Remarks by Dr. Saud Mohammed Al-Sati,
Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to India and Head of Arab Ambassadors' Council
at the function to mark the 'International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People'
ICWA, New Delhi, 29 November 2019

Good morning every one.

Dr. T.C.A. Raghavan

Excellencies, Ambassadors and High Commissioners

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the ICWA for organizing this event to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

This solidarity Day in my opinion is not only an opportunity to show solidarity with the Palestinians, but also serves as a reminder to each one of us about the ongoing suffering of the Palestinians and represents an opportunity to spread awareness about their legitimate rights and their dreams for freedom and justice that were denied by the Israeli occupiers.

It has been more than seventy years since Israel occupied the Palestinian land and displaced thousands of Palestinian families from their homes, and took away their farms and properties.

It has been more than four decades since the UN General Assembly in 1977 marked November 29th as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people. Each year, on this day most of the world nations express their solidarity. In fact, I stood on this stage on the same day of solidarity in 2017 joining our Indian friends and colleagues from the diplomatic corps to show our solidarity with the Palestinians.

Unfortunately, over the past 3 years Palestinians have suffered even more. The occupation has continued, and the unjust treatment under the Israeli occupiers has exacerbated.

In December 2017, the United States recognized Jerusalem as the capital for Israel. A move that was decisively rejected by the United Nations.

In 2019, there was an attempt to close down the UNRWA, the organization that provides humanitarian assistance for the Palestinian refugees and education for their children.

Fortunately, because of the international support of friends including India, the UN decided to extend the mandate of the organization.

We welcome the vote in favour of a number of draft resolutions on Palestine in the Fourth Committee of the UN General Assembly, in particular the resolution on the renewal of the mandate of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine

Refugees (UNRWA) for the next three years, which was adopted by 170 countries.[1]

Earlier this year, in September 2019, the Israeli Prime Minister declared his intention to annex parts of the West Bank occupied since 1967. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia condemned the plan and called for an emergency meeting for the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) at the level of foreign ministers to take the necessary measures to confront that declaration.

On 25th November 2019, the Arab foreign ministers, in their emergency meeting in Cairo, rejected and condemned the announcement by the United States that it no longer considers Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank to be a violation of international law. Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud, who was present at the meeting, reaffirmed the Kingdom's rejection of the US position, and stressed the need to find a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian issue.

Dear friends:

I would like to thank all of you for taking the time to gather today to express solidarity with the people of Palestine in their struggle to achieve their legitimate

rights. Your kind presence here reflects the strong international support for the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people.

My colleagues Arab ambassadors and I, are so grateful for the solidarity expressed today.

This occasion provides an opportunity for the international community, governments and civil societies to remember that the question of Palestine remains unresolved, and that the Palestinian people are yet to attain their inalienable rights as defined by the General Assembly, namely, the right to self-determination, the right to national independence and sovereignty, and the right to return to their homes and properties from which they had been displaced.

The rights of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories, and specially the inhabitants of Al Quds city have been denied. They cannot build homes, they are denied freedom of movement. They cannot perform their religious duties by going freely to al Aqsa mosque.

The practices of the Israeli occupiers are in contravention with international law, in contravention with United Nations resolutions and with all international treaties or protocols, which have defined the role of a military occupier in a militarily occupied territory.

Israel must stop its continuous defiance of the will of the international community. It must stop building the apartheid wall. It must stop illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. The Israeli occupiers must also halt their attempts to Judaize Al-Quds city, obliterate its Arab identity, and change its demographic character.

A recent UN Report (titled 'Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem) found that in the period between June 1, 2018 to May 31, 2019, a total of 218 Palestinians, including 48 children, were killed and 22,483 others were injured by Israeli security forces.

As reported, the severe security measures and restrictions imposed by Israeli authorities over the years have resulted in extensive and systemic damage to the Palestinian economy, including an erosion of the productive base; the confiscation of land, water and other natural resources; restrictions on the movement of people, labour and goods; obstacles to accessing international markets; more than a decade of closure of the Gaza Strip; and the costly fragmentation of the Palestinian economy into three disjointed, disintegrated regions, in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Arab countries have clearly expressed their interest in reaching a peaceful solution for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict based on international legitimacy, the relevant UN Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative that was proposed by Saudi Arabia more than 18 years ago, and was subsequently adopted by the Arab Summit held in Beirut in 2002 as well as by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

We believe that the Arab Peace Initiative provides a solid basis for resolving the conflict, and that it has all the elements for a final settlement that can achieve lasting, comprehensive and just peace in the Middle East.

A just and comprehensive peace in the region can only be achieved by ending the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian land, and establishing an independent Palestinian state with Eastern Al-Quds (Jerusalem) as its capital, in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative. The two-state solution is the only path to end this decades-long conflict, and ensure that Palestinians and Israelis can live in peace and security.

We believe that the international community needs to deal firmly with Israel to compel it to stop seizure of Palestinian territories, implement international legitimacy resolutions and end the continuous violations against the Palestinians.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the Ambassador of the Kingdom Saudi Arabia to India, I would like to stress that the Palestinian issue has been a top priority for my country since the time of the Kingdom's Founder, King Abdul Aziz Al-Saud. It is firmly based on principle of justice, international legitimacy and the rejection of aggression. The Kingdom strongly supports the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, their right to their own state on their own land and their right to return to their homes and properties in Palestine.

In addition to the principled political support, the Kingdom since the very beginning of the Palestinian issue has been providing financial, humanitarian and moral support to our brothers and sisters in Palestine.

It supports the Palestinian Authority's budget with a consistent financial aid.

Extending a Hand

Historically, Saudi Arabia has provided Palestine with aid and development support in excess of $6 billion. We have partnered with various UN agencies, and national and international NGOs to deliver assistance in Palestine. In fact, the Kingdom is the largest donor to UNRWA. To name some, our support included building institutions and facilities and repairing dozens of schools in Jordan, the West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem before the start of this school year.

An additional $200 million was also pledged by the Kingdom – $50 million of this amount to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in

the Near East (UNRWA), and $150 million to support the Palestinian Waqf Program in Jerusalem.

Last October, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud received President Mahmoud Abbas of State of Palestine and a Joint Economic Committee and Saudi-Palestinian Business Council has been agreed to be set up. It is an extension of the support and attention accorded by the Kingdom's leadership to the Palestinian cause, politically and financially.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to take this opportunity to state that the Arab nations greatly value the Republic of India's support to the Palestinian people to regain their legitimate rights. This valuable support has been reiterated by the recent message of Prime Minster of India Mr Narendra Modi on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people.

In conclusion, I would like to say that despite the difficulties and roadblocks, we must continue to be hopeful and optimistic. We express our hope to see a quick end to the conflict and achievement of a just lasting and comprehensive settlement, in which the Palestinians attain their legitimate rights and have their own independent, sovereign and viable state.

I thank you all for listening.