



**UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nickolay Mladenov's
Remarks at Launch of the Palestine National Policy Agenda 2017 - 2022**

Ramallah, 22 Feb 2017

Your Excellency Prime Minister Hamdallah,
Your Excellencies, members of the Government,
representatives of civil society and the private sector,

They say that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a first step. Palestine took its first steps to independence and statehood a very long time ago and you have traveled many, many miles on the journey to achieve your legitimate national aspirations of statehood.

It's been a road that has been very thorny and difficult, a road marred by occupation, by crisis, by conflict. Sometimes we in the international community have helped you, but sometimes maybe not.

Today it is appropriate for all of us to say to you, Mr. Prime Minister, to President Abbas, and to everyone at the Government, to the people of Palestine: Congratulations for the road well-traveled! Moreover, 'Mabrouk', particularly, for mapping out the next miles on the journey to statehood.

It is no small achievement to articulate a National Policy Agenda with a very clear and strong vision in the times of uncertainty we live. Particularly as there is the iron lid of occupation on Palestine's ambitions. You work under uniquely difficult conditions and face remarkable political, security and developmental challenges. This is something that we in the international community should never forget. It is for us to adapt to the circumstances that you face, not for you to adapt to our templates and matrices. That is why the National Policy Adenda that you have developed is so important for all of us. It will serve as a compass heading for international support to the Palestinian Authority.

For us in the United Nations, it will help us design our priorities under the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for the years 2018-2022, which we are close to finalizing in cooperation with the Government. The UNDAF will outline how the UN will support the implementation of the NPA. The first two strategic priorities will be clearly the path to statehood and to governance reform, the third and the fourth priorities that we will set out will look at the economic and social development. I want to assure all of you, and I want to assure all Palestinians, that the United Nations remains committed and will always support you on the road to statehood.

I want to welcome the fact that you have put 'citizens first' at the core of the NPA. I also note that in many of the priorities that the Government has outlined in the agenda are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals to 'leave no one behind'.

Over the years Palestine has had very impressive social achievements: 97% primary school enrollment rate; 95% adult literacy; a 100% vaccination rates for children; relatively low maternal and infant mortality rates; and declining trends in early marriage – you should be proud of these achievements.

It is in the next miles of your journey to statehood that the biggest difficulties will emerge. How to maintain these standards? How to ensure that your people are treated equally and fairly? How to make sure that no one is left behind, that citizens come first?

How you address these and many other challenges, how you protect and advance these achievements, that will be the real test for the Government and for Palestinian leaders.

Half a century of occupation have marked everything in this troubled land. Certainly they have affected the national dignity of Palestinians. That is why it is important for the Palestinian people to see that their Government is there to serve them and to provide them with the best services that it can, and to address the huge problems of the reality of today.

In Gaza we have chronic energy, water and humanitarian problems; massive difficulties stemming from the closures; challenges emanating from a decade of separation and four bloody conflicts.

Life however is not easy in the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory. Just a couple of days ago, in the early morning hours of the 19th of February, the Israeli Civil Administration served yet another round of stop-order and demolition orders to the Bedouin community of Abu Al Helu. This is a community, among many others, that are at risk of being moved, their houses and a school that has been built with international assistance demolished. Later today, the UN Resident Coordinator Robert Piper will be visiting the community to personally take stock of developments there. I assure you we will speak out very clearly in support of the legitimate rights of people under such circumstances.

Palestinians across the West Bank face major problems, particularly in Area C, where limitations on their development have been imposed, where they cannot access natural resources, or work the land for their benefit. Land that is quickly disappearing as settlements expand, despite international statements that they are illegal under international law and present one of the main obstacles to peace.

The economic situation in the areas under the control of the Palestinian Authority is also difficult. The economy lags behind the social achievements of Palestine. Unemployment remains high, budget deficits are recurring, and there are major constraints to private

sector development. We can certainly list a whole litany of technical recommendations on how to change this. There is one political message that needs to resound very clearly — unless the occupation is lifted, unless the iron lid on Palestinian development is lifted, all our efforts can only be partially successful.

That is why we, in the international community, need to help Israelis and Palestinians return back to a meaningful process of negotiations that provides hope to people. In that process we must stand firmly in support of the statehood of Palestine and in assisting you, the Palestinian people, in achieving independence, in getting ‘a good deal’ on independence. ‘A good deal’ can only be based on sovereignty and statehood.

We also need to ensure that the Palestinian case is not lost in the ever-increasing crowd priorities in the Middle East.

We need to make sure that we, the international community, have our common set of priorities firmly aligned to yours.

Finally, we need to make sure that the two-state solution remains at the core of addressing the final status issues. It is the only way to legitimately meet the national aspirations of both Palestinians and Israelis, who both have a link to this land.

I want to assure you that the United Nations will stand with you throughout this process and continue our support for your institution building efforts. We will work tirelessly to help rebuild hope and achieve as soon as we can what generations have worked and struggled for — an independent State of Palestine living next to the State of Israel in peace and security and mutual recognition.

Thank you.