

Speech by Palestinian President Abbas at the EP Plenary on 23 June 2016

Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian National Authority. (The following is a transcription of the interpretation of the original speech from Arabic into English.) – Mr President, in the name of Allah, the most merciful, may I first of all thank you for this invitation to address you in your Assembly.

First of all, let me express my admiration for the democratic model you have constructed, the diversity of cultures and languages and different governments. For us, this is a mirror which reflects great civilisation, great culture and reflects the human principles represented by your European peoples.

I would like to express our respect for you and our thanks to you for the positions you have taken up which honour you. You have taken up positions which militate in favour of the restoration of justice and peace in my country, Palestine. For my people, I would like to convey their greetings, and I would like to take advantage of this opportunity to give you a number of pointers for you to think about in your various committees in this Parliament, so that you have some guidelines in thinking about our situation as we seek peace in our part of the world.

I would also like to thank you all for all the different kinds of aid you have given, aiding us in institution-building and helping us establish the bases for a democratic regime which will be stable in the future and which will be able to comply with international criteria for democracy, and in particular we want to establish a proper rule of law and proper respect for human rights.

So once again, our thanks to this Parliament for the recognition you have given our country. Thank you so much for recognising the State of Palestine. I would also like to thank all the national parliaments which, for their part, have recommended to their governments that they should recognise the State of Palestine.

I would also say this. When talking about a two-state solution, if you believe in a two-state solution you have to recognise both states and not just one of them. A hundred years have passed since the Balfour Declaration back in 1917. Sixty-eight years have passed since al-Nakbah, the catastrophe which we suffered when in 1948 the Israeli forces were guilty of slaughter and massacre in our part world, and this led to hundreds of thousands of our citizens having to migrate. This turned these hundreds of thousands of people into refugees. More than 485 of our villages were simply flattened, villages where our people were living peacefully and had lived peacefully for thousands of years.

In 1967, Israel occupied East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza and once again, thousands of our people were forced to migrate from Gaza and from the West Bank. So the least you can say when looking at Palestine is this: Palestine as a country, and as a people, we have a history, an identity. We are a country, we are a geopolitical entity and this country has suffered a series of historic massacres. We have suffered unprecedented occupation, the sort of occupation of a country we have not seen elsewhere in the world in the 20th century or in the 21st century. And all this in full view of the international community and in full view of the international authorities.

We have been through so many black periods throughout history, and we are still going through a black period. Our Palestinian people are suffering from occupation, from suppression. We are suffering from arbitrary action by the Israelis. We are suffering from racism, hateful racism, and our people are living abroad as refugees. They are living in poverty, in a very precarious situation.

Now we have decided to resist. We have decided to remain in our country, on our land. We have decided to continue our efforts to put an end to Israeli occupation by using political, diplomatic and peaceful means. We have been successful in these efforts at international level, but we are not making progress in terms of our relations with Israel.

We have used every effort in order to implement the agreements which have been signed. We have complied with our commitments, and we are calling on the Israelis to comply with their commitments, but the Israelis refuse to respect these commitments and continue to oppress us and to dominate us in every area of life.

The Israelis are trying to change the situation in the City of Jerusalem. They are trying to change its historic identity. They are infringing holy places – Christian and Islamic and Muslim. They are continuing to build their colonies by confiscating our territory, by flattening our houses. Israel is still imprisoning thousands of our people.

Today, Israel is still a violent state. Every day we see cases of extreme violence for which the Israelis are guilty. We have seen the colonists have burned down houses only recently in which people were living. In particular, a young man died in the latest attack from the Israelis when his house was burnt down. Every day we see murders, extra-judicial killings. And this Israeli attitude, this Israeli behaviour is such that some Israeli politicians have started criticising their own government, for example, Mr Herzog, leader of the opposition, or Ya'alon, a former Army leader, and Ehud Barak, and a former head of the armed forces, and journalists. All these people – Israelis – announcing that the Israeli Government's behaviour is fascist and racist, and I am quoting them there.

Resolution 181 of the United Nations divided the historic territory of Palestine into two states in a more or less fair sharing out of the land, but since then Israel has used force of arms to occupy 78% of historic Palestinian territory. This was back in 1948, but that was not good enough for Israel. It occupied the rest of our territory in 1967. People still quote that United Nations Resolution– Resolution 181 – today and they say that this resolution should not be interpreted literally all the way through, but only certain paragraphs should be implemented. I would say that United Nations Resolution 181 has to be applied in its totality.

Despite international resolutions, United Nations resolutions and the efforts of the international community to find a solution, a two-state solution, despite all these efforts our state is still not independent, despite the fact that we are now a member state of the United Nations, and that since 2012. And we are now a member of a great number of international organisations, as well as the United Nations organisation. We have ratified a great number of international conventions, we are recognised by 138 states around the world.

In order to make progress towards peace and to put an end to our years of suffering, we have now accepted the establishment of the State of Palestine on an area which is less than a quarter of the area of historic Palestine; 22% of our historic territory. We have accepted that as a state, respecting the 1967 borders, and that is an enormous sacrifice.

Since the Madrid Conference and since the Oslo Agreements we have made no further progress. We are going round in circles in negotiations. We are just negotiating for negotiation's sake at the moment. And this is being imposed upon us by Israel. They are trying to gain time in this process so that they can change things on the ground, which will make it less and less possible for us to find a two-state solution.

Today Israel is carrying on with its colonisation. It is continuing to expropriate our land. It is building walls and all this is also being done on a racist basis. Under our other United Nations resolutions calling on Israel to put an end to colonisation, these resolutions have called on Israel to do away with colonisation, to reverse it, but nevertheless, Israel is carrying on with these projects. We are calling on Israel simply to freeze this colonisation so that negotiations can properly start, but Israel still does not stop colonising. It is carrying on.

Furthermore, over the last six years, Israel has started at least three wars in Gaza. It has killed thousands of people. Israel has killed dozens of Palestinian families. There are hundreds of families which have quite simply disappeared. There is no longer a record of them in our civil registers. These families have quite simply disappeared because of the three wars waged by Israel in Gaza in the last six years. Israel has destroyed houses. It has destroyed factories and since the occupation I can tell you this: one million Palestinians have been jailed by Israel at some time or another. At the moment we have 7 000 of our people held as prisoners of war. That is the bitter reality and the dangerous reality we are facing and is it not time to put an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestine? Why is international law not being applied?

(Applause)

Why is international law not being implemented in the case of Israel? You have here a state attacking another state. When that happens normally the whole world stands up and punishes the aggressor, except in the case of Israel. Israel seems free to attack us with impunity. Why have the United Nations resolutions been ignored in the case of Palestine and the rights of the Palestinian people? How long is Israel going to continue to benefit from this impunity? How long is Israel going to continue rejecting peace? How long is Israel going to continue ignoring the historic sufferings of the Palestinian people? How long is Israel going to accept the injustice it has inflicted upon the Palestinian people?

Our people want to live in peace and dignity on our territory, like any other nation in the world. Our people do not accept this colonisation. We do not accept this invasion. And we will continue to make sacrifices and to suffer until this situation is righted. That is why we are calling on you to help us. You are our friends. Help us. Help us alleviate this situation. Help us remove the desperation our people are suffering from. Help us put an end to the longest occupation in contemporary history. There are no other such lengthy occupations I am aware of. Help us put an end to this occupation.

It is so wrong that our Palestinian people – one of the most ancient peoples in the region and of the world, with its ancient culture – it is so wrong that this situation continues and that we do not have our own state. Is it not time for our people to be able to live in freedom, to live without checkpoints, to live without controls, to live without walls, to live without checkpoints again I say, the checkpoint set up by the Israeli army on an entirely arbitrary basis? It is time all this came to an end.

