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Statement by Her Excellency Mrs. Rabihah Diab, Minister of Women's Affairs, before the Commission on the Status of Women, Palace of Nations, Geneva, 28 February 2012

Madam Chair,

At the outset, allow me to extend my warmest congratulations to you, Madam Chair, on your election to the 64th session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Palestine wishes to express to you of its full cooperation during the deliberations of this very important session. We would also like to thank the Secretary-General for the reports submitted to this session, including the report entitled "The Situation of and Assistance to Palestinian Women," which will certainly be enhanced.

It is a great honor that I stand before you to address the important issues facing women and to work hand and hand to promote and enhance their role in society in all social, economic and other fields.

Madam Chair,

The aim of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is to encourage development by improving social and economic conditions in the world's poorest countries through the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, access to primary education, particularly in developing countries, as well as ensuring environmental sustainability, which includes access to clean and safe water, access to basic sanitation and reducing air pollution. In addition to these important goals, the main objective of the MDGs aims at achieving gender equality, the empowerment of women and their right to live free from discrimination and to strengthen their participation in decision-making in all areas of public life. It is imperative that these goals must be taken by all members of society regardless of gender, race, religion or level of education.

It is also important to note that efforts taken by all members of society for the empowerment of women is not enough and other issues, such as continued obstacles to the empowerment of women have to be addressed, such as continued

discrimination, violence and inequality against women. Moreover, the lack of funding for income-generating projects aimed at their endeavors to be self-sufficient and for their participation in the local market which would allow them to have a substantial role in the decision-making process in all aspects.

Madam Chair,

In addition to the challenges and obstacles that have been mentioned earlier, women worldwide, and Palestinian women, including women, are suffering from a challenge and an obstacle that far surpasses all of them, namely the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, since 1967, and the oppressive and destructive policies and practices by the occupying Power against the Palestinian civilian population.

In this regard, the report of the Secretary General entitled "Situation of aid Assistance to Palestinian Women" (A/RES/67/2012/5) paints a grim picture of the situation facing Palestinian women. It refers to the continued deterioration of the social, economic, political and humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem and the numerous daily Israeli violations of Palestinian human rights and illegal practices and measures against the Palestinian people. These include, but are not limited to, the construction and expansion of illegal settlements, construction of the Wall, the formation of military outposts, restrictions on the movement of residency rights, the placement of hundreds of checkpoints, which continue to obstruct Palestinian women and men from accessing land, markets and basic services, as well as the imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians in Israeli prisons and detention centers.

Moreover, the process of empowerment of rural women and their ability to address poverty and hunger is being restricted by the Israeli military the increasing Power and its violations on the ground. It is known that the most important factor for the empowerment of rural women is the cultivation of their land and the achievement of their self-sufficiency. However, the illegal policies and practices by the occupying Power, including its control of water resources and its environmental degradation and destruction of Palestinian land and crops restrict, among other things, women's empowerment and their ability to address poverty and hunger.

Madam Chair,

It has become evidently clear that while the Palestinian women band, the occupation continues to destroy and while they cultivate and plant, the occupation settlers attack, devastate, uproot and burn agricultural fields, homes and properties. Even more tragic, Israeli occupying forces and settlers continue to shoot at unarmed civilians, without distinction between young and old or between women and men.

Secretary-General stated in his report that the right of individual women remains closely linked to the efforts to find lasting peace. We affirm here that the surest step to achieve lasting peace is to end the occupation, the realization of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the right for return of the Palestinian refugees in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions

Madam Chair,

Over the long history of subjugation, dispossession and continued Israeli attacks and violence, Palestinian women have demonstrated resilience, strength and steadfastness in their quest to affirm their rights, achieve freedom and to live in dignity. In this regard, we have undertaken many development projects that empower women politically, economically and socially. We observe this as a reality through the presence of women in leading positions such as ministers, judges, ambassadors and governors. In addition, the Women's Affairs Unit has taken many programs and projects that target the policies and laws related to the rights and needs of women in order to change them for the better. The most important program being undertaken by the Ministry is a program on gender equality and the empowerment of women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, known as "MDC" or "M" moreover, the project "Tawassol" (intercommunication) is also considered one of the most important projects carried out by the Ministry that contributes to the empowerment of rural women by strengthening cooperation and communication among different institutions in order to assess the needs of women in different villages and to propose development projects as needed.

The elimination of all forms of violence against women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is considered to be one of the key issues that we are working to achieve and it is contained in the national project aimed at empowering Palestinian women to play a prominent and equal role with men in the process of building our State and its institutions. In this context, it should be noted that the Palestinian Government has adopted a national strategic plan for nine years aimed at eradicating all forms of violence against women.

In conclusion, Madam Chair, we fully affirm our commitment and our support of international instruments and norms relating to women's issues, and we hope that the United Nations, including the Commission on Women, will continue its support of the Palestinian people in implementing their national plans and programs, particularly those aimed at improving women's conditions and for their empowerment. We also call upon the international community to continue to support our people in their legitimate struggle to end the Israeli occupation and achieve the independence of our Palestinian State on the basis of the pre-1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Thank you, Madam Chair.