



Address of H.E President Mahmoud Abbas to the PLO Central Council 26th Session – April 26, 27 Ramallah, occupied Palestine

Unofficial Translation.

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

I greet our special guests especially accredited members of the diplomatic corps to Palestine. I would like as well to recall our martyrs and leaders who gave away their life for Palestine. We will continue in their steps. Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails are in our minds and hearts. We will have no peace of mind until all prisoners are released and enjoy full freedom in a free Palestinian State.

Brothers and Sisters,

The PLO Central Council meets in difficult and complex circumstances, but we remain hopeful. These days we might have reached the pinnacle of complexities and difficulties vis-à-vis what we do and what we deal with, but we will remain steadfast holding on tightly to our fundamental rights and constants. It is inevitable that we realize our rights and establish our independent Palestinian State with Jerusalem its eternal capital. This is our goal and this is what we have devoted our life for. Therefore, we will proceed in our struggle for freedom and independence, and we will not give up or lose hope despite the difficulties, pressures on us and blackmails.

During the past two days hope radiated lighting up the way for the unity of the Palestinian people. This is a matter that we must adhere and be faithful to. We have waited - we will talk about this for a while - we were patient and we suffered. But the time has come to reap the fruit of this patience and restore the unity of the Palestinian people.

We have today different hot issues that must be dealt with. Negotiations are a hot issue. And likewise is the issue of Palestinian prisoners. The reconciliation is a promising issue. Jerusalem is a pressing issue that we must always keep in mind and work for because Jerusalem is the capital of Palestine and without it there can be no Palestinian State. We will never accept to have a Palestinian State without East Jerusalem its capital, occupied by Israeli in 1967. Moreover, we must seriously and profoundly address the issue of our refugee brothers in Syria. They are suffering guiltlessly. It is rarely that we have excluded ourselves from what has been going around us in order to protect our people, but we have been involved involuntarily in a new refugee tragedy tantamount to that of 1948 if not more difficult. These issues are our main concern today and we hope to be able to address them all.

Negotiations are a political means to a political end. We look forward to earn our rights through negotiations. We gave the first signal in 1974 when we decided to establish an independent Palestinian State on the land that is liberated. In 1969 we declared our intention to establish a democratic Palestinian State, but our call fell on deaf ears.

In 1974 the Palestinian leadership had the audacity and courage to talk politics while carrying arms. At that time the late President Yasser Arafat said, "I have come with a rifle in one hand and an olive branch in the other. Do not let fall the olive branch from my hand." President Arafat was very serious at that time when he uttered these words. The olive branch stood for peace, but peace had not been achieved. Nothing had happened. Days passed and you all know that we had been deported forcefully from Lebanon to Tunisia, which we respect and appreciate. Tunisia gave us refuge at a time it was extremely difficult to find a host country to shelter us. In 1988 the Palestinian National Council launched its peace offensive from Algeria and declared that we would recognize, for the first time in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, international resolutions, 1967 borders and the establishment of the State of Palestine on the land of Palestine. But these words did not find a favorable response except from few countries that have recognized the Palestinian state in exile. The political initiative, however, remained lame.





Days passed and we went to Madrid. They told us we were not an independent delegation and we did not represent Jerusalem or the PLO. We accepted because if we had not we would have been excluded. We agreed to be part of the Madrid negotiations. We struggled and debated. You know well that we fought for our rights and negotiated in the corridors until the Jordanian delegation had of its own accord separated from the Palestinian delegation. In other words, we were one with the Jordanian delegation and there were corridor negotiations. We arrived to Madrid a Palestinian delegation and a Jordanian delegation. Then there was the big surprise called Oslo Agreement, which is the reason why we are meeting today. Oslo is only an agreement of principles and no one pretended it was a final agreement that provided a solution to all problems. According to Oslo Agreement, six main issues have to be resolved, including Jerusalem, refugees, borders, security, settlements, and others. What had happened ever since Oslo was not our mistake, and until today we have received nothing because Israel is determined not to solve the conflict.

What we notice is happening these days and the stalemate in the negotiations evidently demonstrate that the Israelis do not want a reasonable solution based on two states existing side by side in peace and stability. The evidence to this is that we went later to Camp David and we failed to reach an agreement because the thoughts presented were not clear or specific to say if anything was acceptable or not. Camp David ended and we held talks with the former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. For the record, these talks were good and constructive, addressing all final status issues. Olmert did not reject as his successor had done negotiating about the final status issues, including Jerusalem, borders, refugees, security and settlements. We exchanged maps, percentages and others, and both parties were seriously looking for a solution, which was supposed to be put to referendum.

No one has the right to sign on behalf of the Palestinian people only after a public referendum has taken place. The Palestinian people have to say whether they accept or refuse. The referendum is not a new affair that we have invented only recently. It is an old matter. We were told our laws do not provide for a referendum, but we replied we could develop a law for that matter because the referendum is important. Olmert failed and he was the cause for other failures as well, and he was accused of many violations. Then the US President Obama came to the scene and he sent Mirtchell, who for more than one-year-and-a-half tried hard to convince the Israelis to halt settlement activities. At the end of his mission, Mitchell declared, "I have failed and I am going to end my mission."

In the meantime we wrote a letter to Prime Minister Netanyahu accusing him of rejecting the negotiations or peace. We stated, "You are an occupying state and we will no longer accept the current situation to go on. You are and are not an occupying government, and we are and are not an authority, and therefore we are heading to the UN." Remember that on 28 July 2011 the Central Council took a decision to obtain full membership in the UN, and this was preceded by decisions from the Arab Higher Monitoring Committee which agreed with us to go to the UN for full membership.

It seems that some countries in the world do not take what had happened seriously, but this was not the first time. Same happenings will recur. For the record, in Oslo the US was told that negotiations were ongoing between Shimon Peres and Abu Mazen, and at that time the US Secretary of State Warren Christopher said, "Let the children play." They took nothing seriously and what was done cannot be undone. We said we were going to the UN and there we were met with violent opposition from all parties. They told us, "Do not go the UN. You will lose." We knew then that we would lose because we needed the endorsement of 9 countries to put our file before the UN. We roamed the whole world seeking the endorsement of 9 countries but we failed. That was the first step. The second step was the veto. The great powers can use the veto; nevertheless, we insisted on heading to the UN and deliver a speech before the General Assembly. We asked for full membership in the UN.

We thought that if obtaining full membership in the UN was not possible, we would ask for a non-member observer state status which required proportional voting in the General Assembly. Since we went first to the UN on 29/11, Palestinian diplomacy exerted tremendous efforts with world countries in order to win votes.





On 23 September 2012, we went to the UN and said we did not want any voting to take place during that session, and everybody felt relaxed and at ease. But we made it clear that we would like the voting to take place after the presidential election in the US which was scheduled to take place on 6 November 2012. But the date was changed. We were asked, "What do you mean when you said you wanted the voting to take place after the US elections?" We replied we would go the UN either on 15 November which marked the declaration of the State of Palestine, or on 29 November which marked the international day for solidarity with the Palestinian people. On 29 November we went to the UN and we were very tense because we were afraid of any plots or tricks that might obstruct the voting. Things went on at a very slow pace and two were allowed to talk in favor of the project and two against the project. Afterwards the door for discussion was closed, and the result of the voting was, as you know it, in our favor: 138 votes for the project, 41 abstention and 9 against. We achieved what we wanted.

What did we achieve? We achieved a very critical and important objective that I was asked about before flying to the UN. I was asked, "What will you gain from this recognition?" I answered I would gain one thing, namely the Palestinian land occupied in 1967 is a state territory under military occupation. It is no longer disputed territory as the Israelis claim. The Israelis claim it is disputed land to justify their settlement activities. They are constructing settlements everywhere on the land of Palestine even at the gates of Ramallah such as Beth El settlement. The other point is that we have become a state under military occupation and not simply an authority. This gives us the right to accede to 63 international organizations, treaties and conventions. We returned home and we came under extreme pressure to accede to international organizations. But I called for patience because I did not want to lose our relations with all countries. I am a reasonable and flexible person and I thought we had to deal with the matter wisely.

