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Sixty-fifth year**The situation in the Middle East****Question of Palestine****Identical letters dated 31 May 2010 from the Permanent
Observer of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the
Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council**

Upon instructions from the Palestinian leadership, I write to convey and place on record our strong condemnation of the Israeli military attack that was carried out today in international waters in the Mediterranean Sea against the convoy of civilian ships that was carrying hundreds of peace activists from around the world and headed to the besieged Gaza Strip to deliver humanitarian aid and essential supplies to the Palestinian people there who continue to suffer under Israel's nearly three-year, inhumane blockade. Although the details are still emerging, it is by now clear that the Israeli commandos that attacked the ship killed several civilian peace activists and wounded many others in this vicious, premeditated attack, which was launched against the ships in an area 72 nautical miles from the coast of the Gaza Strip. This illegal and deplorable Israeli military operation constitutes an explicit act of piracy under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and must be unequivocally condemned by the international community, including the Security Council.

It was well known in the international community that this convoy of civilian ships, which was carrying 10,000 tons of humanitarian aid, construction materials and much-needed civilian goods and supplies for the Palestinian civilian population as well as more than 600 peace activists and humanitarians from more than 40 countries, including parliamentarians, journalists, civil society activists and many others, was scheduled to arrive at the Gaza Strip during this period of time. It was an open peace, solidarity and humanitarian mission, and the activists involved in what became known as the "Gaza Freedom Flotilla" were very transparent about their intentions and about the content of the aid and supplies being carried on their ships. The activists involved were very clear about their desire to peacefully, non-violently break Israel's illegitimate and destructive blockade of the Gaza Strip, which has impoverished the Palestinian civilian population, causing socio-economic conditions to plummet and widespread despair and trauma among the population,



especially the most vulnerable, including children, women and the elderly, and causing vast damage to the Palestinian society as a whole. Theirs was intended as a mission of solidarity, hope and peace, aimed at delivering food, medicine, medical equipment and supplies, books, children's clothing and toys, as well as construction materials to the Palestinian people to help in the reconstruction of the thousands of homes and the civilian infrastructure that had been destroyed by Israel's military aggression (December 2008-January 2009) against the Gaza Strip, from which the Palestinian civilian population has deliberately been prevented from recovering by the occupying Power.

Israel's military response to this civilian aid convoy, which was attempting to reach Gaza by sea, as Israel continues its land blockade of Gaza with the closure of all of its border crossings, is yet further proof of Israel's rejection and blatant breach of all tenets and applicable provisions of international humanitarian law as well as its violation of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). It is also a clear indication of its callous disrespect and total disregard for the persistent calls and demands upon Israel from the entire international community to immediately end this illegal blockade and allow for the freedom of movement of persons and goods into and out of the Gaza Strip in accordance with international law, including the relevant provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

We reiterate once again, on the margins of this shocking and tragic event, that such Israeli disrespect and impunity is the direct result of the lack of accountability and consequences imposed on Israel by the international community, despite the massive violations and war crimes committed by the occupying Power over the years.

In the aftermath of this violent Israeli attack and the tragedy that has ensued, we once again call on the international community, including the Security Council, to act to address this ongoing and ever-deepening crisis. The world community cannot remain idle as Israel continues to flagrantly and blatantly breach international law, destroying thousands of innocent lives and undermining the principles of international law and our international system as a whole in the process. International inaction has only further emboldened the occupying Power to escalate its actions with impunity over time and to continue to flaunt the law and challenge the international community, gravely threatening peace and stability in the Middle East region and beyond.

It is imperative that Israel be compelled to immediately and completely lift its siege in the Gaza Strip and to allow for the movement of persons and goods in order to end the isolation and humanitarian suffering of the civilian Palestinian population. In this regard, we fear that limiting the international response to verbal condemnation would be tantamount to complicity in this continuing outrage.

Moreover, at this time, the Palestinian leadership calls for the immediate and safe release of the courageous civilian peace activists who were abducted by the Israeli military forces at sea today. Under international conventions in force, States are obliged to extend their full cooperation to suppress piracy on the high seas or anywhere outside the jurisdiction of any State. The community of nations must ensure that the principle of piracy and violence, which Israel has adopted as policy, is combated and confronted.

Acts of Israeli brutality such as the attack on a civilian humanitarian vessel, as well as the cynical attempt to distort the reality and portray the abducted, killed, and injured champions of peace and justice as terrorists, is outrageous and deplorable and must not be tolerated. There is no legal, political, moral or human justification for the inhumane policies that Israel is carrying out against the Palestinian people, especially in the Gaza Strip. The world must act decisively and immediately to protect the prospects of peace on the basis of the two-State solution on which there is a firm international consensus by putting a final end to Israeli violations, intransigence, impunity and brutality. This is imperative to give peace a chance.

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the text of the present letter distributed as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 16 and 15, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) **Riyad Mansour**
Ambassador
Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations
