

Statement by Mr. Ammar Hijazi, First Secretary, Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations, before the 18th Session of the United Nations Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD 18) – Waste Management Thematic Discussion, 6 May 2010.

Mr. Chairman,

We are discussing one of the most basic elements of a functional society; waste management. In fact, the provision of this service is not only an integral requirement of development but also a government's obligation towards its citizens as this service directly impacts the quality of life of population, including its health standard.

One of the most immediate challenges that confronted the Palestinian Authority at its inception was the beleaguered state of this sector, due to decades of wilful negligence by the occupying Power. In some governorates, the occupying Power had left tens of thousands of residents without any waste management infrastructure. 16 years on, this sectors remains far behind the needs of the population and drawn plans of the Palestinian Authority; due once again to the reality of occupation.

The execution of any waste management project in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is an especially cumbersome process as it is often indefinitely suspended while the occupation authorities procrastinate and find pretexts to reject or delay them.

The situation is worst in the Gaza Strip, where the entire population is drinking unsafe water that has been contaminated by raw sewage and solid waste because the occupying Power bans the entry of spare parts to repair the destroyed, overextended and insufficient infrastructure and refuse to allow the entry of equipment needed for the collection and appropriate treatment of solid and hazardous waste. In 2007, this unjustified ban resulted in tragedy, when an entire neighbourhood was flooded with raw sewage, killing, injuring, and displacing hundreds of civilians.

The upkeep and development of this sector is also most difficult as the occupying Power has made of waste treatment plants a constant military target, especially in Gaza. This contamination was compounded following Israel's brutal war on Gaza a year ago. Recently, UNEP concluded that agricultural grounds areas targeted by the military assaults were most likely contaminated. OCHA has also reported that the large amounts of rubble resulting from the latest war on Gaza could potentially contain asbestos or other hazardous chemical substances, such as persistent and/or bio-accumulating carcinogenic substances, constituting additional environmental and health risks. Yet, Israeli occupation continues to deny the execution of crucial projects and import of required equipment to remove this rubble and dispose safely of the waste.

Another reality adding to the burdens of this sector is the occupation authorities' illegal use of Palestinian land in the West Bank as dumping grounds for the untreated sewage and other solid waste of illegal Israel settlements. This also includes untreated chemical and industrial waste from hundreds of factories host in the illegal Israeli settlements. This unmonitored and unregulated dumping of sewage, hazardous and chemical waste from illegal Israeli settlements in the Occupied West Bank poses a direct and unmistakable threat to Palestinian lives, their environment, crops, and scarce underground water resources. In fact, environmental agencies

have already documented the heavy damage to biodiversity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the dramatic loss of green lands due to this policy.

This pollution is further compounded by the complacency of the occupying Power with its local Israeli companies that illegally and unsafely use West Bank land as dumping grounds for over 10,000 tons of solid and other waste from within Israel, in a clear violation of the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal. In one case, the largest stone mine in the West Bank was turned into dumping ground for these wastes. Meanwhile, occupation authorities have severely curtailed the Palestinian Authority's ability to dispose solid and other waste properly, at times forcing it to create dumping sites that are dangerously close to populated areas.

As I said in the beginning, the issue of waste disposal and management is not only relevant to development; it is crucial to the sustenance of life. Hence, with the unique reality of occupation having such a severe impact on this vital sector, we believe it is imperative the CSD attach due attention to it. This is not an attempt to inject politics in a debate where it does not belong. The issues and problems I have just outlined are not caused by unknown factors; rather, they are the clear and direct result of a reality neither chosen nor wanted by the people it devastates. Our common goals at the CSD are hence sufficiently essential to mobilize us into attention, action, and proactive involvement.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.