



**Remarks by  
H.E. Dr. Riad Malki, Foreign Minister of Palestine  
at  
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It is delightful for me to be here today and to have a chance to exchange some views with you all. When we talk about the Palestinian issue, it happened that when we agreed with Israel to sign the so-called "Oslo Agreement," it was proposed that this was supposed to be a transitional agreement: an agreement that would deliver at the end of it a resolution towards statehood. We never thought that a transitional agreement that should last for only five years, to prepare for institutional building and for human resource capacity building, will stay forever.

We always thought that by 1999, the Palestinian state should emerge. That was the agreed upon conclusion when we first signed that agreement. We were preparing ourselves for announcing the establishment of a state in 1999. It happened that when we reached 1999, and we were prepared to announce a Palestinian state, the Israeli Prime Minister at that time, Ehud Barak, threatened to reoccupy the entirety of the Palestinian land if we dared to announce the end of Oslo and the establishment of a Palestinian state as a result of that agreement. So, many friendly and non-friendly countries put tremendous pressure on us to prevent us from making any such declaration. As a result, we lost the opportunity that existed: that by 1999, we could reach an end to that transitional agreement and move into statehood.

There is a difference between what Israel thought and what we thought. We thought that this agreement was a process that will lead us into statehood. Israel thought that the Oslo process is a process that will keep them in control of the territory and us under occupation, and in control of the future of the Palestinian state. What really prevents us from having any breakthrough in the negotiations, any possibility to put an end to the Israeli occupation, or for Israel to acknowledge an independent Palestinian state, is that difference in interpretation: that discrepancy between what Israel wanted from Oslo and what we wanted from Oslo. What they wanted from Oslo was full control of the Palestinian territory, calling it a "disputed land", and because it is disputed, they allowed themselves to build settlements, to change realities, to create realities, to impose realities, to expel Palestinians, to bring settlers and more. We thought of Oslo as a transitional process that will lead into statehood.

And so, because of those differences in interpretation, we are where we are today. As long as it is being left to the Israeli interpretation and to the Palestinian interpretation, then there is no possibility whatsoever that we will reach an agreement between the two different interpretations. As a result, there is no possibility that if we sit together as Israelis and Palestinians, that we will reach an agreement. That is why all negotiation rounds that have started since the Madrid Conference twenty-three years ago until now have gone through




rounds and rounds of negotiations, always repeating ourselves every time. Israeli governments were also changing every four years—sometimes every two years—and as a result, each new government refuses to recognize what has been achieved with the previous government and we have to start from zero.

They kept dragging us on over twenty years talking about the same thing, while the reality on the ground was they were building settlements, confiscating Palestinian land, changing the character of the land by bringing in settlers, expelling Palestinians, demolishing houses and more. They used negotiations as a cover for stealing Palestinian land and changing the realities on the ground. If we keep negotiating under the same conditions for another hundred years, we will never reach an agreement because they interpret Oslo differently from what we interpret. Their objective is different from our objective. Their objective is to maintain their occupation of the Palestinian territory, to change the character of that territory, and bring settlers in. For us, it is to end the occupation and to be able to establish an independent Palestinian state. As long as these two positions are that different, and as long as the negotiations continue under the same conditions, then even if we were to go back tomorrow for negotiations or twenty years later, we will face the same outcome.

This is very important because the international community thinks that best way for the negotiations is to put the Palestinians and the Israelis in a closed room and to tell them, “Go and negotiate between yourselves. We are outside. When you have the smoke, let us know that you have succeeded.” I used to say to my students, “After you do something once, and you fail, and you repeat it another time and you fail, then you really start to question, ‘Am I doing it right or not?’ But if you do it a third time, and a fourth, and a fifth, and a sixth, and you keep failing, then there is something wrong in the process.” The idea is to sit and review the process and to see what is wrong in the process, and to try and learn lessons and draw conclusions and to try to correct your approach in order to overcome the problems and to guarantee successes. This is what one should learn from previous experiments. Now, in our case, this didn’t happen.

