, unilateral steps by the parties would ensue, which would increase the distance between them and make it more difficult to find a comprehensive settlement. We, therefore, call on the members of the Quartet to intensify their collective and individual efforts to break the stalemate.

8. Mr President, India has a long-standing tradition of solidarity with the Palestinian people. India has supported the Palestinian people’s struggle for a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital living within secure and recognized borders, side by side and at peace with Israel, as endorsed in the Arab Peace initiative, Quartet Roadmap and relevant UN Security Council Resolutions.
9. India has been assisting in the capacity and institution building of the Palestinian people with its material and technical assistance programmes. India has extended assistance through IBSA forum. India is also contributing US $ 1 million to UNRWA continuing our solidarity with the Palestinian people in their pursuit of legitimate goals and quest for development based on dignity and self-reliance. In addition, we have provided untied budgetary support of US$ 10 million to the Palestinian Authority for each of the past two years.

10. In conclusion, Mr President, let me reiterate our expectation that the parties will restart talks without further delay. These talks should lead to a final and comprehensive resolution of the Middle East conflict. We owe it to ourselves and to the future generations of Israelis and Palestinians that they do not remain mired in a conflict but live in peace and security.

    Thank you.

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