

**Statement by Mr. Rabii Al Hantouli, First Secretary, on the participation of the State of Palestine in the Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, New York, July 31, 2012:**

(Check against delivery)

Mr. President,

At the outset, I would like to extend on behalf of Palestine our sincere congratulations to you on your assumption of the Presidency. Participation in this Conference, as well as in numerous other conferences organized by the United Nations, and taking into account the importance and wide range of issues discussed, is open to all States, not only Member States of the United Nations. Therefore, Palestine, which became a Member State of one of the UN specialized agencies, and according to the rules of procedure and previous practices of the United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, has fully participated in this Conference, taking its rightful seat alongside the other participating States.

Mr. President,

Respectful of time limits, I will not get into further discussion and reply as to whether Palestine is a State or not; this is not the appropriate place for that. This issue is settled for us - Palestine is a State recognized by 132 countries in the world and is a full Member State of the Arab League, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Group of 77 and China and the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), and is also a Member State of the Organization of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The only problem is that the State of Palestine is still under foreign occupation, and Israel, the occupying Power, and few other countries, continue to refuse this reality, and to obstruct the Palestinian right to freedom and other inalienable human rights.

Israel persists in its occupation of the Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, since 1967 and continues to confiscate land and build illegal settlements and the apartheid wall, violating international law and relevant resolutions of the United Nations, thus aborting all the efforts and undermining the chances of reaching a just and comprehensive peace based on the two-State solution.

Mr. President,

The Palestinian leadership has adopted the approach of peace negotiation for more than 21 years and this approach remains its chosen path for reaching an agreement on the final status issues in order to achieve just and comprehensive peace. But it should be clear to all that we do not negotiate our rights, especially the right to self-determination and independence of our State.

The full participation of the State of Palestine in this Conference constitutes a reaffirmation of the support, will and efforts of the international community to achieve just, lasting and comprehensive peace based on two-State solution on the basis of pre-1967 borders and recognition of the long-overdue rights of the Palestinian people.

We look forward to positive and effective participation in the work of this Conference, to which Palestine has submitted a report on developments and achievements related to the work of the National Committee on Geographical Names.

Thank you Mr. President.