GENERAL ASSEMBLY

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Statement by
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Strengthening of the United Nations system

United Nations, New York
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Mr. President,

Once again, this Assembly has convened to debate a crucially important matter. Member states will be asked to make a decision that will reflect how this institution will be perceived.

No, I am not referring to the Palestinian flag. The lives of Israelis and Palestinians will remain the same whether or not a Palestinian flag flies in New York. I am speaking of a much more important decision.

The real question we face is not whether the Palestinians will raise a flag, but whether the UN will raise a white flag – and surrender the principles of this institution.

Next month, I will complete more than four years as Israel’s Permanent Representative to the UN. During my time here, I have met with diplomats from all around the world, I have participated in many meetings of the General Assembly and the Security Council, and I have even had the honor to preside over this very Assembly.

In my four years, I have seen hypocrisy, I have seen duplicity, and I have seen a triple standard: One for democracies, one for dictatorships, and a special standard designed only for Israel. I thought I had seen everything. But I have to admit, this time, the Palestinians managed to take cynicism to a whole new level.

The goal of this resolution is a photo op. The Palestinians want to bring together world dignitaries and the media to gather around and watch as Mahmoud Abbas raises a flag. They plan to use the prestige of the UN as a backdrop for this charade.

Surprise, surprise, they did all this in contravention of all the established rules and procedures of the United Nations.

During every session of the Assembly, hundreds of resolutions are passed, and hundreds of decisions are taken. From the most significant, to the merely procedural. Yet, I can’t remember one time – not a single one – where member states were not given the opportunity for discussion, debate, and reflection.

You, the delegates in this room, know better than anyone else how exhausting, cumbersome, and frustrating this process can sometimes be.

Do we always enjoy this process? Probably not.

Yet, we do it because we all understand that this deliberative and collaborative process represents the ideals that this institution was supposed to stand for: Democracy, transparency, and open communication.

We do it because, although we have very real differences, we all value the process and have respect for the countries represented here; their points of view and beliefs.
We all understand that this is the only way that this institution can function.

However, in my time here, I have learned that there is one delegation that all those rules and procedures don’t apply to. Again and again, the Palestinians seem to be able to do whatever they want, and are free to act with impunity. In short, they have learned that the more they say no, the more the international community says yes to their every whim and caprice.

So it is no surprise that the Palestinians show no regard for the values of this institution, and that they cynically manipulate the UN to score political points. Time and again, the Palestinians use and abuse the UN. The sad part is, that you allow them to get away with it.

Consider the events of the last two weeks. As the summer began to wind down, and this session was drawing to a close, the Palestinians surprised member states with a resolution proposing to change a rule which has been in existence since the UN was founded.

Did they circulate a zero draft of the resolution? Perhaps they just forgot.

Did they invite member states to any informal consultation? I guess they couldn’t be bothered.

Did they negotiate the language of the resolution with member states? Of course not. They knew that most member states would sign on the dotted line no matter what it said.

As a matter of fact, the Palestinian delegation simply announced their plan, promoted it in a dishonest and manipulative manner, and expected member states to fall in line behind them.

How ironic that this resolution was considered under the agenda item ‘Strengthening of the UN System’.

If this behavior was not bad enough, the story does not end there. Not only did the Palestinians blatantly disregard UN practices, they deliberately deceived member states.

When they introduced their initiative, the Palestinians informed member states that the Vatican was a partner in their plan. Apparently, the Vatican didn’t get the memo.

This blatant lie was exposed to all by the media. As a matter of fact, the Vatican declared that they are not a partner to this initiative, they didn’t ask for it, and they have no aspiration to raise their flag at the UN.

The Palestinians were caught red-handed violating every principle of honesty and integrity we hold dear.
Yet, despite this brazen deception, which every delegation in this chamber knows of, many of you still voted to adopt this resolution.

Voting yes on this resolution means that when it comes to the Palestinians, the standard rules no longer apply. More important than whether you permit the Palestinians to fly a flag is whether you permit them to undermine the rules and procedures, and, ultimately, the credibility of this institution.

Mr. President,

Let no one in this hall, or around the world, be fooled by the outcome of today’s vote.

This Assembly would vote to declare that the earth is flat if the Palestinians proposed it. By the way, the EU would probably try to reach a consensus to abstain on the vote, but some EU countries would consider it a matter of principle to declare that the world is, indeed, flat – if this is how the Palestinians see it.

Speaking of consensus, apparently the EU’s principle of maintaining a holy consensus cannot withstand Palestinian pressure. Yet, they stand firm when their consensus is against Israel.

However, no vote can turn an empty symbolic gesture into a state. The international community must make it clear to the Palestinians that the only way to achieve statehood is through direct negotiations. As long as the Palestinians believe they can achieve their political goals without making concessions, they will continue to avoid taking the difficult decisions needed for peace.

Maybe the international community should recommend that the Palestinians download the Waze GPS app so they can find their way to the negotiating table. Then, they will be able to discover that the distance from Ramallah to Jerusalem is less than ten miles. There is no need to fly halfway around the world to New York in order to make peace.

Unfortunately, instead of trying to guide the Palestinians down the path to peace, the international community is helping them to ride right off the tracks.

We don’t need support groups, or pre-conditions that only complicate the situation. Too many are addicted to the process. This is not a meeting of Diplomats Anonymous.

What we do need is for the international community to tell the Palestinians to go back to the negotiating table:

Enough with empty symbols

Enough with political showmanship

Enough with hijacking the UN agenda

Stop stalling, and start negotiating.

Palestinians and Israelis need real steps to peace, not empty gestures. The vote today may serve the interests of Palestinians leaders, but it will not help the Palestinian people.
Mr. President,

This whole situation would be different if the flag they want to raise represented democratic values which are all too rare in the region. Those who support raising this flag, ask yourself:

Is it a flag of good governance?

Is this a flag of gender equality?

Is it a flag of free elections, so desperately needed in a place where the president is in his eleventh year of a five year term?

If the international community does not demand that the Palestinians enact these basic rights and freedoms, the flag they raise will be a flag of disappointment rather than hope, and of failure rather than progress.

Mr. President,

The people of Israel seek peace with our neighbors. Just this morning, Prime Minister Netanyahu met with the British Prime Minister David Cameron in London, and declared once again that he is ready to resume direct negotiations with the Palestinians without preconditions.

We all remember the historic images of Prime Minister Begin and President Sadat, and of Prime Minister Rabin and King Hussein, coming together in peace. These leaders proved to us that negotiations can be fruitful, that peace is possible, and that we can create a new reality for the people of the region.

I look forward to seeing the image of an Israeli Prime Minster and a Palestinian leader standing side by side, raising the flags of our two peoples, living together in peace. That will be a photo truly worth taking.