

It is high time for world states including Ireland to recognise the state of Palestine and to support its accession to the United Nations , writes **HIKMAT AJJURI**

ON SEPTEMBER 20th, President Mahmoud Abbas will make a formal application for United Nations membership for the state of Palestine. If successful, Palestine will be the 194th member of the UN. We have been told by Israel and others it is somehow inappropriate for us to take our case for statehood to the UN, but it is hard to imagine a more relevant matter for the UN to act upon, considering the UN charter enshrines the principles of self-determination and respect for nations' sovereignty.

Article 1 of the charter says one of "the purposes of the UN" is "to develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples". How can self-determination and statehood for the Palestinian people not be an appropriate agenda item for the UN?

Israel's own legitimacy as a state is derived from UN General Assembly Resolution 181, passed on November 29th, 1947. The role of the UN in the birth of Israel is acknowledged in the Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel on May 14th, 1948: "On the 29th November, 1947, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution calling for the establishment of a Jewish state in Eretz-Israel; the General Assembly required the inhabitants of Eretz-Israel to take such steps as were necessary on their part for the implementation of that resolution. This recognition by the UN of the right of the Jewish people to establish their State is irrevocable."

If the UN had a role in the creation of the Israeli state, how can it be inappropriate for it now to have a role in that of a Palestinian state? The right of the Palestinian people to an independent, sovereign state has awaited implementation for 64 years. It is a long overdue debt owed by the international community to our people.

When the British government sought to terminate its mandate in Palestine in 1947, the international community, through the UN, recommended a solution to the conflict between immigrant Jewish communities and the indigenous Palestinian Arabs. That solution, contained in UN General Assembly Resolution 181, called for the creation of two states, with Jerusalem under international control. Today, however, only one state, Israel, exists and is a full member of the UN.

In 1988, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) declared the establishment of the state of Palestine in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, that is, in just 22 per cent of our historic homeland. By limiting our national aspirations to this extent, the PLO made a historic compromise in the interest of peace.

From then on, the way has been open for a two-state solution, a Palestinian state in 22 per cent of mandate Palestine, with Israel continuing to exist in the other 78 per cent – but this generous gesture by Palestinians has never been reciprocated by Israel.

It continues to occupy the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which it has illegally annexed. It continues to expand its settlements on stolen Palestinian land, contrary to Article 49 (6) of the Fourth Geneva Convention – in 1993, there were about 150,000 Jewish settlers: today, there are more than 500,000. This is undermining the viability of a Palestinian state.

The Palestinian leadership wants a negotiated two-state solution, but Israel refuses to negotiate on a realistic basis.

In February 2009, during his election campaign, Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu said he would “not withdraw from one inch” of territory.

In his speech to the US Congress on May 24th this year, he set preconditions that would make a viable Palestinian state impossible, saying no to a return to the 1967 borders, no to military withdrawal from the Jordan river (so a future Palestinian state would be completely encircled by Israeli armed forces), no to a Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem, and no to even a symbolic return of some refugees. There cannot be realistic negotiations for an independent and viable Palestinian state when Israel lays down preconditions such as these.

The internationally approved framework for negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians is the road map, drawn up by the Quartet in 2003 and endorsed by the Security Council. It was accepted by Israel in May 2003. Under the road map, Israel was supposed to freeze all settlement activity prior to the start of negotiations. Israel has categorically refused to fulfil this obligation.

The territory which is supposed to belong one day to a Palestinian state is being steadily eaten into by Jewish colonisation.

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs Eamon Gilmore told the Dáil on July 13th: “The continuing Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian territories is at the heart of the unresolved Arab-Israeli conflict . . . It is the continuing occupation, and the creation and growth of illegal settlements on the occupied lands, which are now the major obstacles to peace.”

Now is the time for the international community, including Ireland, to help us overcome these obstacles by recognising the state of Palestine on the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, and by supporting its admission to UN membership.

By these steps the international community would reaffirm its commitment to a Palestinian state being established in this territory and would re-emphasise that Israel has no valid claim to any part of this territory, which it took over by force in 1967. This conforms to the long-established principle of international law that the acquisition of territory by military conquest is inadmissible, as the Security Council has stated on many occasions in relation to Palestine.

Recognition of the state of Palestine is not a substitute for negotiations. Rather, it increases the possibility of reaching a just and lasting peace based on the terms of reference accepted by the international community as the basis for resolving the conflict.

Dr Hikmat Ajjuri is the Palestinian ambassador to Ireland