Mr. Chairman,

In recent years, progressive strides have been made in advancing children’s rights and increasing children’s protection through laws, partnerships, programs, and the cooperation of the international community of this common goal. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is the primary international instrument for the protection and promotion of children’s rights outlining the necessities for the full and harmonious development of children, all while ensuring their safety and well-being. Additionally, international law, and specifically humanitarian law and human rights law, govern the protection and promote the rights of children around the world. These international legal tools apply to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem; unfortunately, they are being blatantly violated by Israel, the occupying Power.

Tragically, generation after generation of Palestinian children has grown up under a brutal military occupation that has continued for more than four decades, which has robbed them of their most basic and inalienable rights with far-reaching negative consequences on their development and their society. Rather than the safe and secure childhoods intended by the aforementioned conventions, they have instead been exposed to systematic human rights violations and even war crimes. Indeed, the existence of this cruel and unjust occupation negatively impacts all aspects of life for Palestinian children. The feelings of safety and security are nonexistent, and the ability to imagine a life without occupation to many seems impossible. Undoubtedly, Palestinian children are suffering from this ongoing tragedy and will continue to suffer if the international community continues to fail to remedy it.

Mr. Chairman,

Israel has been a party to the CRC since 1991 and as the occupying Power, it is bound to adhere to its legal obligations throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. However, Palestinian children are being deprived of the rights guaranteed to them via the CRC. Rather than having their rights protected and promoted, they are suffering from obstructions of access to proper health care and education and widespread insecurity in addition to the racism, humiliation and discrimination inflicted daily by Israeli settlers and occupying forces. We call on the international community to ensure and to enforce the implementation of these rules in order to protect and promote the rights of Palestinian children so they too, like other children in the world, can live in peace and freedom with the stability and prosperity they deserve.

In the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the Palestinian people face a myriad of challenges on a daily basis, severely affecting the rights of their children. These challenges include, but are not limited to, hundreds of Israeli checkpoints, the devastation caused by the illegal Wall built in the
Occupied Palestinian Territory, and rampant violence by extremist Israeli settlers. Take, for example, the right to education. For a Palestinian child, simply walking to school can be an impossible challenge because of the obstacles in their way. First, the Wall, which was illegally built, divides villages and properties and often makes schools almost impossible to reach. At checkpoints, children are intimidated and humiliated by armed occupying forces that harass them and at times physically harm them. When one considers all of the extreme difficulties of a life under occupation, it is a triumph that any Palestinian child in the Occupied Palestinian Territory has received an education at all. Another example is the right to psychological safety and peace. It is denied to Palestinian children as they suffer extreme psychological pressures and are subject to physical torture, mental intimidation and repeated humiliation. It is commonplace for children to witness and experience Israeli occupying force incursions into Palestinian cities and the demolition and destruction of family and/or neighbors’ homes causing their displacement. Some children are even used by Israel as human shields during their illegitimate intrusions, when our children are forced to stand in front of tanks to discourage the throwing of stones or to walk into buildings first before troops. In fact, between January 2010 and March 2013, reports have documented fourteen cases in which the occupying Power has used Palestinian children as human shields. The psychological impact these interactions have on Palestinian children is indescribable. Additionally, there has also been an exorbitant amount of settler violence directed at Palestinian children who are shot, beaten, gassed and pelted with stones all in clear view of Israeli occupying forces. Our children are suffering at the hands of these terrorizing extremists who continue to not be held accountable. Thus, we call on the international community to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to bring the perpetrators of these crimes to justice.

Now turning to the situation in the occupied Gaza Strip, the reality on the ground is intolerable and inhumane. It is the collective punishment of the entire population, an open-air prison for 1.7 million people. Palestinian children are suffering from the devastating impact of the blockade, which has devastated all aspects of their lives and has caused severe physical and psychological problems, resulting in horrific living conditions and a humanitarian crisis. There is no clean water, no sanitation, there is constant darkness from a lack of electricity, unemployment has skyrocketed and exposure to violence is a common occurrence. Moreover, the rights to food, education and access to health care are being severely obstructed and violated.

Mr. Chairman,

I would like to draw your attention to the situation of Palestinian children who continue to be illegally held and mistreated in Israeli detention centers and prisons. In a report by UNICEF in February of this year, it concluded that Israel is in direct violation of the provisions of the CRC as well as the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Traumatizing our children, the occupying Power, enters Palestinian villages and towns in the middle of the dark night, forcibly entering Palestinian homes and blindfolding and dragging them to its illegal detention centers. They are interrogated and placed in adult detention facilities where they typically endure physical and psychological abuse such as verbal abuse and sleep deprivation and are forced to sign confessions in a language they do not understand. Left feeling alone and terrified--these horrific experiences will undoubtedly leave permanent scars on our children for the rest of their lives. As of 1 September 2013, 180 Palestinian children remained captive in Israeli detention centers and thousands of children have experienced this traumatic and illegal behavior during Israel’s now 46-year military occupation. We condemn the detaining and imprisoning of Palestinian children by Israel, the occupying Power, and demand the cessation of this illegal practice along with all of its policies and practices of mistreatment and abuse.

In the conclusion of UNICEF’s report referenced above, it was stated that the “ill-treatment of Palestinian children in the Israeli military detention system appears to be widespread, systematic and institutionalized.” The excessive force and ill-treatment exerted over Palestinian children detained by Israel is in direct violation of international law, specifically article 37 of the CRC as “no child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment.” There is no exception for security. We call upon the international community to hold Israel accountable for their violations of the
aforementioned provisions of international law and exert pressure so as to compel Israel to scrupulously adhere to its obligations under the CRC and other relevant provisions of international law applicable to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.

Mr. Chairman,

Palestinian children, like all children all of over the world, desire and deserve peace and freedom and the opportunity to exercise their inalienable human rights. They should have the right to dream- dream of a life that is not marked with violence, tragedy and suffering. Ending Israel’s occupation is the first step to ensure this as well as putting an end to the culture of impunity that Israel has been accustomed to for 46 years of occupation. It is essential to protect Palestinian children, redress the injustices done to them and provide them with the tools to contribute to the advancement of their own viable and independent State so that Palestinian children can develop and thrive to their fullest. While we are grateful for the international community along with UN agencies for all efforts exerted thus far to ameliorate many hardships faced by Palestinian children, we continue to call for even more robust assistance and effort in order to guarantee our children all the rights accorded to them.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman