I am honored to address the Committee today for the first time on behalf of the State of Palestine, following the historic decision by the General Assembly to accord Palestine nonmember observer State status in the United Nations. I would like to begin by congratulating you, and the other members of the Bureau on your election, wishing you all success.

The effect of armed or other kinds of conflict on women, including those living under foreign occupation, is one of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. There are many recommendations for action in this important document, which if implemented, will significantly contribute to the realization of the objectives of the Declaration. One of these recommendations calls upon Governments, the international community and civil society to take strategic actions regarding all critical areas of concern, and to develop and implement mechanisms of accountability. We believe such action is necessary for the advancement of the goals of equality, development and peace for women worldwide, especially those still suffering from the detrimental consequences of the unjust and unstable situations of armed conflict, including foreign occupation.

No doubt that the world has witnessed many significant achievements in the advancement and empowerment of women. Yet, many challenges and constraints continue to hinder full implementation of the Declaration's strategic objectives. Such challenges are even more formidable in the case of Palestinian women, who have been living for too long under the most unbearable, tragic situation as a result of the continued Israeli military occupation, for more than 46 years. Their status has been greatly impacted by the overall deterioration of the political, economic and social conditions of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, the territory constituting the State of Palestine. Any examination of the situation of Palestinian women has to be considered within the overall context of this long and oppressive occupation, which remains the root cause of their critical situation at all levels.

The fact that Israel has never been held accountable for its crimes has surely fostered the continuation and escalation of its oppressive policies and measures against the whole Palestinian population, including women and children. At this critical juncture, it is imperative that the international community, in particular the United Nations, take concrete measures in accordance with the Charter, international law and relevant resolutions to compel Israel to cease its breaches of international law and hold it accountable for its violations of Palestinian rights.

Sadly, illegal policies by the occupying Power, such as the intensification of the construction and expansion of its illegal settlements and its annexation Wall, the increase in home demolitions, the imposition of severe restrictions on movement of persons and goods, the
wide spread destruction of Palestinian property and agricultural fields, including by extremist settlers, forced displacement of civilians; imprisonment and detention of thousands of people, including children, women and heads of households and primary breadwinners; lack of access to education and health services and sometimes even food and other basic supplies; have continued to have detrimental ramifications, not just on Palestinian women’s advancement and empowerment, but on their basic survival and well-being.

Furthermore, violence against women remains a major obstacle towards the realization of their full equality and empowerment. We are aware of the fact that no society is free from such horrendous crimes and many women worldwide continue to face one form or another of violence against them. However, Palestinian women are subjected not only to typical forms of violence, but also to the political violence caused by the occupying forces. Palestinian women continue to face, on a daily basis, grave human suffering and flagrant human rights violations by Israel, the occupying Power, severely affecting the condition of Palestinian women socio-economic condition on the ground and the well being of the society as a whole.

Despite the prevailing despair, Palestinian women remain resilient in their struggle to overcome all obstacles and all forms of violence against them, including domestic violence. At the national level, Palestinian women are striving to implement the National Strategy to Combat Violence against Women of 2011-2019. The program, prepared by the Ministry of Women’s Affair in cooperation with UN women, aims to create work training and empowerment programs for women, provide social support and promote a legal framework to combat violence. The significance of such a program is that, it takes on a cross-sector approach, recognizing violence against women as a development issue affecting the political, social and economic systems of the Palestinian society.

I can’t conclude without expressing our deep appreciation to all U.N. agencies and programs, including UNRWA, UN women, UNICEF, ILO and others, and to the many international organizations that continue to provide valuable support and assistance to Palestinian women and their families, especially at this very critical time. However, until now, responses to the dire situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory tend to address only emergency needs, alleviating some of the suffering endured by women rather than long-term strategies of developmental needs of the society that can contribute significantly to the advancement and empowerment of Palestinian women.

At the same time, while we regret that the international community not only continues to fail to take concrete action to implement the mechanisms of accountability, but also continues to tolerate the denial of the most basic rights of the Palestinian people, including women and, we continue to look forward to the day that action will be undertaken to hold Israel accountable for its crimes and gross violations against Palestinian civilian population. This will bring Palestinian women closer to begin to live a normal life free from occupation, discrimination, and violence.