

**UN International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People**  
**Australian Parliament House**  
**Canberra 29/11/2018**

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, Members of Parliament, Your Excellencies, and distinguished guests.

It is my great pleasure to be here with you all in observance of the UN International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. I would like to sincerely thank the United Nations Information Centre, the federal Parliamentary Friends of Palestine, and the Council of Arab Ambassadors for their efforts towards today's event, and for their firm and ongoing support for Palestinian rights. I also seize this opportunity to express my gratitude in particular to the four co-chairs of the Parliamentary Friends of Palestine – Sussan Ley, Maria Vamvakinou, Janet Rice and Ken O'Dowd – for their tireless and sincere commitment to peace and justice in Palestine.

A special note of appreciation is also in order for the Australian solidarity groups and civil society organizations that share and work towards this same noble objective.

Despite the depressing situation in Palestine and all the problems that continue to beset the wider Middle East region, there are now, as always, glimmers of hope to which we can turn and reassure ourselves that not all is lost, and that something worth fighting for is still there. Just recently, the United Nations General Assembly overwhelmingly endorsed eight resolutions which both reaffirmed the right to self-determination for the Palestinian people within their own sovereign and secure state, and condemned Israel's relentless settlement enterprise which continues to suffocate this aspiration.

More so now than ever before, people are aware. They're well educated and better informed of the truth and of the realities on the ground. This is why grassroots support for Palestinians and their internationally recognised rights continues to swell in North America, Europe, and Australia. The 'shared values' adhesive that has long bound Western countries to Israel is beginning to weaken as defending the Jewish state's colonial project becomes increasingly untenable, especially in the face of domestic opposition to it. Messianic fundamentalism, religious superiority, land theft and dispossession shouldn't be the values of any country that claims to be 'enlightened'. In stark contrast to the liberal and cosmopolitan Tel Aviv, an image that Israel puts on the mantelpiece and polishes for Western audiences, there stands a Jewish settler on his timber porch in the West Bank with an M16. At the same time, Western governments are placing renewed emphasis on the rules-based international order and multilateral institutions as the remedies to the ills of naked power. The Palestinian people and leadership continue to have faith in international law and the UN resolutions that, if adhered to, guarantee an equitable solution for both parties.

As has been mentioned by the previous speakers, the main theme of this Day is UNRWA and the importance of the unresolved issue of Palestinian refugees, another casualty of the Trump administration's impending 'Deal of the Century'. Special credit is due to UNRWA's Commissioner-General, Mr Pierre Krähenbühl, for his unwavering advocacy on behalf of Palestinian refugees and for his successful campaigns to reduce UNRWA's budget shortfall following the United States' withdrawing all its funding to the Agency.

The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is an opportunity to reiterate and reaffirm our commitment to a peaceful solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict based on international law and UN resolutions. It is an opportunity to unequivocally reassert our commitment to the two-state solution where a demilitarised Palestinian state on 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital exists alongside Israel in peace and security. Israel's recently passed and highly contentious *Jewish Nation-State Law* leaves no doubt as to the true end goal of present-day Zionism – an exclusive and 'greater Israel' that regards all of Jerusalem as its eternal and undivided capital, considers settlement expansion a 'national virtue', and, most significantly, stresses that the right to self-determination in the land of historical Palestine is limited to the Jewish people. But you would be forgiven for thinking that Hamas was the only – or the main – obstacle in the way of a two-state peace.

I shall conclude then, ladies and gentlemen, by making mention of the Israeli government's current and misplaced focus on small, diplomatic wins with Muslim-majority countries while still ignoring the elephant in the room, stubbornly refusing to address what urgently needs to be addressed. A long-term vision accompanied by a sustainable solution is what needs the most investment, not diplomatic shortcuts or normalization stunts. We Palestinians are still here, olive branch in hand, awaiting the fulfillment of our legitimate demand for a sovereign and secure homeland. They can ignore us – even try to dissolve our identity, rights, and claims – but we will still be here in the morning. We're in it for the long run.

Thank you once again, and please do enjoy our refreshments.

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