We contacted the US administration and President Obama made a state visit to Palestine. It was not a business or courtesy visit but a state visit. The visit was a good initiative from the US administration. Then in Saudi Arabia we talked about the resumption of the peace talks. John Kerry asked us to meet in Egypt or Saudi Arabia and I chose Saudi Arabia. We agreed to resume peace talks on the basis of pre-June 1967 borders and when we moved on to talk about settlements I told Kerry ad verbatim, "We do not recognize settlements, not even one single stone of them" Settlements are illegal and I will never agree to have the settlements annexed to Israel because they are constructed on occupied Palestinian land. The UN General Assembly resolved that the borders of the State of Palestine are pre-June 1967 borders and that its capital is east Jerusalem. Kerry said that was enough and negotiations began. I must say for the record that Kerry made tremendous efforts and do not be surprised if I tell you that I met with him 40 times during eight-and-a-half months, in addition to other meetings here and there and phone calls.

We proceeded with the negotiations and we told US officials there was a 'framework' and they gave us ideas but there was nothing in writing. Our main concern was to discuss all issues which were written down on paper. If I wanted to give an official reply to all issues I had to read every single word carefully. Words spoken must be written down and read well.

After a few days of the agreement to resume the negotiations, we were asked not to go to international organizations during the whole period of the negotiations which was six months. We said we could and would not accept that. Negotiations were one thing and going to international organizations was another. We came back home and thought, "How can we compromise something that is concrete and has value?" We were told pre-Oslo prisoners were sentenced to life imprisonment and had no chance of being released. We said we did not mind compromising, and we asked for the release of 104 Palestinian prisoners by name from Israeli jails. We committed ourselves not to go to international organizations for 9 months. Immediately, John Kerry took our position seriously and he called Netanyahu. Kerry said, "We agree but Netanyahu does not trust you and says you are a liar. He says he cannot release the 104 prisoners all at one time but in 4 batches." The dates of the release of the 4 batches of prisoners were decided the last of which was on 29 March 2014. Negotiations continued and 3 batches of prisoners were released. The Israeli tried to confuse between the release of prisoners and settlement activities or the release of prisoners and achieving progress in the negotiations.





Those were separate issues. The release of 104 prisoners in return for not going to international organizations was acceptable for us and that was the deal because the life of prisoners was important for us and we hoped they would return to their homes soon. Some of the prisoners have spent up to 20 or 30 years in Israeli jails. Just before the arrival of the date for the release of the 4th batch of prisoners, we were told there was a problem. The problem was that 14 of the prisoners hold the Israeli citizenship and that we had no right in determining their future. We said Netanyahu must have said that long time ago but he said nothing and we gave him the names of the prisoners set for release. We insisted that the prisoners should return home. We had two precedents in the past that we were determined similar incidents would never happen again. The first was the expulsion of 13 Palestinians who took refuge in the Church of the Nativity during the second intifada and the second was Gilad Shalit deal. The 13 Palestinians were expelled to Arab countries and were never allowed to return home. Therefore, we said we wanted every prisoner to return home. We would not accept any of the prisoners to give up his citizenship. That was and is our position toward the prisoners and we say that expulsion is a violation of the international and humanitarian laws as well as of all universal legislations. You can sentence a citizen to capital punishment but you cannot expel him or her from their homeland. That was the problem. They told us there were 10 high risk prisoners who were supposed to return to the West Bank but whom the Israeli authorities wanted to expel. Again we refused. We rejected the expulsion of any of the prisoners.

