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115 EAST 65TH ST.
NEW YORK NY 10021

TEL 212 288 8500
FAX 212 517 2377



Statement by Ms. Nadya Rasheed, Counsellor, before the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, Fifty-fourth Session, 8 March 2010: (Please Check Against Delivery)

My delegation is honored to address this Commission and would like to begin by congratulating you, Mr. Chair, and the other members of the Bureau on your election; we pledge our full support and cooperation.

Mr. Chairman,

Since the convening of the Beijing Conference, the world has witnessed many significant achievements in the advancement and empowerment of women. Yet fifteen years later, we still face many of the same challenges and constraints that were prevalent then along with new challenges that have arisen that continue to hinder the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration. Therefore, we also echo the calls before this Commission that the international community renews the pledges made in the Beijing Declaration to ensure its full and speedy implementation.

Before proceeding with our statement, my delegation would like to take this opportunity to extend our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report concerning the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women (E/CN.6/2010/4). My delegation considers this report to be very important, especially given the continued perpetration of serious human rights violations by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian civilian population, including Palestinian women, and the consequent deterioration of their socio-economic conditions on the ground. However, having said that, we regret having to put on record our deep concern regarding the troubling trend in the reports of the Secretary-General to the CSW of distorting the context of the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. In this regard, there has been a tendency in both previous sessions and the current session, to portray the prevailing situation as more of a conflict between two equal sides – the Israeli and Palestinian – rather than actually one of a foreign military occupation, wherein there is an occupying Power, bound by clear obligations under international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law, and an occupied people, whose most basic and inalienable human rights are being systematically, deliberately and gravely violated and who are entitled to protection under international law. We have sent a letter to the Secretary-General, which is now an official document of this session (E/CN.6/2010/10), highlighting our specific concerns in this regard.

We wish to stress that any examination of the situation and developments in this regard must be considered within the overall context of the occupation, which unquestionably impacts all aspects of the situation on the ground and of the humanitarian and socio-economic conditions of the Palestinian population under occupation and remains the root cause of this conflict. We believe it is imperative that this trend of distorting and omitting the context of the situation on the ground in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, in reports by the United Nations, including those of the Secretary-General, must be rectified in future reports.

Mr. Chairman,

While many of the world's women continue to advance in a number of fields, Palestinian women and their families are sadly still living under a brutal military occupation that has gravely impeded the normal functioning of society and the ability of its members to develop, advance and progress. Undoubtedly, the toll of Israel's 43-year-old occupation of the Palestinian Territory on Palestinian women and their families has

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been vast. It has surely placed a huge burden on women, who struggle daily to ensure the protection and well-being of their families while providing their children with a nurturing, secure environment in which to live and grow. Indeed, the formidable and daunting challenges posed by occupation and all of the illegal and brutal policies of the occupying Power make the above an all too difficult, if not impossible, task to realize.

Take a moment to imagine yourself in a day in the life of a Palestinian woman. A life in which she lives in constant terror, fearing for not only her own safety but that of her loved ones, as fighter planes and tanks shell and bomb civilian areas, bringing more death, destruction and trauma to her people and community. A life in which she has been displaced and made homeless because her home- the symbol of safety for her and her family- and all of her life's belongings are callously demolished to make room for another illegal Israeli settlement built on her land. A life in which she must stand for hours at one of the racist, humiliating checkpoints, waiting for a young Israeli occupying force to decide whether or not to allow her to pass through one of the more than 600 checkpoints as she tries to accomplish the simple task of going food shopping or going to an appointment at the doctor, or even for something more urgent such as the delivery of a newborn. Or a life in which she must watch her children wither from malnutrition, anemia and disease and her family sink deeper into poverty, becoming totally dependent on food aid because of the deliberate and systematic practices and policies of the occupying Power.

Mr. Chairman, the life of a Palestinian women is by no means ordinary and the mere fact that this occupation, with all of its illegal manifestations, has been allowed to continue and even intensify over the past four decades can only be interpreted as a failure by the international community to uphold its own obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law, to ensure that the occupying Power halt its violations against an occupied and unprotected civilian population. After forty plus years, it is not shocking that every single Palestinian, young and old, women or man, child or elderly, continues to ask the international community "When will the time come for the world to guarantee that their human rights, including their right to live in freedom, security and dignity be fulfilled?"

Mr. Chairman,

The situation in the Gaza Strip is untenable, unacceptable and wholly deplorable and Palestinian women and their children have undoubtedly borne the brunt of Israel's cruel and inhumane policies against the civilian population there. For more than two years, Israel, the occupying Power, has collectively punished, imprisoned and deprived more than 1.5 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip of their basic rights. Despite repeated international appeals to end such unlawful measures, the Israeli blockade continues to be imposed as the occupying Power has no fear of being held accountable for its crimes. Not sufficing with this brutal blockade, Israel launched a brutal war in December 2008, against this besieged and defenseless civilian population. Over the course of three weeks, the Israeli occupying forces caused thousands of deaths and injuries among the civilian population, including children and women, and wantonly destroyed homes, vital civilian infrastructure, public institutions, economic, industrial and agricultural properties and UN facilities. The crimes of the occupying Power must be punished, and perpetrators of these crimes must be held accountable.

Mr. Chairman,

For more than four decades, Palestinian women, children and their families have dreamt of, and await the day, when peace in their own state of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, is realized. But, until then, they continue to look to the international community and to international law as the guarantors of the freedom and peace to which they aspire. For peace to be achieved, Israel, the occupying Power, must end its occupation and cease all of its illegal policies and practices, which continue unabated, and truly embark on the path to peace in both action and deed. We thus call on the international community to exert all efforts to ensure compliance by Israel, with all its obligations under international law, in order to truly promote peace. Only then can Palestinian women truly develop and experience the ideals the international community seeks to advance with instruments such as the Beijing Declaration we are commemorating this session. I thank you, Mr. Chairman.