Mr. President,

It is my honor, on behalf of the State of Palestine, to address the General Assembly in this important debate. On this International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I reaffirm the gratitude of the Palestinian people and Government for the compelling expressions of solidarity and support received from all around the world.

We also express appreciation to the UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and its Chair, Ambassador Seck of Senegal, for presiding over this morning’s meeting and introducing the draft resolutions on the “Question of Palestine”. We also thank the Rapporteur, Ambassador Grima of Malta, for presenting the Committee’s annual report, and the other Bureau members - Afghanistan, Cuba, Indonesia, Namibia and Nicaragua - and all Members and Observers of the Committee for their principled, strong support of the just cause of Palestine. We also commend the work of the Division for Palestinian Rights and DPI Special Information Programme on Palestine over the past year.

I thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his report on the “Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine”, and wish to renew our appreciation for the support of the UN system, consistent with its abiding responsibility until the question of Palestine is resolved in all aspects, including the efforts of his Special Representative, Robert Serry of UNSCO, and the tireless efforts of all the UN agencies providing vital assistance to the Palestinian people, including UNRWA, UNDP, UNICEF, OCHA, WFP, OHCHR, WHO, UN Women, UN-HABITAT and UNFPA, along with other international organizations and partners.

The decades-long political, humanitarian, financial and moral support by the international community has helped to sustain the Palestinian people, including more than 5 million Palestine refugees, in the absence of their inalienable rights. We are grateful for this support, while again calling for exertion of all possible efforts, in line with the Charter, relevant resolutions, and international law, to redress the injustice that our people have endured for far too long.

Mr. President,

A year ago, despite the many challenges and harsh realities faced by the Palestinian people, we came before the General Assembly with greater hope. We were in the midst of yet another round of resumed peace negotiations, under the auspices of the United States of America, with the Palestinian and Israeli sides convened in direct negotiations as a result of the tireless efforts of Secretary of State John Kerry and with the support of the Arab Ministerial Follow-up Committee, Quartet and concerned States from every corner of the globe. Despite more than twenty years of negotiations and the situation’s worsening on every front, the Palestinian leadership agreed to again engage in good faith to the peace process, reaffirming its commitment to a non-violent, political approach for realizing our rights and peace.

All were in unison as to the goals: to achieve a comprehensive solution to the conflict by bringing the parties together to justly resolve all core final status issues - the questions of the
Palestine refugees, Jerusalem, settlements, borders, security, water and prisoners-and to actualize the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with a complete end to the Israeli military occupation that began in 1967 and the fulfillment of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to self-determination in their independent, contiguous, sovereign and democratic State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, thus beginning a new chapter of peace, coexistence and security between the State of Palestine and the State of Israel.

Despite the passage of time and the illegitimate attempts by Israel, the occupying Power, to create facts on the ground and repeatedly impose new conditions on the peace process, the international consensus remained firmly in support of the two-State solution, based on the parameters enshrined decades ago in UN resolutions, the Madrid principles, Arab Peace Initiative and Quartet Roadmap. Among the resounding messages: the small opportunity remaining to realize the two-State solution must be seized before it is diminished beyond the realm of viability and possibility; and Palestinian-Israeli peace would be of immeasurable benefit not only to the two peoples, but for the region and entire international community, which for too long have been burdened with the conflict and its ever-present threat to global peace and security.

It was also in this spirit that the General Assembly proclaimed 2014 to be the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People and reiterated its call on all States, the UN system, inter-governmental organizations and civil society to exert all efforts in support of the Palestinian people and the realization of their rights. Hopes rose that the necessary momentum and political will could be mobilized to finally fulfill the right of the Palestinian people to live as a free people in their homeland and for Palestine to take its rightful place among the community of nations and to start a new era in the Middle East.

Yet, that hopefulness has faded in a year that has witnessed instead the collapse of the peace process and a dramatic deterioration of conditions due to Israel’s illegal and destructive actions, reckless provocations and incitement, and flagrant intransigence and bad faith in negotiations, which have brought the conflict to a precipice and made a peaceful settlement more elusive than ever.

