

Statement by Ammar Hijazi, First Secretary, Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations at the Thematic Discussion on Agriculture and Rural Development (CSD-16), New York , Tuesday 6 May 2008

Madam Chair,

The Palestinian People share the same challenges the developing world face but as a people living under foreign occupation, they also face unique challenges and have equally specific needs in the area of agriculture. In fact, agriculture is an area where Palestinians face tremendous hardships. They struggle to ensure unobstructed use of their lands and resources while being deprived of all control over import and export, movement of agriculture goods, and points of entry.

Allow me here to shed some light onto the tragic reality Palestinian farmers face on daily basis. Since the year 2000, the bulldozers and tanks of the occupation army uprooted and destroyed over a million and a half olive trees in the occupied Palestinian Territory, including Occupied East Jerusalem. Concurrent with this destructive behavior, the occupation authorities also confiscated 560 thousand dunams of olive groves, threatening one of Palestine's most important agricultural products. In the same period as well, the systematic actions and policies of the occupation have ensured that the Palestinian agriculture sector regresses beyond repair in some areas; like razing fruit trees to near extinction in some areas and destroying the irrigation systems and water pipes produce depend on.

Additionally the Occupying Power is now using 40% of the West Bank for Israeli-only infrastructure, depriving Palestinians from the West Bank's most fertile land and water resources. In fact, at least 230 square kilometers of the West Bank's most fertile land – constituting some 15 percent of the West Bank's agricultural land - has already been confiscated by the Israeli occupation authorities.

Across the Occupied Palestinian, thousands of dunams of parched and destroyed Palestinian fields provide painful testament to the occupation's systematic destruction of the Palestinian agriculture as a way of life and important sector of the local economy. Consequently, thousands of Palestinian families whose livelihoods were destroyed now live in the misery imposed on them by the same destructive policies, which have made of destroying Palestinian agriculture a goal achieved with devastating precision.

Gaza is now the worst hit by these destructive policies. The latest Humanitarian monitor in the OPT released by OCHA reports a 98% decline in the Gaza Strip's fishing catch between March 2008 and March 2007. This near complete collapse of a vital sector in Gaza is the direct result of nine months of siege and closure imposed on the Gaza strip. This siege has wilfully and criminally targeted every aspect of daily and economic life, severely cutting of the supply of fuel allowed into Gaza while banning spare parts and constructions material from entry into Gaza. Such severe limitations have translated into a breakdown in all sectors, starting with agriculture.

These practices are threatening the lives of the entire Gaza population. As we speak, Gaza is on brink of thirst - 70% of Gaza families receive water once every 5 days and the risks of serious pollution of drinking water and epidemics is a serious concern. Just yesterday, poultry farmers were forced to dispose of their chicks due to a lack in poultry food and fuel for heating.

Finally Madam Chair,

There is a collective international responsibility to protect the right to development for all peoples, especially the most vulnerable such as those living under occupation. This must be a global objective whose importance supersedes all political considerations. That is why the CSD must not shy away from addressing the special needs of peoples living under occupation out of fear of being accused of politicization, which I must stress is nothing more than a pretext to obstruct defending the occupied peoples' right to development. Like all other peoples, peoples under occupation also deserve to live a decent and dignified life that empowers them to work towards achieving the Millennium development Goals.

Thank you Madam Chair,