

**TEXT OF STATEMENT DELIVERED TO THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL BY MR  
LAKHDAR BRAHIMI, MEMBER OF THE ELDERS  
TUESDAY 20 JUNE 2017**

Mr. President,  
Distinguished Members of the Security Council,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am deeply grateful to you, Mr. President, for this kind invitation. I am greatly honored to be back in this Chamber, this time as a member of The Elders.

Our founder, Nelson Mandela was passionate about Palestine. He spoke about it repeatedly, always forcefully. He discussed his views with Jewish leaders in South Africa and the United States. And he thought he had convinced some of them that his support for the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and freedom was morally and politically right. When he launched The Elders, he gave our group three priorities: Palestine was one of them. In response, The Elders have visited Palestine and Israel four times over the past eight years. Neither Prime Minister Netanyahu nor any member of his Government ever agreed to meet them.

We fully share Mandela's view that the Palestinians should have their state; that the two states of Israel and Palestine should live side-by-side in peace; and that security should be ensured to all states in the region. The sad reality however is that 50 years after the start of Israel's occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, little of consequence has been done to bring about a viable Palestinian state on those territories.

I am sure that many distinguished members of this Council read Nathan Thrall's article in the New York Times' edition of 2nd June. Of the ongoing occupation, Thrall says - and I quote - this *"resilient and eminently sustainable arrangement [the occupation] has stood on three pillars: American backing, Palestinian weakness and Israeli indifference. Together, these three insure that for the Israeli*

*Government, continuing its occupation is far less costly than the concessions required to end it”.*

A fourth pillar sustaining this situation is implied in the article, I believe, and that is the near total paralysis of the United Nations Security Council.

Which of these four pillars might change to break the deadlock? Apparently not American unconditional support to Israel. Thrall says, and I quote again: *“Americans are told that Israel will have to choose, and very soon, to give Palestinians either citizenship or independence, and choose to either remain a democracy or become an Apartheid state. Yet, none of these groups calls on the US to force this supposed imminent choice, no matter how many times Israel demonstrates that it prefers a different, far easier option: continued occupation.”*

Since 1967, the Palestinian people have endured grave acts of oppression, violence and collective punishment. During this time, Israel has built approximately 125 settlements and more than 100 so-called “outposts” on occupied Palestinian land, all in violation of international law. They have placed roughly 650,000 illegal settlers in Palestine: 350,000 in the West Bank and 300,000 in East Jerusalem. They have imprisoned 800,000 Palestinians and destroyed 48,000 homes. They have revoked the residence permits of 250,000 Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza and more than 14,000 in East Jerusalem. The West Bank is fragmented by the separation Wall and a multitude of other Israeli imposed controls which affect Palestinian dignity and prevent the people from going about their normal business unhindered.

Indeed Mr. President, the Palestinian population is extremely vulnerable and desperately needs protection from the international community. That protection should be provided for under international law, notably the Fourth Geneva Convention. Regrettably, though, the Geneva Conventions are today talked about more in their breach than in their observance in the Palestinian Territories.

I wish to draw this distinguished Council’s attention in particular today to the dire situation in the Gaza Strip. Here, another dismal landmark - the tenth anniversary of the imposition of a blockade which amounts to collective punishment of all the 1.7 million people of Gaza - is being marked.

I participated in only one of The Elders’ visits to the region - to Gaza in 2010. The misery in that unhappy, overcrowded strip of land is difficult to describe – and more difficult to endure. A young woman student told us: “Israel put us in a

concentration camp. Those who call themselves our leaders are taking away the air we breathe". Only through the tireless relief work of UNRWA, WFP and other UN agencies, as well as persistent interventions by the Secretary General's Special Envoy for the Middle Peace Process, are Gazans able to survive. But what kind of life is it for them: a densely crowded environment, half-destroyed cities, no work, undrinkable water, electricity available for only a few hours a day, where it is available at all, and basic humanity robbed by constant humiliation and the need to depend for survival on the charity of others?

To add insult to injury, the irresponsible failure of the Palestinian leaders - especially those of Fatah and Hamas - to reconcile and unite is a huge hindrance both to the daily life of the people and to the struggle of civil society, prisoners and others to mobilize national, regional and international support for the fight against occupation.

Despite the personal commitment and commendable efforts of Jim Wolfensohn, the Quartet achieved little before the appointment of Tony Blair. Subsequently, the Quartet was totally absent. As you know, Mr. President, many today think that the Quartet has outlived its usefulness.

Nevertheless, there is a crying, urgent need for the Security Council to play an active role. The Council may for example wish to first organize a visit of all its members to Israel and Palestine. Remarkably, considering the longevity of this issue on the Council's agenda, and the frequency of visits made to other conflict zones, a field visit has not taken place for many decades. On this trip members should have an opportunity to talk to all parties, but above all to civil society representatives in Israel and Palestine. They could then see for themselves the harm done to the Palestinian people, what occupation has done to the psychological and moral fibre of the men, women and children of both the occupying power and the occupied people.

In this connection, I wish to put on record today The Elders' appreciation and admiration of the work of the peace movement in Israel, its brave human rights defenders such as B'Tselem, Breaking the Silence and the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, and outstanding writers such as Gideon Levy and Uri Avnery.

If they do make this visit, members of the Council would see how urgent it is to enforce the many binding resolutions the Council has passed since the June 1967 War, starting with resolutions 242 and 338 and including the most recent, UNSCR

2334, which focused on the illegality of settlement building. In this connection, is there any need to remind this Council that resolution 2334 is already being flouted? The recent Israeli Government decision to legalize so-called “outposts” in the West Bank demonstrates, once more, its disregard for international law and the Council’s decisions.

Mr. President,

The not-so-discreet contacts of the Israeli Government with some countries in the region cannot be a substitute for peace with the Palestinians. Only a genuine, just solution to the Palestinian problem will open the way to lasting peace and cooperation between Israel and all its neighbours.

The Arab Peace Initiative provides a sound basis for that to happen. Issued at the Arab Summit in Beirut in 2002, this initiative was ignored by the Israeli Government. All these years later, it is still on the table. Unanimously, Arab countries called on Israel and all Israelis - and I quote - *“to accept this initiative in order to safeguard the prospects for peace and stop further shedding of blood, enabling the Arab countries and Israel to live in peace and good neighborliness and provide future generations with security, stability and prosperity”*.

Israeli politicians of the left and of the right, the media and civil society routinely speak of the danger of Apartheid. Some warn that their country may become an apartheid state; others denounce practices that are already creating an apartheid system. Be that as it may, Palestinians have rights; they have individual rights like all human beings and they have collective rights like any other people in the world. And they have the right to fight for their rights with all the legitimate means available to them.

Mr President,

The Charter of the United Nations, international law and international humanitarian law as well as all norms of international solidarity call for effective support to be given to the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people against occupation and oppression. Such support will, in fact help liberate both Palestine and Israel.

Thank you.