Mr. President,

The current situation in Occupied Palestine is perilous. In the wake of Israel’s war against the Gaza Strip - the third war in six years on this besieged part of our homeland - and due to the intensification of its illegal colonization campaign in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem and its relentless repression, provocation and collective punishment of the Palestinian people, tensions have risen to extreme levels. Violence has escalated in a highly incendiary situation that threatens to implode. The urgency of international action - to avert a complete destabilization and consequences of such an outcome and to salvage the prospects for peace - cannot be overstated.

In Gaza, the 1.8 million Palestinians - children, women and men and the majority of them Palestine refugees - remain imprisoned and isolated under the illegal Israeli blockade, now in its eighth year, which has debilitating the economy and caused widespread poverty and unemployment, food insecurity, health problems and other social ills. The Palestinian civilian population there also continues to endure untold suffering due to the devastation and humanitarian disaster deliberately inflicted by the Israeli military aggression of July and August. The shocking human and physical toll of that criminal Israeli aggression is by now well-known. However, we must recall these facts for the carnage and destruction continue to impact every aspect of life in Gaza and the deep wounds, trauma and grief of our people remain unhealed.
The Israeli occupying forces killed more than 2,180 Palestinians, the vast majority civilians, including 516 children and 283 women, and injured more than 11,000 people, among them 3,000 children, causing permanent disabilities to thousands of civilians. Children were killed on beaches as they played, in the sanctity of their homes, in UNRWA schools, in playgrounds, in the arms of their parents who could not save them from the Israeli onslaught.

1,500 children have been orphaned as mothers and fathers were also not spared, including in Israeli bombings that flattened homes atop entire families, as occurred in Shujaiyah, Khuzza’a, and Rafah, among other areas, where Israel pursued a scorched earth policy, destroying homes and massacring civilians with a vengeance, laying waste to entire communities and terrorizing the whole population. The trauma inflicted has been widely reported, with nearly 400,000 children alone in psychological distress and in need of support, as assessed by UNICEF.

More than half a million people were displaced as the Israeli aggression raged in Gaza, the largest displacement of Palestinians since 1967. Fearful families fled their homes in search of safety, including under the UN flag, with 290,000 people sheltering at UNRWA schools at the height of the conflict. But nowhere was safe in Gaza and UNRWA schools were repeatedly struck in Israeli attacks that killed and injured innocent civilians and destroyed UN facilities, in grave breach of international law and in violation of UN immunity and the inviolability of its premises.

The destruction inflicted by the occupying Power has been described by the Secretary-General as “mile after mile of wholesale destruction” that reduced many neighborhoods to rubble. As reported by the UN, more than 100,000 Palestinian homes were affected, including 20,000 homes either completely destroyed or damaged beyond habitation, rendering 110,000 people homeless. Thousands of meters of water and sanitation infrastructure were severely damaged, exacerbating the water crisis in Gaza and intensifying the risk and spread of disease, and damage to electricity networks, including the main power plant, continues to impact all sectors of life. 75 hospitals and medical facilities and more than 100 UN facilities also sustained damage in Israeli strikes, and at least 500 economic and industrial properties were destroyed, causing extensive loss of livelihoods and furthering the de-development of Gaza. Religious and historical sites were left in ruins, and over 8,000 unexploded ordnance is impeding rubble removal and reconstruction and endangering lives.

While we await the results of the investigations by the Human Rights Council’s Independent Commission of Inquiry, as well as by the Secretary-General’s Board of Inquiry, it is without doubt that gross human rights violations and breaches of international humanitarian law amounting to war crimes were committed by Israel in its July and August military aggression in Gaza. We reiterate the need for accountability for all of these Israeli crimes. Accountability is essential for ensuring justice for the victims and, in turn, justice is fundamental if genuine healing and reconciliation between the two peoples are ever to be achieved. We condemn Israel’s refusal to cooperate with the Commission of Inquiry and its constant obstruction of international efforts to establish the facts and to achieve accountability. In this regard, we believe that efforts to uphold international law, including by the convening of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to determine measures to enforce the Convention in Occupied Palestine, would help to both avert such aggressions in the future and promote accountability for what has occurred.

In the meantime, the situation in Gaza remains dire. Consolidation of the fragile ceasefire continues to be thwarted by Israel’s refusal to resume talks. Moreover, despite the Cairo International Conference on Palestine - Reconstructing Gaza and the generous pledges of international support, despite the efforts of the Palestinian National Consensus Government, and
despite the tripartite agreement brokered by UNSCO, Israel continues to hamper reconstruction with ongoing restrictions on entry of construction materials. The delays in recovery are exacerbating the misery of our people, whose anger at their plight is deepening as the shock of the aggression lifts and their plight remains unaddressed.

We urge the international community to demand that Israel, the occupying Power, fully lift this inhumane blockade and allow for the expeditious entry of construction materials to rebuild Gaza as well as unimpeded humanitarian access to alleviate the disaster deliberately inflicted on Gaza. These demands are obligations incumbent upon the occupying Power under international humanitarian law. Continued violations and delays risk grave consequences, especially as the winter months have arrived, including greater instability and desperation among the population.

Mr. President,

The situation in the rest of Occupied Palestine, including in Occupied East Jerusalem, remains critical as well. Israel’s violations and crimes, including settlement activities, military raids, killing and injury of Palestinian civilians, arrest of Palestinians, provocations, incitement and hateful rhetoric by religious extremists and government officials, and terror rampages by Israeli settlers have escalated. Tensions are at a fever pitch and the situation continues to deteriorate. While we are mindful of the urgency of making peace, including in the context of the turmoil wracking the region, and are engaging with the international community to break the deadlock and end this nearly-half century military occupation, Israel is instead expanding and entrenching its illegitimate control over our territory and ruthlessly subjugating our people, destroying the two-State solution, stoking a new cycle of deadly violence, and dragging us farther away from the goal of peace.

Jerusalem - holy to the three monotheistic religions and the key to peace - is at this moment a painful reflection of the occupation’s entrenchment and Israel’s blatant rejection of peace. Israel’s unlawful attempts to change the demography, character, identity and status of Occupied East Jerusalem and its provocations and incitement, particularly vis-à-vis Al-Haram Al-Sharif, are inflaming this volatile situation and aggravating religious sensitivities, instigating a dangerous religious conflict that must be averted. Repeated incursions by settlers, extremists and occupying forces at Al-Haram Al-Sharif, as well as ongoing excavations and tunneling, threaten the integrity, foundations and sanctity of Holy Sites. Stringent restrictions on access to the City, affecting both Palestinian Muslims and Christians, severely impede freedom of worship and movement and the closure of Palestinian institutions in the City continues.

Here, we reiterate that Al-Quds is the heart of Palestine; it has been the religious, political, social, economic and cultural center of the Palestinian people for centuries and will remain so. As enshrined in General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, the international consensus on the status of Jerusalem is firm, including non-recognition of Israeli claims to sovereignty over East Jerusalem and consensus that East Jerusalem is occupied territory and remains an integral part of the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel since 1967. All Israeli measures - including extension of the so-called “basic law” and attempts to change the status quo at the Holy Sites — that are aimed at altering the City’s status are null and void and must be rescinded forthwith.

Mr. President,

The international consensus on the illegality of Israel’s settlements in Palestine is also firm. Yet, Israel persists with its colonization campaign in contempt of UN resolutions and international
law and of the demands for a complete cessation of all settlement activities, including in East Jerusalem. The Israeli Government has even gone so far as to deride the international community with claims that there is no occupation and that they will never stop “building” in our land.

In grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention, plans for the construction of thousands of settlement units have been declared and advanced by the occupying Power in the past year, and thousands more acres of Palestinian land have been seized. Every day we are witness to the construction of Israeli settlements and the Apartheid Wall, the expropriation of Palestinian land under varying schemes and military orders, the seizure of homes, including by extremist settlers, as well as the savage demolition of homes, in flagrant acts of colonization as well as reprisal against Palestinian civilians. All of these illegal actions undermine the territorial contiguity and integrity of our State and viability of the two-State solution based on the 1967 borders, taking us closer and closer to a one-State reality, with all of the implications in this regard.