Israel has turned our country into an open air prison and our people are living in it. Here in this European Parliament, I would like to repeat: we do not want to wipe any other country off the map. Some people want to wipe our country off the map. This should not be allowed. No country should be allowed to wipe another country off the map. We certainly do not want to. On the other hand, all we want to do is exist, and we will not allow anybody to wipe our country off the map and confiscate our rights. We are still denied our rights, and this only serves to encourage our extremists. That leads to terrorism, that leads to violence. And this gives violent people and terrorists a pretext for doing what they do.

I appeal to you: do not make it possible for the Palestinian cause to continue to be used by these extremists and terrorists. We have to put an end to extremism. We have to encourage them to seek a way of life whereby we can all live in peace and fairness under rule of law, enjoying human rights, so I appeal to the European Parliament and to the European institutions to pursue your efforts, continue your efforts, at political and diplomatic level, so that we can come up with a fair and just solution to the problems of our region, and that means we need a two-state solution using the 1967 borders as your President suggested, and by respecting international resolutions and UN resolutions.

Israel and Palestine have both got close links with the European Union. We both have Association Agreements, we are both members of the Union for the Mediterranean, which means that the European Union is a major actor for us. And this is to the benefit of all parties, to all sides.

I want to be very frank with you. I am normally frank with whomsoever I have to deal and in being frank I would like to try and reply to some questions you may have for me. First of all, we are in favour of a two-state solution. We want to create the State of Palestine on all the territories of the West Bank, respecting the borders of 4 June 1967, with our capital being Jerusalem East, which is currently occupied. We are not against exchanging certain pieces of land as long as they are of equal value, within certain limits. There is also a need to deal with the problem of refugees and there we have to implement Resolution 194 on the basis of the Arab peace proposal, which calls for a fair, just and negotiated solution to the problem of refugees. This is an Arab country proposal which has produced a roadmap based on Resolution 1515.

Do not forget that the PLO has recognised Israel. The PLO recognised Israel back in 1993. So we want peace for everybody in our region and we have accepted that there should be a third territory between the Israeli territory and the future Palestinian territory. This would be in the interests of regional security. But we completely reject the provisional solutions which have been proposed, because we believe that they are a complete waste of time and we do not accept a Palestinian State with provisional borders. Our wish is for the Arab Peace Initiative, which was adopted in Beirut in 2002, to be implemented unamended, the Arab peace proposal.

The Israelis often talk about provocation. Well, I would say that Israeli provocation is never-ending. The colonists are still on our territory and to put an end to any provocation at all, including by extremists, we would like the Tripartite Commission involving Israel, Palestine and the United States to be brought back to life.

This Tripartite Commission was set up in Wye River in 1998 in order to resolve all the problems associated with the mutual proof of provocation on both sides and the United States

were seeking to be the arbitrator. We are in favour of this Tripartite Commission being brought back to life with the membership of the European Union as a fourth member.

This would, I believe, show clearly that we are against incitation to violence, against provocation, we are against extremism. And we need somebody to arbitrate here, we think, in this particular situation. If you continue to say that the Palestinians are continuing to provoke and incite violence, we do not agree. The Israelis are doing this as well and somebody has to arbitrate and sort out these mutual accusations. The Tripartite Commission, I think, should be brought back to life and joined by the European Union.

I would also like to say that certain rabbis in Israel have said very clearly, and they have said it very clearly to their government, that our water should be poisoned in order to have Palestinians killed. Now that is provocation, that is an incitation to commit a crime. And we are against this sort of call for violence, this kind of provocation, this kind of incitation.

Mr President, I would like to say this. The Palestinian nation would like to live with full sovereignty. This could be achieved very quickly; we could put an end to the occupation very quickly, and if we can achieve this, I think that will be a very positive thing for the world community if we could establish a Palestinian state. A full, independent, unoccupied Palestinian state. We could be a responsible actor on the world stage.

