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**Statement by Ms. Nadya Rasheed, Counsellor, Agenda Item 56: Advancement of Women to the Third Committee, 63<sup>rd</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly (15 October 2008)**

At the outset, allow me to convey my delegation's congratulations to you and your country upon your election as Chairman of the Third Committee. We extend our best wishes to the Bureau as well, and express our confidence that under your able stewardship the Committee will successfully conclude its important work.

I also wish to state that Palestine aligns itself with the statement delivered by the G77 and China on the important issue of the advancement of women.

Mr. Chairman,

While significant progress has been achieved in advancing equality, development and peace for women in many parts of world, millions of women still live in conditions that deprive them of their fundamental human rights. These conditions not only limit their opportunities, but handicap the development of the societies themselves. As such, the international community must continue to exert intensive efforts to ensure the full inclusion of women's rights in all aspects through the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

Mr. Chairman,

A tragic human rights situation and dire humanitarian crisis prevail in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. It is an entirely man-made disaster caused directly by the longest military occupation in modern history. The toll of the occupation on Palestinian women and their families has been vast and it cannot be overemphasized how severely they have been affected by the systematic human rights violations committed by Israel, the occupying Power. In this connection, the rights to self-determination, to life, to property, to food, to livelihood, to housing, to education, to health, to development, to freedom of movement, to freedom of worship have all been incessantly breached by the occupying Power. Indeed, the cumulative impact of the occupation has been the shredding of the Palestinian society and the devastation of families.

Furthermore, the occupation has compounded the pressures and constraints that already exist within societies in regards to women's advancement. Like all other women worldwide, Palestinian women continue to fight gender inequality and discrimination in their society. However, 41 years of occupation and all the ills that have accompanied it, remains the major obstacle to their social, economic, and political advancement

Mr. Chairman,

Palestinian women strive to live in a free, democratic and secure environment not only for themselves, but their children and families. But the reality is that Palestinian women must deal with some of the cruelest practices of the occupying Power. The images are harrowing and tragic: Mothers in

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constant mourning over the killing of their loved ones; their homes bulldozed and reduced to rubble as they attempt to pick up the pieces only to find that there is nowhere to be safe and then forced to deal with the economic, social and psychological effect that comes with it; thousands forced to wait for the privilege to go to work, school, or home, enduring countless indignities and abuse; swaths of their land destroyed and orchards of trees uprooted ruining the livelihoods of thousands; and a monstrous Wall and ever-expanding settlements swallowing up their land and the prospects for peace.

The increase of restrictions imposed on the movement of Palestinians within the Occupied Palestinian Territory, with nearly 607 checkpoints, has especially placed women in a precarious situation. Take for example, women giving birth at Israeli checkpoints. According to the UNFPA, since 2000, 69 women have been forced to endure this horrifying fate, which has tragically resulted in 35 miscarriages and the death of many pregnant women. The international community must compel Israel to abide with its obligations as an occupying Power and to facilitate access by pregnant women to life-saving services, as stipulated by international humanitarian law. Israel must also be held accountable for its violations and crimes against Palestinian women in this regard. It is also important to note that inadequate medical care during pregnancy was the third cause of mortality among Palestinian women of reproductive age and of the 117,000 pregnant women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, an estimated 18,000 will suffer poor pregnancy outcomes due to the lack of appropriate and timely prenatal, delivery and post natal care.

Mr. Chairman,

Israeli illegal measures and policies have placed the Palestinian economy in a disastrous state, placing exceptional burdens on Palestinian women trying to provide and care for their children and families. A new report released by the World Bank last month revealed that the Palestinian economy is in a precipitous decline, due completely to the Israeli closure and occupation of Palestinian land. In the report it states, "In reality, these restrictions go beyond concrete and earth-mounds: they extend to a system of physical, institutional and administrative restrictions that form an impermeable barrier that prevents Palestine from realizing its economic potential."

In this regard, poverty and unemployment in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is rampant, especially in Gaza, in which 1.1 million are dependent on food aid. Moreover, the siege has created a humanitarian crisis as the access to medical care and access to adequate food supply, clean water and fuel, continue to be obstructed. Urgent attention and assistance must continue to be given to the Palestinian people in the impoverished and devastated Gaza strip, particularly to women and their children. The international community must demand that Israel, as the occupying Power, abide by its obligations under international humanitarian law towards the civilian population in the Gaza strip.

Mr. Chairman,

We had hoped this year would bring an end to all of Israel's violations, especially after the re-launching of the peace process in Annapolis last November, however not only are the Palestinian people still facing violations of their most basic rights as detailed above, but in some cases these violations have intensified. In spite of this, Palestinian women continue to be resilient in their quest for peace. They continue to look to the international community and to international law as the guarantors of the freedom and peace they aspire. But, for peace to become a reality, Israel, the occupying Power, must cease its illegal policies and practices, which continue unabated, and genuinely embark on the path to peace and end its occupation allowing for the an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital to materialize. Only then will we be able to make real progress toward the advancement of Palestinian women and to embark on securing a promising future and for all women in the region.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.