After twenty-three years of repeating ourselves every year and negotiating the same thing with different Israeli interlocutors, the international community, the US, the EU, and others still believe that the best solution to the conflict is to keep doing the same. That Israelis and Palestinians should be put in a closed room to negotiate between themselves and we should wait until the white smoke comes out. The white smoke will never come out. Either they are, with all respect, naïvely stupid, or they know what they are doing. But if they know what they want, that is very dangerous. Because it means they are covering up for the Israelis to continue stealing Palestinian land and to prevent the creation of an independent Palestinian state.

Now, as I’ve said, we have no problem going back to negotiations at any time. But we should at least correct our approach, learn the lessons, draw conclusions, and go back with assurances that this time will be the last time for negotiations. What we are proposing as Palestinians is that first of all we have to identify what are the terms of reference. We cannot go to the negotiations without knowing what the terms of reference are. What are they? The 1967 borders, territorial swaps, Jerusalem as the capital of two states and an open city, and a two-state solution and so forth. These are the terms of reference. Are they accepted by the Israelis or not? If they are accepted by the Israelis and the Palestinians, then at least we can say that there is a possibility to move forward.



Second, we should ask for the presence of a third party. The absence of a third party in the process prevents the international community from knowing who is responsible for the failure of the negotiations for the last twenty-three years. The Israelis will accuse us and we keep accusing the Israelis. What is the position of the international community? Who should know what happens inside that closed room? At one point, during the first years of the negotiations, the Israelis used to jump on the table and dance. And if we say that, you will laugh and say, “Is that possible? No, you must be joking.” But really, they were jumping on the table and dancing. The Israelis were telling jokes all the time. And if we say that the Israelis were telling jokes all the time instead of negotiating, you will say, “No, you must be joking.” The reality is this is what used to happen. They used to make a mockery out of the whole negotiation.

So, what we are saying is that we need a third party to be present at least to do two things. One is to bridge the gap between the positions of the two parties and two is to be a judge when the time comes to say who is responsible for any failure. And they will say, “It is the Israelis” or “It is the Palestinians.” This is important. Until now, we didn’t have a third party present. The Israelis refused to allow anyone inside to sit and watch and really to know who said what and who prevented an agreement from being reached.


Third, we cannot have an open-ended process. We have been in negotiations for the past twenty-three years. For how long should we stay in that process of negotiation? For another twenty-three years? Fifty years? We should know. At least, as Palestinians, we should know that after, say, fifty years, we will reach an agreement. At least we will know that in 2070, there will be an agreement. But to keep it open-ended is unacceptable. There is a need for putting a timetable and an end to the negotiations and an end to the occupation.

Fourth, we should redefine what the endgame is. If we enter into negotiations, we should know what we want to achieve from that. A peace agreement that puts an end to the conflict? The establishment of an independent Palestinian state next to the state of Israel? We should know. What is the endgame of that process?

If we correct the whole approach to the negotiations, modify it in a way to bring these four lessons that we were able to draw out of twenty-three years of failed negotiations, at least we can guarantee that, if tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow, or the day after that, we will see ourselves engaged in another round of negotiations, then at least this round, the new round, could be different from the previous ones and could really guarantee better results.

We have been saying this to the Americans, who have been arranging many rounds of negotiations, to the Europeans, who have been supporting the US role in this process, to the Quartet, which is supposed to be engaged in this process, to tell them, “Yes, we are ready to engage, but we need guarantees and we need to learn from the lessons we have learned during this process.”

As a Palestinian, I was promised back in 1993—when Oslo was first established—that by 1999, this transitional period would end and I will get an independent Palestinian state. Look at what happened. How many years have passed since 1999? Yet we are still stuck with Oslo as a transitional process. Then we wonder if we have any faith in that process. We have all the right to doubt it. We have all the right to rethink our position. And we have all the right to ask



for a revision of the process itself. When we see the previous twenty-three years, we were stuck in the starting point of the negotiations, and we couldn't move from that starting point for twenty-three years of continuous negotiations. One should think about that. If we are stuck at the starting point, then any time that we go back to the negotiation, we will see ourselves stuck at the starting point. The best thing to do is to move strategies.


