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Remarks by Palestinian PM Salam Fayyad at ATFP Third Annual Gala

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Ladies and gentlemen; ([click for Arabic Version](#))[4]

Your Excellencies.

It is really an honor for me to have the opportunity to address such an esteemed audience tonight.

Tonight's event is neatly book-ended by a number of significant events in the on-going Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Last month, we marked *fifteen* years since the signing of the first in a series of interim agreements. Next month, of course, will mark one year since the renewal of peace negotiations at Annapolis. And, yet, regrettably, we continue to walk the bumpy road to peace that began in Madrid seventeen years ago this month.

A lot can be said, and has been said, about the ups and downs of this process. But, what we *do* know is that we all hoped that we would be a lot closer to peace by now. The Annapolis Conference embodied the hope that we would achieve a comprehensive peace agreement by year's end. In the meantime, we, Palestinians, had expected an improved economic and security environment to underpin the political track.

Alas, few expectations have been met. Settlements pepper the West Bank and continue to grow. Every indicator of settlement activity – from public- and private-initiated construction, to tenders and building permits – shows that rather than stopping, settlement activity has in fact *accelerated* since Annapolis. ... That's right. *Accelerated*.

Similarly, restrictions on access and movement are *tighter* than they were *before* Annapolis. Compare 563 checkpoints and roadblocks before Annapolis to 630 today, not to mention the severe tightening of the siege on Gaza. And land confiscations, home demolitions, military

incursions and raids all continued.

Needless to say, the quality of life for the average Palestinian has worsened. And if we are honest with ourselves, vague pronouncements that the current peace talks are “on-going” and “serious” mean little on the Palestinian street and, when all is told, are of little relevance to people who are living hand to mouth.

As devastating as these developments have been on Palestinians’ fabric of life, the combination of deteriorating conditions on the ground and the lack of a political horizon have had an even worse impact on the Palestinians’ state of mind, which had already been seriously deformed by the erosion in self-esteem, and self-assuredness, prompted by decades of Israeli occupation and oppression. We, Palestinians, have felt this erosion. Those old enough to remember the first Intifada felt it during the second Intifada. We felt the shame of it in June of last year. We felt it last month when twelve of our citizens, including a baby, were killed in Gaza.

I have always felt that an understanding of how this sad state of affairs came about was necessary to enable us to position ourselves on a path that could lead to freedom and independence. The truth is: the loss of self-esteem and assuredness had tended to elicit one of two seemingly diametrically opposed reactions among the Palestinian public, namely, defeatism and belligerence. The painful truth is that neither is constructive. You cannot end the occupation if you are dominated by a “can do nothing,” defeatist kind of attitude. Nor will belligerence get you there, with what may come with it by way of violence and isolationist tendencies.

When viewed this way, it becomes clear that the greatest obstacle that has prevented us, Palestinians, from achieving our national goals was not occupation per se or factionalism, not poverty or separation, but that deadly erosion of self-esteem and consequent loss of faith in our capacity to get things done.

If this analysis is correct, which I believe it is, it follows that to end the occupation, we, Palestinians, must first rid ourselves of what four decades of Israeli occupation have precipitated by way of fear, skepticism, cynicism, self-doubt, and, yes loss of self-esteem. I believe we can – though I must confess I didn’t always. At one point, the erosion of our esteem seemed to have taken on a life of its own, propelled by its own momentum, becoming almost self-fulfilling ... *almost*. However, I truly believe we can regain our sense of self-assuredness, once we, Palestinians, collectively embrace – *consciously* embrace – a paradigm that says that, along the way to freedom, defeatism must be defeated and belligerence must be set aside. To me, this is not only emancipation – it is deliverance.

Acting on this conviction, and from day one – a day of national tragedy of virtually unprecedented proportions – my government set out to put in place and set in motion mechanisms capable of getting us there. My motto was “building towards statehood *despite* the occupation”. This involved, in the first instance, building strong, effective institutions capable of delivering services to our people in an effective, expeditious and fair manner, all within the framework of good governance. The effort has already started to bear fruit. In the area of financial management, for example, I am proud to say that we now have a system that truly measures up to the highest international standards and practices. In addition to building up our credibility at home, this has won our government the international confidence necessary to secure much needed aid, including from the United States and the European Union.

Indeed, last March the US Administration transferred US \$150 million directly to the Palestinian Authority coffers. This transfer was the largest sum of assistance to be transferred to the PA in a single tranche by any donor for any purpose since the Authority's inception. What is more, the Administration is about to transfer another US\$ 150 million to us the same way. Surely this will be another strong message of support and desire to help, which I deeply cherish. What I cherish even more is the strong message of confidence in the integrity of our public finance system which this action by the Administration implies. For, as you know, however strong the desire to help is - - and indeed it is - - Congress would not authorize a transfer directly into our coffers, of this amount or indeed any amount, were it not for the integrity and the credibility which our financial system and management have come to enjoy.

This is but one example of the progress we have been able to achieve over the past year in building towards statehood. There are other important examples, especially in the sphere of security and law and order. Together, these efforts prompted UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon to speak of “an emerging sense of self-empowerment” among Palestinians.

