

PALESTINE

Mr. President,

Excellences,

Ambassadors, and

Colleagues

It is my honor to attend this conference representing my country Palestine, the holy land, the land of prophets Zachariah, John the Baptist and Jesus Christ, peace upon them.

As you are fully aware Mr. President, conflict on this land is still prevails. This is the holiest place for Christians, it is the place of Baptism with an area of one million square meter and it is the exact place of Christ Baptism by John the Baptist. 300 thousand Christian pilgrims visit this place, which has eight churches filled with 2600 anti-tank mines and 1200 anti-person mines, in addition to war UXO until now. **The time has come to be cleared of mines and returns it to its old status of a pilgrimage destination.** My government has agreed to clear the mines, and based on figures released by Holy Trust, this process will cost \$ 4 million, to be collected from churches. It will not be feasible because of the lack of pledgers.

Therefore, I wish upon you to seek for one of the donor countries to adopt this project. Taking into consideration that we have cleared three mine fields in the holy city of Bethlehem of an area of 40 acres. Therefore, we were able to clear a total of five mine fields in the Palestinian territories with an area of 117 thousand square meters that contained 717 mines of several sizes. We like to take this opportunity to thank the donors, especially New Zealand for their continuous support and contribution to our Center's budget, in addition to the United States, Great Britain and Netherlands for their clearing efforts and pledges.

We also like to inform you Mr. President that our government has signed the Cluster Agreement, and currently examining signing the Ottawa Agreement upon finalizing and overcoming some legal issues. We also like to inform you that we are seeking to issue a special mines law in the state of Palestine. We are hopeful within a year we will complete the legal procedures and present the draft law to the Legislative Council for endorsement, followed by the President signing. We realize the urgency of clearing many mine fields in the Palestinian territories because of the a proximity of some of the mine fields to residential areas, **where in some areas the distance between mine fields and residential homes is less than three meters.** Those mine fields pose a threat and grave danger to the lives of innocents. Those mine fields are scattered over a stretch of geographical area, such as: Soreef area, Yabad, Qabatia and Arraba. We hope with the generous funds from donors that we are able to continue our clearing efforts, despite the ongoing conflict, to free the Palestinian territories from all mine fields.

Thank you Mr. President