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Statement by David Hersch to Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on International Relations and Cooperation on the Palestinian Bid for full membership in the United Nations

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Chairman, Mr HT Magama, members of the committee, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank you for the invitation and opportunity to address your committee on this important subject.

I am South African. I was born in the Free State, grew up in Thaba 'Nchu, educated at St Andrew's School, Bloemfontein, and the University of Cape Town. Dumelang.

I am Jewish. I am a retired businessman and former broadcaster. I am a regular visitor to Israel and have travelled the length and breadth of that tiny country many times and whilst I have more than the average experience, I do not claim to be an expert.

I do not represent anyone except myself and in no way can it be or should it be construed that I speak on behalf of the Israeli Government or its Embassy in South Africa or the local Jewish community and its official bodies and organisations.

1. My position on the Palestinian bid for full membership of the United Nations or even an upgrade to non-membership from observer status is that I am totally against it. **What we see happening is an attempt to gain legitimacy by stealth and to abuse the United Nations, its systems, committees and sub-committees to propagate the Palestinian's agenda and war by other means against the legitimate and recognised State of Israel**, a member state of the United Nations. In so doing, the Palestinians hope to avoid the required direct negotiations for peace as laid out in the Oslo Accords and other agreements signed between the Palestinians and Israel.
2. Palestine is not a state and will not be one in the foreseeable future. If and when it becomes a state through direct negotiations and making peace with Israel, then and only then can it be regarded as legitimately deserving of membership of the United Nations. Granting it full membership without being a state opens a Pandora's box, undermines the United Nations and sets a very bad precedent that will come back to haunt it.
3. Accompanying the Palestinian attempt to enhance its status within the United Nations is also the application by the Palestinian Authority to unilaterally declare independence, thus avoiding direct negotiations with Israel. **If the ANC before 1994 had taken the same approach, this country might still be at war and in ruin and thousands of people may be dead and wounded. The road to peace can only be built on a foundation of mutual recognition and direct dialogue. This is South Africa's great achievement and example to the world.** If the South African government deviates from this, it will be hypocritical, cynical and disloyal to its history and principles. It would mean that everything the ANC stood for was a lie.
4. Allow me another analogy. Let us hypothetically assume the Western Cape decides to approach the United Nations with a view to declaring itself independent from the rest of South Africa and similarly does so to avoid direct negotiations with the recognised government of South Africa, what would this government's response and view be? Its response would be obvious, like Israel it would oppose it vehemently. Similarly, not only for logical reasons, but also for legal reasons, this must be the South African

Government's response to the Palestinian's applications to the United Nations. It cannot and should not support the Palestinians in its' current applications to the United Nations.

5. It is well known that the ANC and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) shared offices over many years as clients of the former USSR. Whilst the ANC was a genuine liberation movement, this cannot be said of the PLO, in spite of its name. No one but the Palestinians have denied themselves independence on numerous occasions since 1948.
6. **After seventeen years it is also time that the South African Government took a mature approach to world affairs and reconsidered where its best interests lie.** It is a fact that in international relations there are no friends, only interests. It is in the South African Governments best interests to take a balanced and fair approach, consider whether they really have a contribution to make to this conflict and to look to the best interests and welfare of its own citizens.
7. South Africa's approach on this matter must also be based on what is best for both parties and certainly not on past friendships and loyalties. This is the honest and only approach. In the words of the Greek playwright Euripides, though many have said something similar, "Those whom God wishes to destroy, he first deprives of their senses."

Those who willfully misinterpret events in the Middle East are setting up their own destruction. Israel logically does not choose to join them in this endeavor.

8. The Palestinians have recently claimed that settlements are the core cause of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is a nonsensical assertion considering that the conflict was raging for nearly a half century before a single settlement sprung up in the West Bank (Judea and Samaria). From 1948 until 1967, the West Bank was part of Jordan, and Gaza was part of Egypt. The Arab world did not lift a finger to create a Palestinian state. And it sought Israel's annihilation when not a single settlement stood anywhere in the West Bank or Gaza. The people that lived in the West Bank and Gaza also made no attempt, nor did they express any desire for independence.
9. It is a well known fact of history that the Arabs and Palestinians have always rejected every opportunity offered them since 1948 to achieve independence. The international community has called on the Palestinians to go back to direct negotiations. Israel has accepted the principles outlined by the Quartet to restart direct negotiations immediately, without preconditions. Israel is now waiting for the Palestinians to do the same. The Palestinians have in recent years rejected every opportunity to negotiate a peace settlement. When we speak about Palestinians, we refer here to the Palestinian Authority only and not Hamas in Gaza, who reject any form of peace with Israel and only seek its destruction.
10. Sustainable peace must be negotiated directly. It must be nurtured. It must be anchored in security. It must take root in homes, schools and media that teach tolerance and understanding, so that it can grow in hearts and minds. It must be built on a foundation of younger generations that understand the compromises necessary for peace. A brighter future in Israel and Palestine must be forged from within, when both parties are open and honest about the challenges before them - and resolute in their determination to meet them together.
11. A democratic state cannot be built on the basis of calling terrorists "freedom fighters". There cannot truly be interest in compromise with Israel when the Palestinians continue to urge and justify the deliberate murder of its civilians. The Palestinians themselves are not united and certainly do not have the infrastructure and real will to achieve peace and compromise. The Palestinian Authority's recent agreement with Hamas, regarded correctly internationally as a terrorist entity, makes the recognition of a Palestinian state even more problematic.

12. **The many issues that remain outstanding can only and will only be resolved in direct negotiations between the parties. Israel's peace with Egypt was negotiated, not imposed. Israel's peace with Jordan was negotiated, not imposed. Israeli-Palestinian peace must be negotiated. It cannot be imposed. The Palestinians' unilateral action at the United Nations is no path to real statehood. It is a march of folly. It is for our government to be wise and mature and not aid and abet this folly.**
13. Israel's right to peace, security, sovereignty, economic development and maritime freedom, its very right to exist, has been and continues to be forcibly denied and aggressively attacked. This is the true origin of the tensions which torment the Israeli-Palestinian issues. All the other elements of the conflict are the consequences of this single cause. The so-called "Arab Spring" aside, which Israel has absolutely nothing to do with, is a danger and there is still peril in the Middle East because of Israel's existence, sovereignty and vital interests, which have been and are continuously violently assailed.
14. Raising the status of the Palestinians in the United Nations will be a retrogressive step and would create conditions for renewed hostilities. If this occurs and South Africa played a part in it, what would this government say? Would this government even care? What would each one of you think? South Africa's approach should not facilitate a backwards move to belligerency, but rather a forward move to a genuine peace.
15. What the General Assembly should prescribe is not a formula for renewed hostilities, but a series of principles for the construction of a new future in Israel and Palestine. History summons us all forward to a permanent peace and the peace we all envisage can only be elaborated in frank and lucid direct dialogue between Israel and the Palestinians. Israel has had to live with intermediate arrangements which are neither war nor peace. Such patchwork ideas carry within themselves the seeds of future tragedy and it is not for South Africa to be involved nor complicit in yet another war in the Middle East.
16. Time does not allow a full analysis of this vast and complex subject, but the South African Government is urged to take a balanced, knowledgeable and wise view on the issue.
17. To this end may I suggest that this committee seriously consider a visit to Israel to properly familiarise itself with the issues and the geo-political situation. May I invite this committee to visit Israel and the Palestinian areas where they will not only see the geographical issues and complexities, but also meet with all parties, but also meet with experts, analysts and members of government on both sides. I would be willing to assist in this endeavour and accompany this committee to Israel to assist wherever I can.

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