


Statement

by

Ambassador Rajiv Bhatia

Director General, ICWA



**on commemoration of
'International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People'**

at

**Sapru House, New Delhi
December 6, 2012**

Honorable Minister of State for External Affairs, Mr. E. Ahamed, His Excellency, Mr. Adil Shaban Hassan Sadeq, Ambassador of the State of Palestine in India, H.E. Dr. Ahmed Salem Saleh Al-Wahishi, Chief Representative, League of Arab States Mission, Ms. Lise Grande, UN Resident Coordinator, members of diplomatic corps, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honor for the Indian Council of World Affairs to host, once again, the 'International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.' We take pride in reiterating our support and solidarity with the people of Palestine. India has always stood with them and backed them, consistently and steadfastly, in their just cause.

For long, India has been a passionate supporter of the cause of the Palestine people. The modern history of relations between the people of India and the Palestinian people has largely been shaped by the common struggle against British colonialism. 'The Father of Nation', Mahatma Gandhi, had once said: 'Palestine belongs to Arabs in the same sense that England belongs to the English or France to the French.'

Following the advent of its independence, India moved quickly to support Palestinian self-determination. In 1974 India became the first non-Arab state to recognize the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). India's support did not stop there; it went much further when India was also the first non-Arab nation to recognize the state of Palestine on November 18, 1988.

Driven by the deep concern of Indian people for the people of Palestine, the Government of India has always called for the establishment of a sovereign and independent state, along with the state of Israel. India has not hesitated in extending support to any initiative or plan that envisages giving the Palestinians a state of their own. We never wavered in calling on Israel to end illegal settlements in the occupied land, despite having close ties with Israel.

On a personal note, may I add that, on the basis of what I observed in and around Palestinian camps during my tenure in the Indian Embassy in Beirut in the late 1970s, I strongly

empathized with the Palestinian people. I also recall with great happiness that I had occasions to meet Chairman Yasser Arafat, the perennial fountain of inspiration for his people.

India's support to the Palestinians has not been confined to diplomatic and political support; we have also extended generous material support in various forms, including assistance for humanitarian relief and development projects. During the state visit to India in September 2012 of H. E. President Mahmoud Abbas, India reiterated its firm support for the struggle of Palestinian people to achieve a 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.

Democratic impulses symbolized by 'the Arab Spring' ushered new hopes for the Palestinians. It was expected that the new trends would bring a positive change for the Palestinian struggle. But there were disappointments once again when the Gaza Strip witnessed recently the spate of violence, jeopardizing all endeavors for an early negotiation and resolution of the Palestinian question. The statements by the Government of India on this matter conveyed the country's position very clearly.

This Solidarity Day in 2012 bears special importance for Palestine, India and all those who have stood by the cause of Palestinian people. United Nations' decision to grant Palestine the status of non-member observer State, through a decisive vote in the General Assembly, is of exceptional importance. It has been welcomed widely around the world. A significant step has been taken for rectifying the 'unprecedented historical injustice' - as President Abbas aptly put it - that has been inflicted on the Palestinian people since 1948. We rejoice with you, Ambassador Sadeq, Ambassador Al-Wahishi and all the Arab ambassadors present here. It is our ardent hope that this will pave the way for further progress and even more glorious achievements in future.

To express solidarity with the people of Palestine, we have several dignitaries with us today who would articulate their views on this occasion. They will now address us now, receiving no doubt our utmost attention.
