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Sixty-third session

57th plenary meeting

Monday, 24 November 2008, 3 p.m.

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Official Records

President: Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann. (Nicaragua)

The meeting was called to order at 3.30 p.m.

Agenda item 64

Promotion and protection of human rights

Draft resolution (A/63/L.31)

The President: Before we proceed, I would like to inform Member States that, on behalf of the entire membership, representatives of all regional groups — Algeria, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Germany and Indonesia — were appointed as facilitators by the President of the General Assembly in connection with draft resolution before us today. As a result, no more sponsors will be accepted for draft resolution A/63/L.31.

(spoke in Spanish)

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/63/L.31, entitled “Commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights”.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/63/L.31?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 63/25).

The President *(spoke in Spanish):* The General Assembly has concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 64.

Agenda item 16

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/63/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/63/368)

Draft resolutions (A/63/L.32, A/63/L.33, A/63/L.34 and A/63/L.35)

Statement by the President

The President: I am pleased to open this plenary meeting, in which we take up the question of Palestine. This morning, with heavy hearts, we observed the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. I joined His Excellency Ambassador Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to voice our ongoing concern about the terrible situation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and to express our solidarity with that long-suffering people.

We heard the comprehensive report of the Chairman on the current situation of Palestinians living under occupation. As well, the Secretary-General summarized the complex initiatives that are being undertaken by the international community to move forward peace talks and the establishment of the Palestinian State. I urged the international community to raise its voice against the collective punishment of the people of Gaza, a policy that we cannot tolerate.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.



We demand an end to that massive abuse of human rights and call on Israel, the occupying Power, to allow humanitarian and other supplies to enter the Gaza Strip without delay.

I spoke this morning about apartheid and how Israeli policies in the occupied Palestinian territories appear so similar to the apartheid of an earlier era a continent away. I believe it is very important that we in the United Nations use that term. We must not be afraid to call something what it is. It is the United Nations, after all, that adopted the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid, making clear to the entire world that such practices of official discrimination must be outlawed wherever they occur.

We heard today from a representative of South African civil society. We know that civil society organizations all around the world are working to defend Palestinian rights and are trying to protect the Palestinian population, which we, the United Nations, are failing to protect. More than 20 years ago, we in the United Nations took the lead from civil society when we agreed that sanctions were required to provide a non-violent means of pressuring South Africa to end its violations. Today, perhaps we in the United Nations should consider following the lead of a new generation of civil society, who are calling for a similar non-violent campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions to pressure Israel to end its violations.

I have attended a great many meetings on the rights of the Palestinian people. I am amazed at how people continue to insist on patience while our brothers and sisters are being crucified. Patience is a virtue in which I believe, but there is nothing virtuous about being patient with the suffering of others. We must endeavour, with all our heart, to put an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people.

I have great love for the Jewish people, and that has been true all my life. I have never hesitated to condemn the crimes of the Holocaust or any of the many abuses committed against our Jewish brothers and sisters. However, their suffering does not give anyone the right to abuse others, especially those who historically have such deep and exemplary relations with the Jewish people.

Having said that, I would like to remind our Israeli brothers and sisters that, even though they have the protective shield of the United States in the

Security Council, no amount of arm twisting and intimidation will change resolution 181 (II), which was adopted 61 years ago and called for the creation of two States. Shamefully, there is no Palestinian State to celebrate today, and the prospects are as distant as ever. All explanations notwithstanding, that central fact makes a mockery of the United Nations and gravely hurts its image and prestige. How can we continue like that? I urge the international community to defuse the political deadlock that cynically perpetuates that hatred, isolation and abuse. Our solidarity must prompt concrete action to realize those elusive rights, which most of us can take for granted.

(spoke in Spanish)

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Paul Badji of Senegal, who will speak in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Mr. Badji (Senegal) *(spoke in French)*: I would like, at the outset, on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to most sincerely thank all who participated this morning in the special meeting held to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. On that solemn occasion, the importance and urgency of achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine was forcefully and unanimously reaffirmed. There was also considerable support for the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights.

Before I introduce the four draft resolutions that the Committee has prepared under the agenda item under consideration, I should like to make some brief remarks with regard to the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory and on developments in the political process.