I share his assessment. I have had the opportunity to visit most districts in the West Bank this past year – which I hope to be able replicate in Gaza – and everywhere I have been, I was greeted by a cautious, yet distinct glimmer of the self-respect, pride and resilience that makes *me*, despite all the obstacles we face, so very proud to be Palestinian.

It is there in the streets of Nablus and Jenin, where law and order and, thus, a modicum of normalcy have been restored. It was there in Manger Square in Bethlehem one starry night last May, when a thousand businessmen and dignitaries from all over Palestine and abroad, including Israel, dined together in the open air. It is there every Friday – and *has* been for the past few years, and will *continue* to be there – in Bil'in, where villagers peacefully protest against the erection of a despicable wall that threatens their livelihood and, *sometimes*, their lives, though *never* their spirit. It was there one sad day when Palestinians walked up a Ramallah hill to bury Palestine's most highly revered literary icon (Mahmoud Darwish), conjuring up memories of the day our nation mourned the loss of our late President Yasser Arafat. It was there the day when a shipment of Palestinian pharmaceutical products, destined for the first time ever to Germany, made its way through the maze of economic restrictions in the West Bank, to meet the most exacting pharmaceutical standards in the world. And, yes, it was there the day Palestinians welcomed a boat-load of visitors off the shore of Gaza ... And it is *there*, every single day, that a Palestinian child goes to school, that a Palestinian farmer manages to work his/ her land, that a Palestinian mother remains hopeful that her son will be released from Israeli prison, that a rural community begins to benefit from the implementation of one of literally hundreds of community projects being implemented throughout the country,

that a Palestinian family chooses - *finds* a way - to remain on their land for another day.

We are approaching a critical mass of positive change – positive facts on the ground, as I like to call them, that are indicative of a most encouraging shift in the mindset of our people, away from doom and gloom towards a distinct sense of possibility and the promise of a better future.

When and where possible, with President Abbas's guidance and support, our government tried to help generate opportunities and create conditions to make these things possible – and, in so doing, to nurture our people's sense of dignity in themselves. *This*, more than anything, is what I think our job is about – as we say here tonight, “the courage to persist, the will to build”. And I am *unequivocally* committed to continuing to do that – *now* and even *after* I leave office.

Still, there is no dignity in what is happening to us now. And the same is true for the Israelis. There is nothing dignified in Israeli parents having to be afraid while their children are away at school. There is no dignity for the mother of the Israeli soldier who delayed a Palestinian woman at a checkpoint near Nablus, causing her to lose her unborn child. There is also nothing dignified about the world's fifth largest army subjugating a people with no country and no army. There is nothing dignified in a country that prides itself on being a democracy when it allows itself to be held hostage by a group of extremist settlers who forcibly put their own interests ahead of the will of the majority.

Despite this – indeed, *because* of this – we, Palestinians, remain hopeful – *resolute* – to reach a peaceful resolution to the conflict between us and Israelis based on a two-state model. Palestinians long to live in freedom like any other people. For, in freedom, there is dignity, as there is in freedom from fear.

In fact, we don't just seek peace; we seek a meaningful and lasting peace with Israel. We seek strong ties with Israel. We seek strong economic ties between the independent states of Israel and Palestine. We seek warm relations with Israelis. We do not want to simply get to a point where we just accept each other – we want to have warm relations where we both recognize the mutual economic, intellectual, spiritual, and of course security benefits of living and working together. We do not want to erect walls; we want to build bridges. We do not want to close Israelis out of our lives; we want to live with Israelis as our neighbors.

However, let it be known that Palestinians are not interested in just any state and not at any cost. It is not just Israel who has a constituency it has to worry about and serve. Let's not forget the reasons why the results of Palestinian parliamentary elections were what they were in 2006. As one prominent Israeli advocate of peace put it, “There is no Palestinian partner for improving the quality of the occupation – there is only a Palestinian partner for ending the occupation.” When all is said and done, the Palestinian leadership will have to take any agreement it negotiates with Israel to its people.

People have an inherent sense of fairness by which they judge any settlement. And that inherent sense of fairness tells them that a peace agreement with Israel must yield a viable, contiguous, independent, potentially prosperous, sovereign Palestinian state on 22% of their historic homeland with East Jerusalem as its capital, and a solution to the refugee issue that honors the refugees and recognizes their legitimate rights and their suffering. That same inherent sense of fairness tells them that a rump state made up of disconnected Israeli throw-aways is not what they have waited so long or sacrificed so much for. It tells them that the great compromise they made back in 1988, when they relinquished claim to 78 percent of

their historic homeland, should be acknowledged and respected by the other party.

Regrettably, the two-state solution is teetering under the weight of 170 settlements and almost *half a million* settlers. Time is running out on the two-state solution. With every brick that is laid in a settler house, with every road that is paved for settlers, with every concrete slab that is erected for the wall that snakes in and out of the West Bank, the bond that ties Israelis and Palestinians together, which originates in the fact that we must share the same piece of land, grows just a little bit tighter. That is the great irony of Israel's settlement enterprise. Prime Minister Olmert recognized this. He said "The day will come when the two-state solution collapses, and we face a South African-style struggle for equal voting rights."

