

(Check against delivery)

**STATEMENT OF AMBASSADOR GERT ROSENTHAL
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF GUATEMALA TO THE UNITED NATIONS
OPEN DEBATE OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST,
INCLUDING THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION
24 APRIL 2013**

Mr. President,

In the first place, we want to thank Mr. Jeffrey Feltman for his presentation on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.

Mr. President,

While we deal with this issue with short intervals between each session, the situation in the Middle East is dynamic enough to provide new developments on each occasion. Thus, in recent months there have been some significant developments that merit comment. I will focus on the following topics: (1) the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic; and (2) the Middle East Peace Process, including the Palestinian question.

Regarding the **situation in Syria**, the Council's work has been focused on finding a political solution to the conflict that overwhelms the country, but, despite the many efforts undertaken, we have only witnessed the increased use of violence, both by the Government and by the armed opposition, all of which has resulted in the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians, the suffering of millions of people, and a humanitarian crisis of grave dimensions.

Worse, this trend shows no signs of improving, as both parties are governed by the logic of military victory over the other, but with very little prospect of achieving that goal. That is why Guatemala continues to strongly believe that the only solution to the conflict in Syria is that both parties agree to lay down their weapons and negotiate a political solution. We do not believe that the militarization of the conflict will solve the underlying problems that gave rise to demonstrations in Syria two years ago. Rather, the continuation of the armed struggle will only serve to increase sectarian violence in the country, with the additional risk of spreading to neighboring countries. We are also greatly concerned about the emergence of groups within the armed opposition that do not conceal their association with terrorist organizations. We believe that these organizations should not be allowed to take advantage of the existing instability.

We acknowledge the efforts and work that has been made to place the various opposition groups in Syria under the same banner, same which have so far resulted in

the creation of the so-called “Syrian National Coalition”. However, we remain concerned that the label of “legitimate representative of the Syrian people” is being assigned to the Coalition. Guatemala believes that any transition in Syria should be the product of a Syrian-led process which respects the rights of all parties, and that it is premature to legitimize a group that, like the Government, may not enjoy the widespread support of the Syrian population, much less has been elected democratically. We hope that the function of this group is focused on facilitating interlocutors to advance peaceful negotiations between the parties. On this point it should be clear that the perpetrators of all crimes committed in Syria, no matter by whom, should be held accountable for their actions. No atrocity of the magnitude of those that occurred in Syria should go unpunished.

Additionally, Guatemala recognizes the urgency for the implementation of the Humanitarian Response Plan in Syria. It is unacceptable to extend the suffering of the Syrian people. In this sense, although we have welcomed the pledges that have been made in the various meetings of donor countries, we believe it is important to make them effective. In the same context, it is also indispensable to help all countries that provide humanitarian aid and receive Syrian refugees. The impact that the conflict has had within their borders quickly consumes those resources, putting them also at risk.

Mr. President,

Turning now to the **Middle East Peace Process, including the Palestinian question**, we hope that in the short term both Israel and Palestine can commit themselves to the peace process and work to advance a solution that leads to a long and lasting peace. In this regard, on April 8th my Government took the decision to recognize Palestine as a state. This decision, based on the principle of the right to self-determination, was taken without ignoring the importance of re-launching direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine, under the support of the international community, with an aim of leading to the adoption of a definitive agreement which allows both parties to live in peace, with clearly defined borders, secure and internationally recognized, and that ensures the peaceful coexistence between the two peoples.

We hope that the Quartet will retake a pro-active role in this direction. Above all, we hope that the parties directly involved assume their responsibility to work in the search for viable solutions in the short term. The year 2013 should be a year marked by the long-delayed resumption of substantive negotiations that lead to a definitive agreement to resolve all outstanding issues. In this regard, we believe that the work done by the United States in recent weeks may help steer the process and give the parties the necessary push to launch the much-needed dialogue.

We are concerned about the poor state of the Palestinian economy and the negative impact this has on efforts to build state institutions. We believe it is necessary for the international community to reaffirm its support for the Palestinian Authority and encourage countries in the region, as well as emerging economies, to fully extend their assistance for the revitalization of the Palestinian economy.

The international community should urge both sides to avoid any act, action or provocation that hinders the possibility of returning to the negotiating table. We believe that the international community, through the United Nations, is obliged to condemn all violations committed, including those related to safety, and take all necessary actions to put an end to those transgressions. It cannot be expected that the parties act responsibly when condemnation for their actions is avoided.

Finally, my delegation believes that only through the respect of the rights of each of these people and a firm commitment to seek a peaceful solution will both parties be able to live together in peace with secure and recognized borders.

Thank you.