One year ago, the international community as a whole welcomed the holding of an international conference at Annapolis convened by the United States of America to follow up an initiative by the Quartet. The Conference led to the resumption of the political process between Israelis and Palestinians and elicited an unprecedented level of political, economic and financial support by the international community for the Palestinian Authority, and subsequently led to substantial pledges at the donors' conference held in Paris in December 2007. The Committee joined the groundswell to relaunch the peace process and, in the

context of its programme of work, worked to establish an environment conducive to advancing permanent status negotiations.

Under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Secretariat's Division for Palestinian Rights organized three major international meetings in 2008. The Palestinian Reform and Development Plan was at the heart of the debate that took place at the United Nations seminar on assistance to the Palestinian people held in February 2008 at Amman, during which donors were encouraged to become active participants in the implementation of the Plan. The seminar also made it possible to undertake an assessment of the numerous obstacles impeding the achievement of that goal, namely, the hundreds of checkpoints and the routine closure of the occupied Palestinian territory, which stifle economic development, the expansion of settlements and the construction of the wall on Palestinian land, which further fragments the West Bank.

The delegation that represented the Committee at the seminar took up the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, during a meeting with the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Jordan. Following the Amman seminar, a delegation of the Committee visited two refugee camps in Jordan and obtained first-hand knowledge of the living conditions of its inhabitants.

The United Nations International Conference on Palestine Refugees, which was organized by the Committee in April at the Paris headquarters of UNESCO, took up the issue of the many Palestinians forced to live for over 60 years in refugee camps in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. Participants at the Conference stressed the fact that a durable solution to the Palestine refugee problem and to the Israeli Palestinian conflict could only be achieved if those refugees could exercise their inalienable right to return to their homes and to recover the property of which they had been deprived.

The Conference highlighted that the right of return of refugees, which is a fundamental and widely acknowledged humanitarian and human rights principle, did not diminish with the passage of time and remained fully applicable to Palestine refugees. Participants in the Conference also unreservedly supported the resumption in the political process.

However, they cautioned that any final Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement must encompass a just and fair solution to the Palestine refugee question.

The Committee's delegation took advantage of its stay in Paris to meet with officials of the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs and with French parliamentarians at the Palais Bourbon and Palais du Luxembourg. Those meetings resulted in useful exchanges of views on the role of the European Union, the United Nations and the Committee in international efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In June 2008 in Malta, the Committee held the United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine to assess difficulties impeding the parties from making progress in the peace process. Participants at the Meeting expressed particular concern about the ongoing expansion of settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and the continuation of the construction of the wall, both of which are contrary to international law and serve to prejudge, as has been pointed out numerous times, the outcome of permanent status negotiations.

While affirming that acts of violence by either side were damaging to the political dialogue, the Malta Meeting also expressed support for every effort to achieve a ceasefire. It also welcomed the important role played by European countries and encouraged them to become more active in various aspects of the political process.

The Committee's delegation to the Meeting also met with Malta's President and Minister for Foreign Affairs. On its return through Rome, it also visited Vatican City to meet with the Secretary for Relations with States of the Holy See.

I should now like to highlight an important aspect of the mandate conferred upon the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People by the General Assembly, so as to illustrate how the Committee contributes to the comprehensive efforts of the United Nations to find a peaceful solution to the question of Palestine through the establishment of a Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security.

Having listened to assessments by Palestinian and Israeli experts and the analyses made by renowned international specialists on the issue, the Committee concluded that there is a widening gap and stark

discrepancy between bilateral negotiations, the efforts of the international community and the deteriorating situation on the ground. Even more worrying are the ongoing settlement activities, the blockade of Gaza, the construction of the wall on Palestinian land, the demolition of houses in East Jerusalem, the daily incursions by the Israeli army into Palestinian areas and violence by Israeli settlers — all of which threaten to derail already fragile negotiations.

Today, one year after the Annapolis Conference, the Committee cannot but encourage the parties to continue the political process by building on the achievements. The only solution is to undertake serious negotiations on the substantive issues. At the same time, actions on the ground must change dramatically. Settlement activities must be stopped. Extremists must be brought to justice for their acts of violence. The blockade of Gaza must be lifted. The ceasefire should be maintained and expanded to the West Bank. Economic activity should be relaunched in the Palestinian territories by lifting restrictions on the movement of people and goods. Those measures will make it possible to restore confidence in the peace process and to gradually build public support among Palestinians and Israelis. That will allow the parties to take decisions, even though they may appear difficult at the moment.

The Committee believes that the basic reason for the conflict continues to be the ongoing illegal occupation of Palestinian territory. We emphasize the urgent need to find a negotiated solution that will end the occupation, ensure that the Palestinian people can exercise their inalienable rights and guarantee the security of the State of Israel. Such a settlement must be based on international law, Assembly resolution 194 (III), Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), other relevant United Nations resolutions and the principles outlined in the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The Committee continues to be extremely concerned about internal Palestinian divisions, which pose obstacles to national reconciliation and the reunification of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip under the control of the Palestinian Authority. The Committee supports efforts by Arab and other countries, as well as the initiatives of the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, aimed at restoring the national unity necessary for embarking on

the path towards a permanent settlement of the question of Palestine.

The Committee firmly believes that the United Nations should continue to maintain its permanent responsibility with regard to the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects in accordance with international legitimacy. The Committee calls on the Security Council to act decisively to implement its own resolutions regarding the question of Palestine, in particular resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). The Committee also expects that the Council — on which the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security has been conferred — will fulfil its obligations under the Charter. For its part, the Committee will continue to fulfil the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly, so as to help the Palestinian people achieve its inalienable rights.

In this context, I would now like to introduce to the General Assembly the four draft resolutions approved by the Committee and circulated under the agenda item under consideration, namely, A/63/L.32, A/63/L.33, A/63/L.34 and A/63/L.35.

The first three draft resolutions concern the work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat and the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat. Those draft resolutions reaffirm the important mandates entrusted to those three entities by the Assembly. As in the past, the Committee intends to make sure that resources available to it are used judiciously to carry out all the activities envisaged. The three draft resolutions have also been updated.

The fourth draft resolution, which is entitled “Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine”, reiterates the position of the General Assembly with regard to the essential elements of such a settlement and includes references to the developments of the past year. The draft resolution notes with satisfaction, among other things, the international community’s redoubled efforts to support the political process, the reaffirmation of the Arab Peace Initiative and the follow-up steps undertaken by Arab States, as well as the activities by the Quartet and its Special Representative.

The four draft resolutions that I have just introduced outline positions, mandates and

programmes that are of special importance, particularly at this crucial moment. I call on the General Assembly to vote in favour of those draft resolutions and to support the important goals contained therein.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Saviour Borg of Malta, Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to introduce the Committee's report.

Mr. Borg (Malta): It is an honour for me, in my capacity as the Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to introduce to the General Assembly the annual report of the Committee, which is contained in document A/63/35. Allow me to summarize each section of the report.

Chapter I contains the introduction, which outlines the Committee's objectives and its general perspective on the events that have taken place in the course of the past year. The chapter highlights, in paragraph 4, "the dichotomy between the resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian political negotiations and intensified international engagement on the issue, and a deteriorating situation on the ground".

Chapters II and III summarize the mandates entrusted by the General Assembly to the Committee, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information. They also contain information on the organization of the Committee's work during the year under review. Those two Chapters also reconfirm the Committee's declared position that all United Nations Member States and Observers wishing to participate in the work of the Committee as observers are welcome to do so.

Chapter IV reviews the situation relating to the question of Palestine and the relevant political developments as monitored by the Committee during the year in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. That includes the situation of Palestinian refugees; the Israel Defense Forces' deadly military incursions into the Gaza Strip, which have resulted in a large number of civilian casualties; the rocket and other attacks by Palestinian militants against Israeli civilians; the Egyptian-mediated ceasefire in the Gaza Strip between Israel and Palestinian groups; and efforts aimed at Palestinian national reconciliation.

Also in that Chapter, the Committee denounces the excessive and indiscriminate use of force by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian civilian population in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and condemns extrajudicial killings, the destruction of Palestinian homes, civilian infrastructure and agricultural lands and the attendant devastating effects on the Palestinian population. At the same time, the Committee strongly condemns all attacks against Israeli civilians and infrastructure.

That Chapter also addresses other issues of serious concern, including the increasing number of obstacles to movement and access; the continued construction of the separation wall, in contravention of the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice; the demolition of Palestinian homes; the continued blockade imposed by Israel on the Gaza Strip, which is obstructing the movement of persons and goods and exacerbating the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip; the detention of approximately 11,000 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons; Israel's continued settlement expansion activity; the continued violence, harassment and intimidation by settlers against Palestinian civilians; the water crisis throughout the occupied Palestinian territory; the deterioration of the agricultural sector; the halting of the import of fuel, food and medical and relief items; and the difficulties still faced by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in carrying out its mandate.