Nevertheless, I remain hopeful that, *through* negotiations, we *can* reach a lasting peace between us on the basis of a two-state solution. For this process to be successful, however, we must, again, bring to it dignity and credibility. Oslo stalled because it quickly lost credibility— there was talk of peace while actions on the ground worked against peace. Annapolis risks being the same unless Israel reconciles its behavior on the ground with its stated intentions of peace and creating a viable and independent Palestinian state.

And so, if we are to get to where we want to be, we have to treat each other with dignity – *lead* with dignity. This means behaving like statesmen instead of politicians – thinking of the next generation, *not* the next elections.

For Palestinians, what this means is remaining steadfast not just to our principles for a solution, but to our commitment to non-violence and previous agreements. And we *are* resolute in this. Make no mistake about it. As I mentioned earlier, I view my role as Prime Minister as one of assisting our people, to the best of my ability, to live just a little bit better than the day before, and to stay on their land for another day ... and another. But we do it – and will continue to do it – through constructive, non-violent means that honor our very noble cause.

For Israel, what this means is negotiating an agreement with us as equals, no more and no less. Not bullying Palestinians at the negotiating table with facts on the ground it only erected yesterday – or five years ago, or 10 years ago, or 35 years ago. Saying "no" to the settlers. Not abusing its stature as an occupying power to coerce, for example, by withholding much-needed tax dollars when it disagrees with our legitimate means of diplomatic protest. Not shutting away 1.5 million Palestinians from the world for the unacceptable actions of a few.

For the rest of the world, this means showing strength of leadership, and getting tough with transgressors of our commonly-held values, whether friend or foe. The world has been generous with us, backing our state-building efforts with robust financial investment. And it has been tough with us when it felt we strayed onto an undesirable path. We now need it to be equally demanding of our neighbor. We need the international community to hold Israel to its word when it says it desires the establishment of a viable Palestinian state. We need the world to take practical steps to keep the establishment of such a state possible. Wagging its finger at continued settlement activity is simply not enough.

With the help and encouragement of this US Administration, we are off to a good start. However, neither we nor the Israelis can afford to wait another four or eight years. We will desperately need the *immediate* assistance and investment from the incoming administration if we are to make a success of the process begun at Annapolis.

This is where the Palestinian-American community can be of great service. To members of this community, let me first say that I am privileged to have lived long enough in this country to appreciate its beauty and understand why you think this nation of immigrants became so great. You are an enormous but enormously underutilized source of strength to the cause of a just and durable peace. We need to work together to create that other state which, one day, you may wish to call home. We are facing many domestic difficulties and challenges, especially those related to the current state of separation. Do not give up on us. We have proposed concrete ideas the adoption of which is capable of reuniting Gaza and the West Bank. These include the formation of a national consensus, non-factional government in the run-up to presidential and legislative elections, and the utilization of Arab security assistance for a transitional period to help with the rehabilitation of our security services and with the provision of law and order in Gaza until our services are rehabilitated. National dialogue on the key political issues can then proceed, but then against the backdrop of a reunified country, in the hope of sorting out our political differences or at least forging a national consensus on how to manage these differences in a civilized, orderly, and non-violent manner. Just as you were not indifferent to the less-than-perfect way in which the PNA managed the affairs of the Palestinian people after Oslo, you cannot, I would submit, be indifferent to the risk of our country – our state-in-the-making – sliding towards backwardness, isolation, repression of freedom, gender inequality, and cultural and religious intolerance. For those who may have crossed that bridge to nowhere, to nothingness, indeed, destructive nothingness, I respectfully ask that you to reconsider.

And so, my friends, we are at a crossroads. A lot is riding on the choices we all make. Outcomes are not ordained or inevitable. We must seek to draw the right lessons from our experiences of peace-making since Madrid. Now is not the time to ditch the solution concept which, with President Bush's 2002 speech, became a matter of explicit international consensus, namely, the vision of two states living side by side in peace and security. For abandoning that concept would be another escape to destructive nothingness.

Instead, we should make adjustments. Since Oslo, the pendulum has swung too far away from what international law and justice prescribes, towards the diktat of practicality, towards what may be seen as acceptable to each of the parties to the conflict. This shift would not have been too problematic had it occurred in a context of parity of influence. However, with us, Palestinians, holding the shorter end of the stick, this disparity has necessarily meant an erosion in our position with each round of diplomacy that did not end with a solution. This structural defect has to be redressed. It is time for the pendulum to swing back in the direction of what international law and justice requires. Back in 1988, Palestinians made the historic and painful compromise that we felt was necessary to secure a solution to the conflict. As our Israeli neighbors think about what they consider to be painful compromises, it is my hope that they will devote equal time to reflecting on the promise that ending the occupation of all Arab territories holds: normalization not just with Arab countries, but with the 57 member states of the Islamic Conference who all endorsed the Arab Peace Initiative. That consideration will no doubt be aided by effective international engagement, with the US leading the way in close partnership with the rest of the community of nations, especially the other members of the Quartet, as well as Arab countries. To me, *this* is the way forward.

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