

STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR ASOKE KUMAR MUKERJI, PERMANENT  
REPRESENTATIVE, OPEN DEBATE ON MIDDLE EAST, AT THE UNITED NATIONS  
SECURITY COUNCIL ON JANUARY 20, 2014

**Thank you, Mr. President,**

Let me begin by expressing our appreciation for convening this quarterly open debate, which will allow the Council to take stock of recent developments in the Middle East, including the State of Palestine. I would like to thank UNSG for his comprehensive briefing.

**Mr. President**

2. The situation in the Middle East region continues to remain fragile and unpredictable with the unprecedented changes in several countries in the region and the ongoing conflict in Syria.

**Mr. President**

3. We firmly support a negotiated solution to the Israeli Palestinian issue resulting in 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. We will also continue to support Palestine's bid for full and equal membership of the United Nations. We look forward to a meaningful 2014 as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, launched on 16 January 2014 by the UNSG.

4. We welcome the continuation of the negotiation rounds between Israel and Palestine that began in late July with the aim of reaching a deal within nine months. It is unfortunate that so far there has been little visible progress but we hope that both sides will seize the opportunity presented by the direct negotiations and will strike a peace deal in the critical months ahead.

**Mr. President**

5. The recent announcement by Israel on new settlement construction is regrettable. The settlement activities are not only illegal but also pose a threat to the two state solution. We join others in urging Israel to stop settlement activities.

6. 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.

**Mr. President**

7. India has always supported the nation-building efforts of Palestine through technical and economic assistance, including budgetary support. In 2012 India pledged an amount of US\$ 10 million as a budgetary support to Palestine and signed three Memoranda of Understanding for the development projects in the fields of Information and Communication Technology, vocational training and construction of schools. In September 2013 India contributed US\$ 1 million, as a part of India's annual contribution to UNRWA, primarily for provision of food and medicines to the displaced people in the refugee camps under UNRWA's various programmes. We are also implementing series of development projects under IBSA funds in Palestine. We have so far been able to assist in the rehabilitation of cultural and hospital center in Gaza, construction and equipping a center for person with physical disabilities in Nablus, and supporting recreational activities through infrastructure support for a football stadium in Ramallah.

**Mr. President**

8. India welcomes the efforts made by the Joint Mission of the Organization for Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the UN towards the removal and elimination of Syrian chemical weapons programmes and hope that the Joint Mission will be able to meet the final deadline of 30 June 2014 for the complete elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons Programme.

9. In December 2013 India offered a financial contribution of US \$ 1 million to the Trust Fund set up at the OPCW at The Hague for use in the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons and related facilities. India has also offered the services of its experts to be used by the OPCW in the destruction verification activity as well as training slots for the personnel participating in the UN/OPCW mission for the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons.

10. In conclusion, Mr. President, let me express our full support to the Geneva II Conference on Syria. We hope it would commence a Syrian-led inclusive political dialogue that resolves the current crisis and meets the legitimate aspirations of all sections of Syrian society.

I thank you.

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