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## ROUNDTABLE PRESENTATION

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### ENDING THE ISRAELI OCCUPATION

When addressing this situation, it is necessary to start the analysis from the beginning of the negotiations. As you are probably aware, we started to negotiate with Israel in 1993, after the signing of the Oslo agreement.

Since then, and for almost seventeen years now, the negotiations with Israel have been in progress, having made, however, very little progress in establishing a state for Palestine.

We had been promised by President Bush that by 2008 the Palestinian state would come back to life. However, we are currently in 2010, far beyond 2008, and back to zero. This is due to the fact that, all of a sudden, the most extreme right wing government is in power, a government which has declared that they no longer recognize anything signed previously.

Having refused to recognize all previous agreements, they state that the Palestinians had imposed conditions before the beginning of negotiations. They have continued, of course, to build settlements throughout the past seventeen years. Not only that, but they have already started to build walls in the area. The wall they have built is similar to the Berlin wall, but three times higher. If you could see it for yourself, it is much different than I describe. Even I was shocked the first time I saw it. In Gaza, life can be compared to a twilight zone, as if it is not real. There is this wall running like a snake around every part of the West Bank. Not to mention the continuous destruction of the various previously existing walls. In Jerusalem now, they want to destroy hundreds of walls claiming that they were built illegally.

In addition to all the above, two months ago Netanyahu claimed that there are seventy thousand Palestinians who have entered the West Bank on permits, illegally. I personally, do not understand how Palestinians can be considered illegal in their own homeland.

Furthermore, there is the problem of the confiscation of land: nearly sixty percent of the land in the West Bank is now under Israeli occupation. A number of killings take place by the Israelis every single day. I will give you some numbers concerning this fact, which are particularly shocking. Most of you probably know that in the last year, during the war in Gaza, the Israelis

killed one thousand five hundred and injured five thousand people. Since the end of the war and up until now, Israel has killed in total five hundred people in the West Bank and Gaza.

When the Israelis attacked the ships in the sea, I was neither shocked nor surprised. Would you like to know why? It might have been the first time that the world witnessed these kinds of atrocities by the Israelis, but I see these types of crimes every day in the Palestinian territories, and their occurrence has been documented. Every day killings of Palestinians take place - they have become the targets of the Israelis.

There is no doubt that the situation in the West Bank was extremely dramatic, but it presented a different kind of siege, in comparison to Gaza. Every town was in siege. Throughout the West Bank, which is almost the size of Cyprus, there are almost five hundred military blocks. Imagine driving around Cyprus, and having to stop five hundred times. There is no way that developments can be made when the situation is like this. Even the United Nations are having difficulties. After the continuous development of Europe, and with hundreds of millions worth of funding from Europe and the United States, we could not make any progress in any sector, because of all of the obstacles mentioned above, and this is the situation until today.

Now, I will go back to Gaza, and I will tell you a story. Since 1948, eighty percent of Gaza has consisted of refugees. Almost sixty percent of Gaza is populated just by children. That is sixty percent of one and a half million. People have elected Hamas, due to frustration at the lack of progress with the peace process. They thought that if they elected extremism, then this would provide them with a solution. Most of the people of Gaza are less educated than others, because of their economic situation. This is how they perceive things, they have not elected Hamas because they actually support it and agree with its political positions, but because it represents an alternative option, totally different than the others that had produced no results. Seventeen years of very disappointing and depressing results have gone by, and no progress took place in their economic lives or in their aspirations.

During the last UN meeting I attended, Cyprus declared: "This is it. By the end of this year, if there are no results, then we will stop negotiations." Cyprus has been in negotiations for three or four years. We, however, have been in negotiations for seventeen years, and yet no results! People still blame us though, and say that we should go back to negotiations after seventeen years of lies and jokes. Is this situation acceptable for the international community?

Gaza has been under siege for three years now. Starvation and sicknesses decimate the area's population, sixty percent of which are children. Half of these children, as stated by the World Health Organization, are anaemic, and suffer from malnutrition. Only ten percent of the water in Gaza is suitable for human consumption, because Israel has destroyed the whole of the infrastructure. Not only this, but they have refused to allow water installations and clinical supplies to arrive from international aid organizations, thus resulting in the slow death of the people.