As for the negotiations, we told the Israelis that East Jerusalem is the capital of Palestine and that pre-June 1967 borders are not a subject for discussion. We have become a state, we told them. We tried to set a timeline for ending the occupation. Concerning the refugees, any refugee who decides not to return must be restituted by the host country by mutual consent. Refugees who like to leave the host country and go to another country must be compensated, and those who prefer to return to Palestine must also be compensated. But the right of return still exists and is valid. The Arab peace initiative provides a just and agreed upon solution to the refugee problem based on UN resolution 194. Hence the right of return exists and is valid. I told the educated elite who sent an open letter titled "We Will not Give Up the right of Return" that we advocate the right of return. They asked, "How can you resume the negotiations?" I answered, "We have no objection to extend the duration of the negotiations, but the 30 pre-Oslo prisoners have to be released, our map be put on the table for discussion and agreed on, and settlement activities must cease." This was our position throughout but we received no official response to it. Crises emerged. The prisoners were supposed to be released on 29 March 2014. The Minister of Detainees and Ex-Detainees asked me and I told him the prisoners would be released on time as agreed. He went to Ofra jail and I told we had to respect dates. In the meantime communication between us, the Israelis and the US were ongoing. On 29, 30, 31 March we sent a written letter to the US and Israeli government pointing out that the prisoners had not been released. At that time the Palestinian leadership was holding a meeting and we decided to go to the international organizations. Came 1 April and I was waiting in my offices. The leadership had to take a decision. I was also waiting for the Israeli cabinet to meet but it did not. That day the leadership decided to have accession to 15 international organizations. We told the media we were willing to proceed with the negotiations. We were grateful to the Americans for their efforts, and we were ready to resume the negotiations. But nothing had happened and we were compelled to sign the documents for accession to international treaties. The Israelis told us they were taken by surprise because we signed the documents. I told them I sent a letter and told you about that. We signed the accession documents to international organizations. I was asked by my men, "Shall we deliver the letters to international organizations?" I replied, "Deliver the letters to three parties in the UN and some to Holland, and others to Geneva. Tell them to do it."

The designated countries received the letters. Geneva told us we became a high contracting party to the First, Second and Fourth Geneva Convention. In Holland Palestine became a member in the convention even though Holland did not vote for us in the UN. The State of Palestine has become a UN member according to special procedures. All treaties were ongoing and were took 15 treaties. In his speech, Abu Adeeb talked about accession to the other treaties. I would like to say here that we are proceeding rationally but we have the right to accede to all treaties. The time had come for the release of prisoners, but they were not released and therefore we had the right to go to the UN. We gave Israel 9 months for the release of prisoners but Israel did not comply. Why? It was not the fact that they were taken by surprise when we resorted to the UN.



I am slightly preceding events to say that as a result of the reconciliation that has also 'surprised' them despite the fact that the delegation obtained permits from Israel to enter Gaza, and despite the measures taken against us the first of which was the imposition of economic sanctions, the occupation played a major role in stopping negotiations. The second thing was reducing the level of communication and limiting it to the areas of negotiations and security only. We will say to the state of Israel you are an occupying power. You are responsible for everything and for all the gaps here. So, take responsibility! This is what we should tell them and this is what we have already told them. As long as you are an occupying power we will not accept the status quo: the continued settlement activities, the attacks on people and Jerusalem, devastation and killings are not acceptable. You are an occupying country. Tell the world that Palestine is a state under occupation. We obtained recognition from the UN that Palestine is a state under occupation. We say to Israel since you are an occupying power, you should take responsibility. We have spent what the occupation should have spent. We assume responsibility. This was the conclusion we arrived at as a result of the negotiations and the issue of prisoners. Who wants to return to negotiations shall release prisoners, stop all forms of settlement activities and return to the negotiating table. If they do not stop, let them come and assume their responsibilities.

Over the years, the Israelis have agreed on the separation and division. They were supporters and sponsors and protectors of division. The reason was that whenever we talked about negotiations, Israel would ask, "Who are we negotiating with? Is it Gaza or the West Bank?" We achieved reconciliation and the Israelis threatened us saying either we choose Hamas or the negotiations. We told them the reconciliation was one thing and the negotiations another thing. This is our land and these are our people, and reconciliation is not the business of Israel. They say that Hamas is a terrorist group. If As Israeli claims Hamas is a terrorist group, why did Israel sign an armistice agreement with Hamas under the sponsorship of President Mohammed Morsi. The US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, was here and signed the agreement. We are not against the agreement and the ceasefire. On the contrary, we respect the agreement. Why am I forbidden to go to Hamas? Why do I have to choose between negotiations and Hamas?! I told this to Israeli journalists who visited me two days ago here in the Presidential HQs. Hamas is part of our people and Israel is our partner. I cannot abandon our people or our partners. Now they say that I shook hands with terrorism. These are shoddy excuses. In addition, they said they should defame Abu Mazen, but this is nonsense to me. Netanyahu got angry after hearing about the reconciliation and said he was surprised by it.

