

(Checks against delivery)

**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR GERT ROSENTHAL, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF GUATEMALA
AT THE OPEN DEBATE OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST,
INCLUDING THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION
(July 23, 2013)**

Madame President,

We wish to thank Mr. Robert Serry for his presentation to us on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine.

Madame President,

The frequency with which we address this topic has often been questioned within the Security Council. However, the actual situation in the region is so volatile and changing, and holds implications of such a magnitude, that it must be acknowledged that frequent monitoring is justified. The original enchantment with which the “Arab Spring” was received in this Hall only a little over a year ago, is now seasoned with a dose of skepticism regarding the ease or difficulty to be expected regarding the transition from Authoritarian Governments towards more democratic, participative, plural and open systems. Recent events in Egypt offer only one testimony of this fact. In addition, the deepening of sectarian tensions and their frequent spill-over into violence are matters of growing concern for obvious reasons.

But this is not the moment to discuss the overall panorama. I will therefore center my remarks on the two topics that have most been subject of our attention: first, the situation in Syria, and, second, the Peace Process in the Middle East. They are radically different situations, but at this point they have one topic in common: a broad acknowledgment that the road towards reconciliation begins by seating the parties in conflict at the table to talk to each other, and, eventually, seek agreements through direct negotiations. That is the logic behind the initiative dubbed “Geneva 2”, and also underlies the imperative that the directly affected parties – Israel and Palestine – be the ones to define the path that will lead to the two-state solution, allowing them to live in peace behind secure borders.

Moving on now to the Situation in Syria, this has been a human tragedy of immense proportions, and a source of permanent frustration for my delegation. Clearly, the Security Council has failed to meet its basic purpose to avoid, first, and then put an end, to the spiral of violence that has destroyed lives, communities, and a cultural legacy of millenniums. The anxious search for a negotiated and peaceful political solution has not been realized. Rather, both the Government and the armed opposition groups have increased the use of violence, with all that it entails. The risk that the crisis will spread to neighboring countries is growing, and the humanitarian cost has reached unimaginable levels.

In the context of this somber scenario, our only hope, which is fading with time, rests with the attempts of the United States, the Russian Federation and the Secretariat to establish the basis that would allow holding a conference which could trigger a dialogue and negotiation between the parties. We fervently want this conference to take place in the short term, and, above all, that the parties commit themselves to seeking a definitive solution to the conflict, which would require a transitional authority. We do not

believe that conditions should be set for the participation in this gathering nor preclude any possible outcome.

My delegation continues to believe that any solution must include for starters an agreement to put down their arms. At present, the logic of war that seems to prevail in both parties impedes the search for any other solution. But it is obvious that extending the armed struggle will only increase sectarian violence, hate, the humanitarian crisis and the rupture of the social fabric of the country, with all its consequences for a post-conflict Syria. That is why we believe it to be extremely important that the international community completely stem the flow of arms to Syria.

As a corollary, it should be made clear that those responsible for all crimes committed in Syria must be punished for their acts. One cannot permit that impunity prevail in a post-conflict Syria.

Finally with regards to Syria, we reiterate our admiration and respect for the Governments of Jordan and Lebanon, countries that, in spite of the enormous pressure they are enduring, have maintained their borders open to the refugees from the Syrian conflict. They more than deserve the support of the international community.

As regards the peace process in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, steps have been taken during the past months that suggest it is still possible to reach a mutual agreement between the parties to rescue the two-state solution. The basis that could lead to renewed talks have recently been agreed to, as part of the diplomatic initiative of the Secretary of State of the United States, and supported, we presume, by the Quartet, the League of Arab States and the European Union. The involvement of other actors of the region also demonstrates the sense of urgency with which a search for a definitive solution to the conflict between Israel and Palestine is being pursued. We hope that both parties can show the leadership and needed responsibility to continue their commitment to the peace process. We believe that the involvement of the Quartet in this initiative is essential.

As we have done on previous occasions, we maintain our position that both parties must avoid all acts that put at risk the prospects of a peaceful solution to the conflict. Such acts only undermine any prospects that both peoples can live in peace and security. We believe that the construction of new settlements, or the expansion of existing ones, falls within this category and constitutes a violation of international law. Naturally, the firing of rockets from the Gaza Strip to Israeli territory must cease totally. At the same time, we hope that in the short term the economic restrictions being placed on the Gaza Strip will be reduced, since they undercut any prospects of progress.

Finally, we believe that the international community, through the United Nations, has the duty to condemn all and any violation that can undermine the peace process. The involved parties cannot be expected to act responsibly when the international community ignores flagrant violations committed by either of the parties.

Thank you.