The political developments reviewed in that Chapter include the convening of the Annapolis conference and the Israeli-Palestinian joint understanding reached at the conference, as well as the Paris international donors' conference and the resulting \$7.4 billion in pledges. The Chapter also highlights the efforts being made by the Palestinian Authority to advance economic development, as well as the important role being played by the Quartet and its representative, Mr. Tony Blair.

Chapter V reviews the action taken by the Committee to mobilize the international community in support of the Palestinian people, in cooperation with United Nations bodies, Governments, intergovernmental and civil society organizations and others. It is divided into two main sections. Section A describes action in the General Assembly and the Security Council, as well as statements issued by the Committee's Bureau. Section B contains a detailed account of the

implementation of the programme of work and activities of the Committee and the Division. It also provides information on the continued dialogue between the Committee and members of the European Union and other intergovernmental organizations.

Sub-section 1 gives an account of the various international meetings and conferences organized in the course of the year, including those held in Amman, Paris and Malta. The Committee's delegation also met at Vatican City with the Secretary of Relations with States of the Holy See.

Sub-sections 2 to 7 deal with the Committee's cooperation with intergovernmental organizations and civil society, including parliaments and inter-parliamentary organizations; the Division's research, monitoring and publications work; the administration, maintenance, expansion and development of the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL); the training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority; and the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People held here in New York, in Geneva and in Vienna.

Chapter VI provides an overview of the work done over the year by the Department of Public Information (DPI) in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 62/82 of 10 December 2007, whose objective is to raise international awareness on the question of Palestine and on the situation in the Middle East with a view to contributing effectively to an atmosphere conducive to dialogue and supportive of the peace process. Important contributions by DPI included the coverage of intergovernmental meetings, reports by the United Nations Radio Arabic Language Unit of meetings organized by the Committee, the highlighting of stories by the United Nations News Centre, a training programme for young Palestinian journalists, the permanent exhibits at United Nations Headquarters and at Geneva, and the dissemination of information by United Nations information centres, services and offices.

The last chapter of the report contains the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee. In that chapter, the Committee notes that the year 2008 marked 60 years of Palestinian dispossession — the Nakba — and reiterates the permanent responsibility of the United Nations towards the question of Palestine

until it is resolved in all its aspects in accordance with international law.

Encouraged by the outcome of the Annapolis conference and the Paris donors' conference, the Committee stresses the need for a complete cessation of all acts of violence, including military attacks, destruction and acts of terror. It calls upon Israel, the occupying Power, to end its illegal policies and oppressive practices in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, such as settlement activities, the construction of the wall and numerous measures of collective punishment.

The Committee also emphasizes the importance for both sides to implement their road map obligations. The Committee also stresses that the political momentum provided by the Annapolis and Paris conferences must not be lost, and supports all efforts towards the goal of achieving a final status agreement by the end of 2008.

The Committee expresses its view that the illegal Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory must end without conditions, which should allow the Palestinian people to establish an independent State on all territories occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem, and to exercise their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination.

The Committee also expresses its firm support for the two-State solution, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003). The Arab Peace Initiative remains a crucial element for advancing peace in the region.

While welcoming the unwavering and substantial budgetary support for the Palestinian Authority by the European Union and other major donors, the Committee encourages member States of the European Union to take a more proactive role in international efforts at resolving the conflict. The Committee also calls upon all donors to live up to their pledges in order to ensure the continued functioning of the institutions of the Palestinian Authority.

The Committee calls upon Israel to end its military operations in the occupied Palestinian territory and to stop any other measures that further undermine Palestinian institutions. The Committee expresses its strong opposition to the illegal construction and expansion of settlements in the West Bank, as well as

the unlawful construction of the wall, and finds those activities incompatible with negotiations on a permanent settlement.

The Committee again reminds Israel, the occupying Power, that it is bound by the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, which, inter alia, obliges parties to the Convention to protect civilians during hostilities. The Committee also calls on Israel to release, immediately and unconditionally, all Palestinian prisoners, including imprisoned Cabinet members and parliamentarians. Also, the Committee strongly condemns the killing of innocent civilians by either side, denounces rocket attacks on Israel and calls for a cessation of those activities by Palestinian armed groups.

