Statement by Mr. Rabii AlHattouli, First Counsellor, Permanent Observer Mission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations, before the Economic and Financial Committee (Second Committee) on Item 61: "Permanent sovereignty of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan over their natural resources," 68th session of the UN General Assembly, New York, 30 October 2013:

(Please check against delivery)

Mr. Chair,

At the outset, I would like to extend, on behalf of the State of Palestine, our sincere congratulations to you on your assumption of the Chair of this Committee, as well as to the distinguished members of the Bureau. We have full confidence in your ability to lead the work of this Committee efficiently and effectively. I would also like to express our appreciation to H.E Permanent Representative of Guyana for his skilled leadership of the Committee during the past year. We also express our appreciation to the members of the Bureau for their dedication and sincerity in fulfilling their duties to the fullest. Allow me also to thank Ms. Rima Khalaf, Executive Secretary of ESCWA for her presentation of the report of the Secretary-General, contained in document (A/68/77-E/2013/13), prepared by ESCWA, entitled: Economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan.

Mr. Chair,

Through this item, your esteemed Committee is considering an issue of extreme importance to the Palestinian people, that is their sovereignty over their natural resources, which is considered one of their inalienable rights. Achieving sovereignty, which has been resolved to the benefit of all peoples over their lands, remains one of the main aspirations of the Palestinian people living under the only existing racist foreign occupation of our time. Forty six years of oppression and violations of all human rights mastered by Israel, the occupying Power, in plundering and exploiting our national resources have deprived an entire people—the Palestinian people—from their natural resources forcing them to live on minimal capabilities required for a decent life.

Mr. Chair,

The report presented to you today briefly reflects the cruel reality and the ongoing injustice from which the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, has been suffering for more than 46 years, while the international community stands helpless in front of the occupying Power, which considers itself above the law and continues its violations of international law and the
United Nations Charter and resolutions without deterrence, by continuing to target Palestinian civilians by killings, arbitrary detention of civilians, including children, confiscation of land, destruction of property, including farms and water wells, demolition of homes, and imposition of severe restrictions on the movement of persons and goods, which undermine the Palestinian economy as a whole.

These Israeli policies and practices are not random but are part of a systematic, deliberate policy undertaken to ensure control over the land and natural resources after the forced displacement of the Palestinian population from their towns and villages. We are witnessing an intensification of these policies and practices accompanied by confiscation of land to build illegal settlements and the apartheid annexation wall, particularly in the occupied City of Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley, which constitute the largest agricultural area in Palestine.

Mr. Chair,

Agriculture is the most important pillar of the economy in the State of Palestine, and it is one of the pillars of food security in the Palestinian society, most notably the olive cultivation upon which the majority of Palestinian farmers depend, and it is part of the history and culture of the Palestinian society. Now this time is the season for the olive harvest and for olive oil extraction, whose revenues could reach tens of millions of dollars. But in this particular season, barbaric and brutal Israeli attacks are systematically escalating by the Israeli occupying forces and by gangs of extremist settlers against Palestinian farmers, uprooting trees, stealing crops and dumping waste water in the agricultural lands, causing heavy losses, in addition to environmental pollution.

The agricultural sector represents the cornerstone of the survival and development of the Palestinian economy, however, this sector is deprived of the ability to play its strategic role due to the Israeli practices that I have mentioned, in addition to the expropriation of land and prevention of Palestinian farmers from accessing agricultural areas and water resources, as well as domestic and foreign markets to sell their products and to buy means of production. The Palestinian economy is deprived of access to 40 per cent of the area of the West Bank and of 82 per cent of its groundwater.

In this regard, we recall that Israel, the occupying Power, currently exploits more than 90 per cent of Palestinian water resources for exclusive Israeli use, including for use in Israeli settlements, and less than 10 per cent is allocated for Palestinian use. As a result, the average water consumption in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is 70 liters only per person per day, which is below the minimum level of 100 liters per person per day as recommended by the World Health Organization, and is much less than the average 300 liters per person per day in Israel.

Mr. Chair,

Israel, the occupying Power, continues its illegal and inhumane blockade of the Gaza Strip, which obstructs imports and exports and prevents the free movement of persons. Israel continues to deny Palestinian farmers access to more than 35 % of the area of the Gaza Strip. It also continues to prevent Palestinian fishermen from accessing...
more than 85% of the Palestinian fishing waters, which has led to worsening living conditions in the Strip, where more than 44% of its population suffers from food insecurity. In addition, the Israeli blockade continues to obstruct the implementation of the necessary water projects leading to the creation of a catastrophic aqueous reality and the worsening of the humanitarian crisis in the Strip.

Mr. Chair,

This esteemed Committee should know that the Palestinian lands confiscated by Israel, the occupying Power, in order to build its illegal settlements and the apartheid annexation wall, with a length of 732 km, of which 87% is located in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, are not randomly chosen. Rather they are sites of which Israeli control, would ensure its control over vast natural resources, specifically groundwater, and result in the fragmentation of the Palestinian State and undermining its viability.

These Israeli practices and policies constitute a flagrant violation of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. The entire international community considers that the continuing violations, specifically settlement activities, are the main obstacle to reaching a just and comprehensive peace based on the two-State solution—Palestine and Israel. Therefore, the international community must assume its responsibilities by taking effective, practical measures for the application of international law and compel Israel, the occupying Power, to respect the international will and ultimately cease its attacks and violations towards ending this colonial occupation.

In this context, the State of Palestine welcomes the decisions taken by some countries that began to act nationally to convey serious messages to the occupying Power, for example by imposing distinct labels on the import of products manufactured in illegal Israeli settlements which are built in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. It is an important step to allow the consumer an opportunity not to buy these products and therefore not to support the Israeli violations of international law, including the exploitation of Palestinian land and natural resources. In this regard, the State of Palestine welcomes the European Union’s adoption of guidelines with regard to Israeli entities and their activities in the territories occupied by Israel since 1967. We affirm that these measures represent a step in the right direction and must be strengthened and further developed.

Mr. Chair,

There will be no sound economy or sustainable development in the State of Palestine without the achievement of freedom and sovereignty, including over the natural resources of our land, which constitute the backbone of our economy and are essential for realizing our right to development. Freedom and sovereignty will be achieved by ending the Israeli occupation, and ending this occupation requires practical decisions and measures from all of you to prove to Israel, the occupying Power, that the continuation of its aggression and its violations of international law will not be without a price.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.