Instead of being stuck at the starting point, let us jump to the end and walk in reverse. It is really reverse engineering. At least what you do is you liberate yourself from the deadlock where you are and allow yourself a new opening. By walking in reverse, at least you could answer all of these issues and get better conditions. Our endgame is an independent Palestinian state living side by side next to the state of Israel. Is that agreeable to the Israelis? Is that agreeable to the Palestinians? If yes, then can we say when will that task be achieved? That means we have to put an end to the Israeli occupation by putting a definite time for ending it.

This is exactly what we did when we decided to go to the Security Council and ask for a vote on December 30. By going to the Security Council, we wanted to alter the whole negotiating process from being stuck at the beginning and to move to the end and walk backwards. By going to the Security Council, we were asking for one thing: to define a timetable for ending the occupation and establishing a timetable for establishing an independent Palestinian state. We didn't ask for anything more. As people under occupation, we have a right to know when we are going to be free, when we can get our self-determination as people all over the world. When can we have our independent state free of occupation? We have the right to know and the international community has an obligation to tell us. Going to the Security Council was like ringing a bell in the mindset of the international community, that you, as the international community, should recognize that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands cannot continue forever.

It is your obligation as the international community to put a date. We tried to help when we said in our draft resolution November 2016. Why did we choose November 2016? We put it because we wanted to put a date. It could have been December 2017; it could have been January 2018. But we wanted to put a date in order to send a clear message to the international community that, "You have the full obligation to act responsibly and to put a date to end the occupation of Palestinian lands." If you agree that that date could be November 2070, at least we will know that by November 2070, we will get our independence. But we will know that, until then, we will have to work to get our independence. This really was the objective of that resolution: to focus on that responsibility, to put that responsibility on the shoulders of the international community, and to act responsibly in order to show that this is a matter of urgency. They have to deal with it. That's it.

We knew in advance that going to the Security Council was not going to get us anything. We knew that we faced two obstacles. One is being able to get nine votes. Two, even if you get nine votes, to pass the US veto. The Americans told us they would use the veto if we got the nine votes. So we knew in advance that our efforts in the Security Council were not going to succeed and were doomed to fail. Still, we insisted because we wanted to introduce the concept that each and every country in the Security Council has to think differently from now on. They need to introduce and include in their thinking a resolution to the Palestinian problem and a date to end that occupation. And I think we have succeeded. Despite the fact that the resolution failed, we have succeeded in introducing this concept. This was exactly





our intention in going to the Security Council. We started to think wisely about how to maximize such an effort.


Now, obviously we know that living in Palestine, next to the state of Israel, it would be naïve, stupid, and suicide to enter into a military confrontation with the state of Israel because they would eliminate us. We will give them an excuse to kill and destroy like what happened in Gaza recently when they destroyed 50,000 houses, killed 2,300 innocent people, destroyed the whole infrastructure under the pretext that they are defending themselves. I've never heard of an occupier having the right to defend themselves. I know that the occupied has the right to defend himself, but the occupier? Defend himself from what, the occupied? It is really reverse logic. It never happened in history that the occupier who controls the land and the people uses his right to defend himself. There is a contradiction between being the occupier and defending yourself. You are occupying another people and another land. The right to defend himself should be with the Palestinians under occupation.

We still believe in the right to go back to negotiations. If the Americans and the Europeans start talking to us, and maybe after the Israeli elections that will take place on March 17, the international community might introduce some revival of the negotiations. We told them that the negotiations have to be altered in such a way as to take into consideration the four elements I have already mentioned. But it should also focus on two important elements for success. One, they should put a date for ending the occupation, and secondly that Israel has to freeze its illegal settlement construction in Palestinian territory during the negotiation process.

Look at what happened. The international community convinced us that we should accept direct negotiations with Israel with no conditions whatsoever. What happened? Twenty-three years of negotiations. The outcome? Zero. What happened during these twenty-three years of negotiations? Israel continued building settlements. Today we have 600,000 Israeli settlers living in occupied Palestinian territory in violation of international law and, in particular, of the Geneva Conventions. So if we do not insist on a freeze on settlements during any future round of negotiation, then Israel will take advantage of the negotiations to continue building settlements. Then, maybe, at the next round of negotiations, perhaps in 2016 or 2017, we might see ourselves repeating the same thing but instead of talking about 600,000 Israeli settlers illegally living in occupied Palestinian lands, we might be talking about 700,000 settlers. It is important that any future negotiations take these elements into consideration.

We, as Palestinians, are ready to engage, we are ready to collaborate with a collective international effort to see that negotiations this time will be the last time, and will culminate in an agreement that will put an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people, an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state that lives side by side with the state of Israel. Of course, the vote on November 29, 2012, in the United Nations General Assembly has recognized Palestine as a non-member state, meaning it is a state, but not a member of the United Nations. The language of the resolution was very clear, that the territory of the state of Palestine is under occupation.

Israel keeps talking about “disputed territory” according to their version of Oslo. But after November 29, 2012, Resolution 67/19 says very clearly this is occupied territory of the state of Palestine; occupied by another state called Israel. Any negotiations that start between the state of Palestine and the state of Israel must be about the ending of the Israeli occupation of the territory of the state of Palestine. Any country, it could be Israel or it could be Korea, that



does not have to recognize Palestine as such, but has to respect the resolution of the United Nations where Palestine becomes the state of Palestine. Our name at the United Nations is the “State of Palestine.” We have acceded to many international organizations, treaties and conventions, the last of which is the International Criminal Court, where by April 1 we will become a full member. In that sense, we expect the international community to act in that way and to see how we could put an end to the last colonial occupation in modern times that exists on this planet, with Israel still occupying the territory of the state of Palestine.

This occupation did not start yesterday. It started in 1967. At the time, I was 11 years old. Here I am now, almost 60. It is very important to see that this occupation has to end. Maybe I won’t see a resolution to the conflict in my lifetime. I don’t know if it will happen in my son’s lifetime. But it is something we must work on. It is very important to put an end to this. As I said, the occupation was not only a military occupation; it was also an economic, cultural, and social occupation in all aspects. When a people are deprived of their basic, fundamental rights for so many years, then one really wonders what kind of a situation you are pushing us in and how do you expect those people to act or behave? Since 1967 until today, 48 years have passed. During this period, we knew nothing but Israeli military occupation: checkpoints, military controls, showing identification cards, standing in lines, and more. For a new generation, like my son, they know nothing but occupation. They have never lived in a free country. They have never felt freedom. They don’t know what that really means.

When my eldest son finished high school, he needed to go to university abroad to study and he left occupied territory for the first time to go to Dublin, Ireland. The first thing he said to me when he arrived was, “Dad, you know what? There are no checkpoints, there are no soldiers asking for identity cards, you can move around freely, no-one is telling me where I can go. My goodness, for the first time I am discovering what liberty and freedom means.” In that particular moment, I felt I was losing my child. Because if my child discovers freedom outside, he is not going to come back to a place where that freedom does not exist. So, I feel an obligation to work harder in order to end the occupation and to guarantee that my son will be able to come back.

This is the situation. Sometimes from a distance, people see it only as a matter of entering into negotiations, but it is becoming too profoundly rooted in the depth of each and everyone’s life to a level that we have to liberate ourselves from that notion of what the occupation really means. I also worry that even after ending the occupation, we will have to work repair the trauma because no-one in Palestine is mentally prepared to work in a situation outside of the occupation. We have to prepare for that. We have to begin preparing people to start moving gradually from that prolonged occupation into what freedom offers.

Thank you.