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Statement by Mrs. Somaia Barghouti, Senior Adviser, before the Third Committee, Agenda item 28: Advancement of women, 66th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, New York, 11 October 2011:
(Check Against Delivery)

Mr. Chair,

At the outset, I would like to extend Palestine's warm congratulations to you and your friendly country Malaysia on your election as Chair of the Third Committee. We are confident that you will bring the work of the Committee to a successful conclusion. We also extend our congratulations to all the distinguished members of the Bureau.

Mr. Chair,

The situation of and the advancement of Palestinian women is intricately linked to the political, economic and social development in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. In this context, the continued Israeli military occupation and the intensification of its oppressive policies and practices against the Palestinian people have had severe implications on the entire population, in particular Palestinian women and their families. Palestinian women continue to bear a special and enduring burden from living for more than 44 years under Israeli military occupation. This harsh and painful reality not only has had a devastating impact on their daily lives, but has also been an impediment to their efforts in implementing their strategic plans and programs geared towards their empowerment and enhancement.

Since we addressed this Committee last session, I regret to inform you that the situation of Palestinian women has only worsened. This has stemmed from the fact that Israel, the occupying Power, has continued to relentlessly pursue its illegal seizure and colonization of Palestinian land, home demolitions, rendering thousands of Palestinian women and their

families homeless, the continued construction of its unlawful apartheid Wall, which is forcing Palestinians to live in Bantustan-like enclaves, the obstruction of movement of persons and goods, detention and imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians, including hundreds of women and the increased level of unchecked settler terror and violence that go unpunished have all had severe ramifications on Palestinian women and their families.

Moreover, we continue to witness unbearable human suffering and the deterioration of economic and social conditions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, as a result of the strangulation of the Palestinian economy due to more than four decades of occupation which have had grave consequences on the advancement and well-being of Palestinian women.

Mr. Chair,

Numerous reports by the United Nations and other non-governmental and international organizations have all concluded that the capacity of Palestinian women to cope with such tragic conditions under occupation has been declining, as the number of women dependent on emergency aid assistance has risen. Also, their responsibilities within households have expanded due to the death and imprisonment of male members of households as well as high unemployment. These reports also highlight the existing gaps that hinder women from attaining gender equality and social justice within Palestinian society.

Another issue of great concern is the escalation of violence against Palestinian women, which has risen to an alarming level. While many women are subjected to the typical forms of domestic violence plaguing other societies, they mainly suffer from the violence emanating from the Israeli military occupation and the continuation of armed conflict.

Mr. Chair,

Combating violence against Palestinian women throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, is one of the main pillars of our national project in order to allow women to play an important and equal role in building our State and creating strong foundations for our institutions. Strengthening the role of women and combating all forms of discrimination against them have been addressed via legislation and laws.

Most recently, the Palestinian cabinet endorsed a nine-year national strategy plan to combat violence against women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. This plan was prepared by the Ministry of Women's Affairs in cooperation with UN Women. The plan takes on a cross-sector approach, recognizing violence against women as a development issue affecting the political, social and economic systems of Palestinian society. The strategy plan directly responds to the UN Third Millennium Development Goal, which calls for gender equality and women's empowerment.

Mr. Chair,

The submission of the application of the State of Palestine for admission to membership in the United Nations on 23 September 2011 was met with joy and cheer by the Palestinian people. It gave them hope for the realization of their inalienable rights, including their right to self-determination and the realization of their legitimate national aspirations for justice and peace in their own independent and sovereign State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital. For Palestinian women, the significance of this historical moment is perceived also as a step forward towards the achievement of their objectives of equality and empowerment.

I would like to conclude with a quotation from our President's speech before the 66th session of the United Nations General Assembly: *"The time has come for our men, women and children to live normal lives, for them to be able to sleep without waiting for the worst that the next day will bring; for mothers to be assured that their children will return home without fear of suffering, killing, arrest or humiliation" "The time has come for my courageous and proud people, after decades of displacement and colonial occupation and ceaseless suffering, to live like other peoples of the earth, free in a sovereign and independent homeland"*.

Mr. Chair,

It is about time for the international community, mainly the United Nations, to shoulder its responsibility in standing firm in their support of the Palestinian people to enable them to achieve this noble and way overdue objective.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.