

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 January 15, 2015

**Thank you Mr. President,**

We congratulate you on your assumption of Presidency of the Security Council and for personally chairing this quarterly open-debate on the situation in the Middle East including the Palestinian Question. I would also like to thank Assistant Secretary General ad interim for Political Affairs Mr. Jens Anders Toyberg-Frandzen for his briefing. We would also warmly welcome the new members who have joined the Council this year – Angola, Malaysia, New Zealand, Spain and Venezuela.

**Mr. President,**

2. This quarterly debate is important in that it gives us an opportunity to take stock of the developments in the Middle East Peace Process. We would like to reiterate our support to the amicable resolution of this long standing issue. We are concerned that this debate here in the United Nations Security Council has not achieved the objective of such a peaceful solution. The effectiveness of the Council has therefore been brought into question.

3. We are particularly worried that last year saw a downward trend in the Peace Process. Efforts for serious negotiations between the parties were inconclusive. In addition, we were faced with an unfortunate situation of resumption of the tragic and escalated conflict in Gaza which resulted in a large number of civilian casualties and heavy damage to property.

**Mr. President,**

4. India's deep association with, and continuing commitment to, Palestine is rooted in our modern history that goes back to our struggle for independence. India's position on the issue of Palestine is very clear. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi wrote in his Message on the occasion of International Day of Solidarity with the Palestine people on 21 November 2014, 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 at peace with Israel and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

5. 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. It also contributes US \$ 1 million annually to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). India has recently pledged US\$ 4 million in response to the National Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan for Gaza. 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. Our Minister of External Affairs addressing the Ministerial-Level Meeting of the NAM Committee on Palestine on 26 September 2014 had reiterated that India welcomes the ceasefire between Palestine and Israel and calls upon all sides to exercise maximum restraint and avoid taking any action that may lead to violation of present ceasefire, and work towards a comprehensive resolution of the Palestinian issue. India remains firmly convinced that dialogue remains the only viable option that can effectively address the issue. We remain hopeful that the current ceasefire will be sustained and both sides will resume the peace process soon, for a comprehensive resolution of the Palestinian issue.

7. We are deeply concerned about rising tensions in East Jerusalem. The imperative need is for urgent de-escalation, for restraint, for avoidance of provocation and for a return to the peace process. Diplomacy and statesmanship have to prevail over hatred and violence; there is no other road to a lasting peace.

**Mr. President,**

8. We are deeply concerned with the activities of radicalized and extremist groups in the northern parts of Iraq and Syria, with dangerous exacerbation of sectarian and extremist tensions, critically impacting on the peace and stability of the region. We note that a proscribed terrorist group has targeted UN peacekeepers twice in UNDOF. Efforts must be taken by all parties and stakeholders in the region to curb this trend. Member states must comply with Security Council resolutions that proscribe terrorist groups operating in this region. 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. We believe that the consolidation of political processes and solutions while building durable state institutions will be the most effective way of addressing such extremism and radicalism in the region.

**Mr. President,**

9. On Syria, we have consistently supported a Syrian-led, comprehensive political solution to the ongoing crisis, in alignment with the Geneva Communiqué of 2012. We would like to add our voice of support for the efforts of Secretary General's Special Envoy De Mistura and continue to urge all parties to demonstrate the requisite political will, exercise restraint, and commit to seeking common ground in accommodating their differences.

I thank you.