The thing that we are proud of and should take very seriously is the consummation of the reconciliation. We must work hard in order to sustain it by all means and all parties must have good intentions. You know that we had elections on the 25th of January 2006. During that time many events had taken place which I do not want to mention. But all have taken us to where we are now! Many events had taken place in Gaza. Saudi Arabia has kindly invited all parties to the Ka'bah to make an agreement ending with a national unity government. Indeed, we formed a national unity government consisting of different parties. Before that when the coup took place, the Arab League met and authorized Egypt to sponsor the reconciliation. For now, we are holding on to Egypt's role in the reconciliation irrespective of the tension in the relations between Egypt and Hamas. However, Egypt is aware of the difference and is eager to nourish the reconciliation and help it grow. We do not accept a substitute for Egypt.

The Mecca meeting was blessed by Egypt. After that, a coup took place. Since then, we have been making efforts for reconciliation most notably is signing an agreement in Doha. In order for Egypt to be the sponsor, we went to Egypt and announced the agreement. It was blessed on 6 February 2012, but remained unimplemented. And now we do not blame ourselves. We have something new which we will proceed with. We have a simplified agreement of two points: We want a government with independent technocrats and want to go to the elections. Resorting to the ballot box is the basis of democracies in the world. It has been eight years since the presidential elections and seven years since the legislative elections. It is time to renew our legitimacy, especially that we have a state. Jurists and wise men shall come together to understand what we can do.



Is it a legislative council or a parliament? Are there elections for a head of state or chairman of the authority? These are legal matters that we have enough time to discuss and come up with a result. As long as things are like this, they are good. I am here on behalf of all of you, I salute Rami Hamdallah who submitted his resignation yesterday under our disposal. He wrote his resignation was instigated by his concern for national interest and its progress.

The upcoming government will be the same as the previous ones. It will address issues concerning the authority. The negotiations are the PLO's affairs because it represents all of our people and because negotiations take place on behalf of all the Palestinian people and represent the interests of all the people especially the refugees. The PLO represents the people, cares for their interests, and protects everything they need. The government is guided by my orders and policy. I recognize Israel and Israel acknowledges that. I renounce violence and terrorism. I acknowledge international legitimacy and Israel acknowledges international legitimacy. I am committed to international obligations and the government will implement the international as been or extremism. It is time to lift the siege on Gaza. We must make every effort to lift the siege from all directions. The residents of Gaza are part of our people and it is our duty to do everything we can to save the situation in Gaza. The water is contaminated by 95%. They drink salt, the raw material supplies are lacking, and the tunnels were closed down. I am with the closure of all tunnels, but I also call for giving the Palestinian people in Gaza their rights. We must pay attention to the suffering of the people and the difficulties they experience. We should eliminate all difficulties and create better life conditions for the Gaza people. The tunnels are illegitimate and illegal.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

There has been talk about creating an independent Palestinian state and autonomy in Gaza on an area of 1,600m². This has been the adopted policy since the Balfour Declaration until today. With reconciliation and unity, we have broken this slogan and declared that Palestine is one state.