The Committee calls upon the Palestinian leadership, the leaders of all factions and all Palestinians to unite in support of President Abbas, his Government and all democratically elected Palestinian institutions, and to resolve their political differences by peaceful means. The Committee also calls for a comprehensive national dialogue, supported by confidence-building measures, to start a process of regaining national unity and the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank under the Palestinian Authority.

The Committee, convinced that its own work and the programme of mandated activities of the Division for Palestinian Rights represent a significant contribution by the United Nations and its membership in the search for a solution to the question of Palestine, also emphasizes the useful and constructive contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat in support of its mandate aimed at enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights.

The Committee stresses that its programme of international meetings and conferences contributes to focusing the attention of Governments, intergovernmental and civil society organizations and the general public on the need to advance a peaceful settlement of the conflict and to mobilize much-needed assistance for the Palestinian people. It also suggests, in its report, themes for its programme of meetings for the year 2009.

The Committee commends civil society organizations for their efforts to uphold international legitimacy with regard to the question of Palestine

through advocacy and the mobilization of public opinion, as well as for their initiatives aimed at alleviating the plight of the Palestinian people. It also expresses its intention to develop its cooperation with parliamentarians and their umbrella organizations.

The Committee requests the Division for Palestinian Rights to continue its substantive and secretariat support; its programme of research, monitoring and publications and other informational activities, such as the further expansion and development of UNISPAL, including the graphic enhancement of the website on the question of Palestine; the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority; and the annual observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

The Committee requests the continuation of the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information, with the necessary flexibility called for by developments relevant to the question of Palestine.

Finally, while reiterating its desire to make a contribution to the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, the Committee calls upon all States to join it in that endeavour and to extend their cooperation and support to the Committee. It also again invites the General Assembly to recognize the importance of the Committee's role and to reconfirm its mandate.

In conclusion, may I express my thanks and appreciation to the Chairman and the other members of the Committee, as well as the officials of the United Nations Division for Palestinian Rights, for the assistance they have extended to me as Rapporteur of the Committee. I would like to express the hope that the report I have just introduced will be of assistance and guidance to the Assembly in its deliberations on the question of Palestine.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Riad Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Palestine.

Mr. Malki (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate Palestine's pleasure at seeing you, Mr. President, preside over the General Assembly during its sixty-third session. We reiterate our confidence in your abilities and wisdom in

guiding the Assembly's efforts to address the important and critical issues on its agenda.

Mr. Tommo Monthe (Cameroon), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We are gathered in the Trusteeship Council Chamber this morning once again to solemnly commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Our people are filled with deep gratitude for the outpouring of solidarity, support and concern expressed to them on this Day from all corners of the world. The Day is traditionally observed on 29 November, the date in 1947 when the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), which partitioned historic Palestine into two States — one Arab and one Jewish — and led to the tragedy and injustice that befell the Palestinian people with their uprooting, dispersion, dispossession and loss of their homeland in the Nakba of 1948.

The annual observance of the Day reassures the Palestinian people of the continuing international commitment, especially on the part of the United Nations, to uphold its historic responsibility with regard to the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects, in accordance with international law and United Nations resolutions. That commitment and the ongoing solidarity have helped to strengthen Palestinian perseverance over the many years of struggle against injustice, oppression and occupation on the long road towards the realization of the Palestinians' inalienable human rights and national aspirations. Yet, today, as the Palestinian people solemnly reflect on the passage of 60 years since the Nakba, they are also filled with grief at the immense suffering and losses they have endured, collectively and individually. Our people are tired and drained from the suffering and hardships that they have withstood, and they are filled with longing for the rights and freedom they have for so long been denied, including their rights to self-determination and return.

More than half of the Palestinian people, comprised of more than three generations of families, continue to live in exile as refugees. They are dispersed throughout the diaspora, with millions still languishing in refugee camps and denied the right to return to their homes to live in peace with their neighbours, and suffering innumerable hardships. In the meantime, the remainder of the Palestinian people, including refugees, continue to live under Israeli occupation in

the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and are continually subject to oppression and the violation of their human rights.

As they reflect on that reality, the Palestinian people are filled with sorrow and resentment at the injustice, endless humiliation and affronts to their dignity that they have been forced to endure for so long before the eyes of the world as they have continued to appeal for their rights. Moreover, they are deeply disappointed by the many promises repeatedly made, yet unfulfilled, to uphold the law and resolutions of international legitimacy to justly resolve the question of Palestine and finally bring peace and stability to our region.