We would have a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as capital. Jerusalem would be an open city, open to all faiths, especially the three major faiths in the region: Judaism, Christianity and the Muslim faith. We would all have Jerusalem as a capital, as an open city, respecting the three main religions of the region, with free expression for all of them in Jerusalem: Jerusalem which would remain a free open city.

In this way our country could be responsible for its own management, its own government, its own development, its own natural resources. But to do this, we need to regain 70% of our territory and then it will be able to exploit and use all these resources, including our human resources, as for the time being these areas, 60% of our territories, are since the Oslo Agreement inaccessible to us, that is to say we cannot do anything with it. We cannot cultivate that land, we cannot establish industry on that land, it is categorised as a 'C region' – Region C – occupied by Israel since the Oslo Agreements.

And in that region Israel has been implementing an illegal project since 1993. Now if we can get that land back, that territory back, I believe we can perform miracles in agriculture, in industry and tourism, and I am wondering why the Israelis are insisting on keeping that land; I really am.

If we could do this, we could develop industry on this territory, develop agriculture, we could create jobs for tens of thousands of young people, we could exploit our own national resources: oil, gas, for example. We could generate clean electricity. We could develop the Jordan Valley. We could develop the Dead Sea region.

We could develop tourist projects, and of course you should not forget the importance of tourism – a pilgrimage in our country, for example, to Bethlehem, to Jerusalem – and in order to do that, we do not need a lot of assistance because we would have all these assets.

And in this situation, I have to say that, so far, the European Union has assisted us, has helped us. You have helped us create an embryo Palestinian state. Now we are going to continue with our efforts to develop a Palestinian state, so that we can enjoy full self-determination and that should not depend on negotiations with Israel. The right to self-determination should not be negotiable. It is a natural right.

So we need your assistance in this situation. We have dozens of educational institutions, universities, all of which are at a very high level. And these assets will allow us to develop and to further develop basic education, organise campaigns for literacy. These institutions will help us do our own research. We can become involved in joint projects with other educational institutions and do not forget, we are a free society, where women are equal to men. They have the same rights and the same duties.

On 3 June, a ministerial meeting was held in Paris. This was on the initiative of the French Government. Twenty-eight states were involved and three international organisations. We are grateful for this noble effort and this will now lead to a further conference on international law and international equality based on the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and on the basis of the Arab Peace Initiative which was adopted at the Beirut Summit in 2002. This conference will also be using the roadmap which has been developed by the Arab Peace Initiative.

Now if this major international conference is held, there should be very clear deadlines associated with it. Negotiations cannot start without some deadlines being set, and any agreements should also be subject to a schedule, to deadlines. And then, there should be a follow-up to these agreements, a monitoring arrangement for these agreements that will be reached, similar to what happened in the case of Iran when you had the 5 Plus One Group, which solved an enormous number of problems in association with Iran.

So we would have to have a 5 Plus 2 or a 7 Plus 2 arrangement, that is to say a monitoring group to monitor the results of this major international conference which I would like to see take place with a view to achieving a settlement in the Middle East.

The European Council at its last meeting adopted a final communiqué to the conference held in Paris on 3 June. And let me say this: I and my colleagues, we support this French initiative. The President of the French Republic, Mr François Hollande, told me some days ago that France was determined to pursue its efforts so that this international peace conference can take place before the end of the year.

He said that the preparatory work should begin soon in order to make sure this international conference is a success. The civil servants and Sherpas, he said, should get to work as soon as possible, and I have to say, as a Palestinian and as an Arab, we Arabs are with you in this initiative. We are with you as well when it comes to combating terrorism and extremism. Here, we are on the same page. What is happening in the Middle East has also happened in Europe, in Brussels, in Paris, and in the United States. We are against terrorism – let me make this perfectly clear – whatever form it may take and whoever carries it out. We are against terrorism.