The international community is represented by fifty nations, seventeen of which are members of the parliament of the European Union. There is a continuous deception on the part of Israel, and a quiet massacre of people takes place. Citizens are not only being killed by weapons, but they are being killed slowly and deceptively, without anyone knowing about it. The international

activists are extremely aware of this situation, but as far as anyone else is concerned, the world lives in ignorance.

Do you know what we call Gaza when we want to joke about it? We compare it to the twilight zone. There is no other place on earth like it. Twenty four hours in Gaza is worse than living under ground, or even in a grave for six months. I can describe the situation to you, but you will never understand what I am talking about, unless you witness it with your own eyes, and realize how miserable it is being under siege. It is like the biggest jail on earth. You feel like you are choking. It is not just about being in jail. Every day Israel attacks us in any way possible. One day they will be attacking, and the next day, for example, they will refuse to let flour go into Gaza, or stop supplies of energy arriving. Every day, they want the people to feel like miserable and tortured citizens, and lead them to desperation. It is definitely a nightmare to live there.

Now, I would like to deal with the attitude of Israel, and its intentions. They are being very deceptive towards the international community, and claim to have left Gaza, refusing to talk about it. The truth here is revealed by the recent events with the ships to Gaza. The peaceful activists want to get some food to the people, but Israel immediately stops it. If Israel says that Gaza is not under occupation, then why are they stopping those boats from coming in?

They want the siege to continue forever, and to punish people for electing Hamas. However, the root of the problem is not Hamas. These are just the “symptoms” of the “sickness”. The “sickness” is the refusal of Israel to meet the conditions. They left Gaza as a prison, and they took the keys with them. The keys are the siege, and they have locked everything. Even though they have deceived the world that they have left Gaza, they have still got the keys to the jail. They control the wall, and they control the borders. They control everything, but they still claim that they have ended the occupation.

Of course, there is much more to say about the situation there, but I think that I have given you a brief, but concise image of what is going on, and I hope that you realize the tragedy of the situation.

In conclusion, I would like to tell you that I lived in The United States for sixteen years, where I was educated, and worked as a businessman. Just a few minutes ago, while watching TV, it was reported that Helen Thomas, who is the most famous reporter in the White House, 89 years old, has resigned because of a statement she made yesterday. I know of this reporter very well, having lived in Washington, and every President admired and respected her. I was shocked by the news of her resignation, but then I understood, when I heard the nature of the statement she made. She stated that the Israelis should leave Palestine! I thought at first that she was talking about the West Bank, and Gaza, but she was talking about the whole of Palestine. When asked what she meant, she said that they should go back to Germany and Poland. You may wonder why she has said this, but it is because the international community is fed up of this entity which is continually breaking international laws, and having such a lack of respect for human life. Not only that, but the world community is fed up of these double standards. Israel has been playing victim for sixty two years now. The most powerful nation of this sea is playing the victim, and this is very difficult to understand because there is so much hypocrisy. In this international community, the biggest demonstration of continuous lies, hypocrisy, double standards takes place on the part of Israel, which continues to attack innocent people, whilst claiming to be the victims of the situation.

Have you ever seen Israel, once admit having even the minimum element of responsibility for their actions in killing anybody? This has never happened, not in any occasion, or under any circumstances. They left Lebanon in 1992 completely destroyed, killing perhaps a hundred thousand people, but have never once, however, acknowledged having any responsibility, or apologized for this.

The international community has the responsibility not to allow oppressive forces to destroy world peace and international security, and to force them to end occupation. You cannot leave this decision up to them. I think that it is also a war crime to remain silent, when you witness the killings of all these people. What is happening in Gaza is the slow massacre of children and women, who are already suffering from malnutrition and various sicknesses. We have to consider whether this is really acceptable.

I think that I have given you enough of an insight to the real situation in Gaza, and have opened your eyes to the truth.

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