

Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon General Assembly

11 May 2009

Address to the 63rd Session of the General Assembly on the 60th Anniversary of Israel's Admission

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

With each passing year, we come closer to our past. Every year brings with it momentous anniversaries of events that shaped our world. For example, we have recently marked the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II and of the United Nations itself. These two events, inextricably linked, form the basis of what we have come to know as the modern era, the post-war era.

For me, as Secretary-General, looking back on where the UN started and where it is now has a special importance, for I am now charged with guiding the world body through unknown and uncertain territory. "Terrorism" has long since replaced "arms control" and "détente" as the focus of international security, yet the term defies definition. One country's terrorist is another country's revolutionary hero. Some insist that terrorists are opposed to democracy, but we have all seen democracies behave like terrorists.

In many ways, the world today does not seem to be very removed from the barbarity of world war. The invasion of Iraq has lasted longer than World War II, and more tons of bombs have been dropped on that poor country than all the bombs dropped in that great war. The International Declaration of Human Rights, so prized and venerated by men and women of honour everywhere, stands as an impotent relic of a forgotten time because conquest, cruelty, and arrogance are still with us and growing stronger.

For all of the good the UN has accomplished since its founding, and there have been successes, the sheer magnitude of human suffering and violations of international law that have occurred and are still occurring must also be taken into account.

Few people know that Israel is the only state to be given a conditional admission. Under General Assembly Resolution 273, Israel was admitted on the condition that it grant all Palestinians the right to return to their homes and receive compensation for lost or damaged property. This provision is embedded in UNGA *Resolution 194*.

Suffice to say, Israel has never lived up to those terms, and never intended to. For 60 years Israel has violated its terms of admission, and for 60 years the UN has done nothing about it. It has watched as Israel heaped misery upon misery on Palestine, and violated international law with impunity.

After "Operation Cast Lead," no person, no country, no democracy can look at Israel without thinking of the inhuman slaughter and destruction committed by the axis powers in World War II, though one could have said the same about numerous past massacres. What atrocities might the world have been spared if the UN had refused to admit Israel 60 years ago?

Of course, the immediate post-war world was a different time. The world had just witnessed the horrors of Hitler's racist excesses, and collective Western guilt for the Holocaust dictated attitudes toward the idea of a Jewish state. Even the UN could not withstand the moral pressure. On Nov. 29, 1947, it passed General Assembly Resolution 181, "The Partition Plan," to carve a Jewish state out of Arab Palestine. However, it was never ratified by the Security Council, and so does not exist in law, which means the UN played no role in the creation of Israel. Nevertheless, "The Partition Plan" was utterly illegal and a violation of the UN Charter, because the UN had no right or power to take land from one people and give it to another.

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If it hopes to play a meaningful role in the 21st century, the UN must do more than simply promise to enact reforms. It must search deep within its soul to redress the fundamental violations of its founding principles, which have long since ceased to have any force. That recommitment must begin now, for it was 60 years ago today, May 11, 1949, that Israel became a member of the UN. The UN cannot hope to achieve any measure of peace or justice as long as it condones war crimes, which it does every day that Israel is allowed to flout its terms of admission.

The past cannot be undone, but the future can change. As its newly elected Secretary-General, I promise that the UN will no longer be a passive enabler of genocide. Therefore, I will ask the General Assembly to meet in special session at the earliest possible time to strip Israel of its membership. Ordinarily, a motion to expel a member nation would have to come at the recommendation of the Security Council, but this is not an ordinary motion. Because Israel is in violation of its terms of admission, it is not a member in good standing, so the UN has every right to declare General Assembly Resolution 273 null and void. Since Israel's membership depends on adherence to that resolution, its expulsion is automatic.

Essentially, the unavoidable, lamentable truth of the last six decades is that the UN has been a moral and political failure because it has refused to enforce its own rules and defend the Charter. Nothing the UN does will have any value as long as this illegitimate member occupies a place in the General Assembly. I want the UN to have value.

I count on your support.

Thank you very much.