(Applause)

However, in order to overcome terrorism we also need to end Israeli occupation by creating a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, so that Palestine can live in peace and security, side by side with Israel, and that will be a step towards ending terrorism. If this does not happen, we will still be giving pretexts to those who commit terrorism in the name of religion, but once this occupation ends those pretexts will disappear and extremism will be overcome, as will terrorism. There will be no more terrorism in the Middle East nor elsewhere in the world.

The beginning of the problem of terrorism is the problems that exist in Palestine. So the non-existence of the Palestinian state simply perpetuates the problem and that will only play into the hands of the extremists – the violence, terrorists – and many countries in our region and elsewhere have suffered at the hands of these violent extremists.

This terrorism has given rise to a wave of refugees that have fled now to Europe. Among them there are Palestinian refugees fleeing from this situation and we would ask you to treat Palestinian refugees in the same way as you treat other refugees, those who have fled from war, massacres and terrorism, and we condemn that terrorism.

Terrorism gives rise to waves of refugees. But among those refugees there are Palestinian refugees. Of course these internal conflicts that happen in the region are not our fault but when they happen we suffer from them as well. When Palestinian refugees arrive in refugee camps they have to be given the same rights as other refugees. My question is: put yourself in the shoes of a Palestinian refugee. That refugee is the same as any other refugee. They need help and they need support.

Regarding the internal situation in Palestine, I would like to say that we would like to manage our country properly. Currently there is a blockade in Gaza. We would like to put an end to the internal Palestinian blockade and division through an international governance agreement respecting the PLO commitments and international and regional commitments that have been undertaken regarding this region. We would like to create a Palestinian government involving all stakeholders in a national unity government, with all necessary elements in place to meet the commitments we have undertaken.

We have to meet all of the commitments that have been taken on and we are willing to form a national unity government with a view to establishing legislative and then presidential elections in order to overcome the current division and I would like to take this opportunity to once again assert my thanks to the European Union and to all of its Member States for all of the help they have contributed in putting an end to the Israeli occupation of Gaza and the attempts to rebuild the area.

More than 10 000 people have been killed, 100 000 people injured, many thousands of houses were destroyed during the Israeli bombings of the region and all of that was condemned here in the European Union and we have to acknowledge our thanks for that expression of support.

Please allow me to send out a message to the people of Israel from this podium, to the Israeli Government and its political parties. Our hands are extended with a desire for peace. We have the political will to achieve peace and we would ask you: do you have the same desire? Do you have the same political will to achieve peace and to acknowledge the historic injustice that your state has exacted on our country?

You have your history and we have ours. Our history has been, frankly, one of a continued existence in this territory since the dawn of civilization until now. We have constant ongoing rights in our territory, in a sacred place for Christians and Muslims alike. Peace and reconciliation will involve the acknowledgment of our rights and the need for reparation and compensation for damage.

This political struggle has been transformed into a religious struggle. That is an extremely dangerous element for our region. We have to remove religion from this conflict. It is a political struggle and the solution to it has to be political. Using a religious pretext is a genuine threat. It is a danger which we all face.

Peace is in everybody's interests and I hope that you, Israelis, neighbours, believe in that too. Let us build a peace which does not involve hegemony or colonisation or aggression. Peace and coexistence on the basis of justice, law, respect and dignity for all parties involved, on an equal footing. That peace will be a genuine guarantee of security, stability and a promising future for our generations to come.

Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for your welcome. We are counting on your noble efforts to help us restore peace in our region. Long live Euro-Palestinian friendship that lets the holy land of Palestine be one of peace, stability and security for the Palestinians, for its neighbours and for the whole of the world.

We have a specific interest today for what is happening in Great Britain. We are very closely accompanying what is happening in Great Britain and we would express our support for that process.

(Applause)

*Disclaimer: The interpretation does not constitute an authentic record of proceedings.