Such actions also continue to cause the forced displacement of Palestinian civilians, constituting yet another grave breach. The occupying Power is now threatening thousands of Palestine refugee Bedouins with massive forced transfer from their homes, communities and pastoral way of life, all to facilitate its unlawful annexation aims. The stability, security and presence of Palestinian families in East Jerusalem is also in constant jeopardy as they continue to suffer home demolitions and revocation of their residency rights, in addition to raging violence, discrimination and virulent racism against them by Israeli extremists, who persist in attacks against Palestinians, including killing, assaults and kidnapping attempts on children, as well as attacks against Muslim and Christian holy sites, that have seriously destabilized the City.

Israel also continues daily military raids, violently attacking, killing and injuring Palestinian civilians and ransacking and destroying Palestinian homes and properties; severe restrictions on movement continue in collective punishment of the entire population; and occupying forces continue to protect and support extremist settlers committing acts of violence and terror against Palestinian civilians with impunity. These raids have also entailed Israel’s repression of any opposition to the occupation and the continued arrest and detention of Palestinians, bringing the total number of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel to more than 6,000 people, including children as young as 12 years old, women, men and parliamentarians, who are enduring a horrific abuse, including all forms of cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment and torture, unsanitary conditions of captivity, and other violations of their most basic human rights.

We condemn all of these illegal Israeli actions, and call on the international community to firmly condemn these violations and demand their immediate end. The situation - as all have recognized - is totally unsustainable, and, if left without remedy, will not remain stagnant, but will spiral out of control with grave consequences. Responsible international action to address this long-festering conflict and bring the parties back from the precipice is a matter of utmost urgency.

Mr. President,

The crisis the Palestinian people face has reached existential proportions. Under occupation and in the Diaspora - where regional instability, foremost the conflict in Syria and its spillover into Lebanon and Jordan, has severely impacted the Palestine refugee community - our people are suffering immense and growing hardships, all stemming from the grave injustice done to them in Al-Nakba of 1948 and thereafter. Their repeated displacement and dispossession, generation after generation, and the continued denial of their inalienable rights is an injustice that pains not only our
people and the Middle East region, but the international community as a whole, for which this conflict remains a source of shame and a threat to global peace and security.

The international community, foremost the Security Council, must uphold its established positions and must send a clear message to Israel, the occupying Power, that it will no longer tolerate the obstruction of a peaceful settlement. The parameters of a solution have long been known and supported by the international community based on international law and principles of justice.

The Security Council must implement its resolutions and fulfill its responsibilities to contribute to bringing an end to this illegal situation, recognizing its broad and dangerous political, religious and security dimensions. This includes responsible and timely action on the initiative we have brought before the Security Council for setting a timeframe to end the occupation and achieve a comprehensive and just solution of all core issues that fulfills the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, including to independence in their State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and security on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, and ensures a just solution for the Palestine refugee question on the basis of resolution 194.

Defusing the situation and creating a credible political horizon must be a priority. Israel must be compelled to comply with the law and commit to the path of peace and negotiate in good faith. Negotiations will never succeed in the absence of this. If Israel remains intransigent, it must be held accountable, and alternative political, legal and non-violent methods must be immediately considered to ensure Israel’s compliance and provide protection to the Palestinian people for as long as this belligerent occupation persists, for it is clear that past methods and efforts have failed to uphold the law, uphold human rights, and secure the peace and justice we have long sought.

Mr. President,

The value of hope for human perseverance cannot be quantified. At the same time, the consequences of the loss of hope are unimaginable. We appeal to the international community to not let the Palestinian people lose hope. As stated before this august Assembly, forty years ago this month, by the late President Yasser Arafat: “Do not let the olive branch fall from our hands”.

For decades, our people have been sustained by a deep conviction in international law and the international community’s pledges to achieve a just resolution of their plight. We thus reiterate our appeals to the international community today. We are committed to peace, as affirmed by President Abbas from this rostrum and affirmed in the program of the Palestinian National Consensus Government, and we call on the General Assembly, the Security Council and all Member States to rise to their responsibilities and commitments and to help us stop the bloodshed and suffering.

After nearly seven decades, it is time to finally bring an end to this tragic conflict and to allow the Palestinian people to know justice, to know peace, to know security, to know human dignity, and to finally know freedom, like all other peoples on this planet.

I thank you, Mr. President.