For the past two or three years, the case of the Jewishness of the State of Israel has been proposed to me. Our position is mutual recognition. We and the Palestinian government have acknowledged the state of Israel. When Israel concluded a treaty with Egypt, Egypt was not asked to recognize the Jewishness of Israel. And when Israel concluded a treaty with Jordan, Jordan was not asked to recognize the Jewishness of Israel. Why are we asked to acknowledge the Jewishness of the State of Israel? I say no to the recognition of the Jewishness of the State of Israel. I ask, "Why does not Israel go to the UN and ask them to recognize it as a Jewish state?" One last point I explained to the Israeli journalists: You may not know your history; we know more about your history than you do. From 1900 to 2000, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, some one-million Russians immigrated to Israel; more than 50% of those are Muslims and Christians. They have the right to return to their homeland. Why does Israel allow them to return? They are Christians and Muslims. How can Israel explain to me its Jewishness? The soldier stops at the checkpoint and prays. This is not my business, but Israel allows one to enter and forbids the other. We will not accept the recognition of the Jewishness of the State of Israel.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Let us go back a little to the Arab Spring which took place in the Arab countries. It began in Tunisia, then Egypt, then Libya, then Syria and before that in Yemen. Our unequivocal position was nothing to do with what was going on here or there. We have nothing to do with the internal Arab issues. We said we do not wish to interfere in what was going on in the Arab countries, particularly in Syria, because there are 600,000 Palestinians whose situation affects another 300,000 Palestinians. In other words, one million Palestinians are under threat. I do not want to have anything to do with these events. We are not with this party or that party and we are not against this party or that party. But we say one word only: the internal Syrian problem can be solved through dialogue.

We proved to them now that what we have said was true. We presented ideas that were welcomed by both sides. There is fighting here and there and the victim. Palestinian refugees have become the victim. This is the tragedy of our people. Nine months later, Qais Abdul Karim 'Abu Laila' went to see what was going on in the Palestinian refugee camps and when he returned he said one sentence only, "Who enters Abu Sufyan's house will be safe." This means that those whoever feels threatened goes to the camp and solves the problems between the two disputing parties. Suddenly, the Moslem Brothers engaged the camps in the conflict, resulting in destruction and asylum. It was our duty to assign Dr. Zakaria Agha and Dr. Ahmed Majdalani to solve the problem. We were criticized for going to Syria, but we said that we had nothing to do with what was going on there. I only wanted to protect my people there. They went and met with everyone and have succeeded in alleviating the suffering of our people. Aid began to arrive and the refugees who were displaced from the Syrian camps might return. We will continue in this effort and we will continue in this position. We have no relationship to what is happening, and we have no relationship with the Arab Spring. We either say a good word or keep silent. This is our situation.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Jerusalem is the jewel in the crown. The question of Jerusalem calls for serious efforts. What is happening is that these efforts do not help; rather they are a source of obstruction. Many are calling for not going to Jerusalem. I heard who said that visiting Jerusalem is "forbidden and is tantamount to normalization." I shall say that whoever comes to strengthen the existence of the residents of Jerusalem is welcomed and this is not normalization. Jerusalem without its citizens is worthless and becomes stones only. Jerusalem is neglected to a large extent. Since the Arab two summits, which were held in the Libyan city of Sirte, Arab countries have been promising to support Jerusalem, but nothing had happened. I said to Colonel Muammar Gaddafi; "Nobody paid." He said, "What shall I do? Shall I put my hands in their pockets?" I told him, "No, put your hands in your pocket." Unfortunately, they have decided to pay USD 500 million to the Jerusalem Fund at the Islamic Bank, but only USD 37 million arrived. Who wants to protect and sponsor Jerusalem shall support the steadfastness of its people. Israel can stop the settlement activities in Jerusalem and the West Bank if pressure is strongly exerted on it. I say: no Jerusalem, no negotiations.

This is what we have on the issue of negotiations, prisoners and reconciliation that is dear to our hearts. We hope the reconciliation will be consummated in good faith so that we can push it forward. We have no other options. The other option is to divide the country and to establish a state in Gaza as the Israelis want and to expand the Gaza Strip by 1,600m². There was also talk about setting up a free trade zone. I asked former Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi about this project and he replied the project was intended to help our brothers in Gaza. I told him this is not a national project that ends the national problem. It simply throws Gaza in the face of Egypt. Morsi asked, "What does this mean? What is the population of the Gaza Strip?" I told him one-million-and-a-half. He wondered, "What does this mean? Shall we put them in Shubra and bring them hot meals?" I asked him, "Is this how you understood it?" Igor Island was the one who brought the project and the intention was 1,600 kilometers. Caravans began to arrive to Sinai. The project was about to be implemented, but did not last. The division will end and the Palestinian national unity will return.

May the peace of God be with you.