However, the Palestinian people remain hopeful and are reassured by the justness of their cause and the international support that has helped to sustain their steadfastness over the decades. The political, socio-economic, humanitarian and moral support and assistance that has been extended to the Palestinian people from around the world has helped to ease their suffering and strengthen their resolve to bring an end to the occupation, realize their rights and achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace.

Indeed, despite repeated crises, upheavals and displacement, the Palestinian people have never given up on their legitimate national aspirations. Under the leadership of their sole legitimate representative — the Palestine Liberation Organization — they have remained determined to achieve justice and to live in peace and security in their homeland. As embodied in the 1988 Palestinian declaration of independence and as pledged at the Middle East peace process launched in 1991, they are committed to the two-State solution as the means of peacefully establishing their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in the Palestinian territory under Israeli occupation since 1967.

The Palestinian leadership therefore remains committed to the Madrid terms of reference, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace. Our leaders have also strived to fulfil our obligations under the Quartet's Road Map and have fully endorsed and committed themselves to the Arab Peace Initiative. In addition, our leaders have made every effort to follow up on the joint understandings agreed at Annapolis.

Moreover, the Palestinian people and their leadership remain convinced that, as regards the question of Palestine, the international community will ultimately fulfil its responsibilities by upholding international law and the Charter of the United Nations so as to achieve a peaceful settlement that will give our people the freedom for which they have waited so long and allow them to take their rightful place among the nations of the world, including here in the General Assembly.

We have therefore returned to the General Assembly to renew our appeal to the international community to continue and intensify efforts in support of the peace process in order to achieve a peaceful and just settlement of the question of Palestine in all its aspects, including a just solution to the plight of Palestine refugees on the basis of resolution 194 (III). In today's world, there is no doubt that the question of Palestine is at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict and that rectifying the injustice that has been done to the Palestinian people is fundamental to ensuring peace and stability in the Middle East. The positive effects of such an accomplishment will no doubt extend beyond our region, as has been repeatedly asserted for many years in numerous debates regarding Palestine.

In addition, the issue of Palestine has emerged as a central theme in debates concerning other relevant issues of our time, including at the recent high-level meeting on dialogue among religions and cultures. During that meeting, country after country referred to the pressing need to resolve the Palestine question, as it is at the centre of widely held perceptions among States regarding the lack of justice, equality and respect for human rights in the world and the existing tensions and sensitivities among religions and between East and West.

In fact, a just and peaceful resolution to the question of Palestine and the closing of this tragic era will allow the peoples of the world to truly believe that the wrongs of history can be righted and that dialogue and peaceful negotiation, rather than military force and aggression, are the means to resolve conflict. That will, in turn, allow us to turn our attention and energies from conflict to the pursuit of coexistence and the development of our societies. The resulting hope and political, social and economic stability and security will allow us to make the necessary efforts to lift our peoples from the suffering caused by armed strife, poverty and hunger and to harness our true potential.

That will benefit our people and the international community as a whole and help us to establish a more harmonious and prosperous future.

Regrettably, we have not made significant strides towards the realization of those goals since we last met in this Hall to consider the question of Palestine. An honest and careful assessment of the current situation reveals little progress in the peace process since its resumption a year ago. It also shows a continuing deterioration of the situation on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, as a result of ongoing illegal Israeli policies and practices.

Even under the aegis of the peace process, Israel, the occupying Power, has continued to commit countless violations of international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, many of which amount to war crimes. Israel continues with impunity to kill, injure, imprison, displace and collectively punish Palestinian civilians. It is destroying their homes, properties, infrastructure and lands and continues to inflict immense losses and humanitarian suffering on our people. At the same time, Israel continues its unlawful colonization campaign, in particular by building and expanding settlements and constructing the wall in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. All those efforts are aimed at creating facts on the ground in order to alter the territory's character, status and demographic composition, entrench Israel's presence on the territory and advance its expansionist agenda.

For many decades, Israel has relentlessly pursued the two-pronged policy of subjugating and oppressing the Palestinian people and confiscating and colonizing their land. As time and developments in the situation on the ground have demonstrated, Israel's deliberate intent in that regard has been to consolidate its control over the Palestinian territory it has occupied since 1967 in order to forcibly acquire, and de facto annex, as much of that land as possible. Israel's pursuit of that policy has entailed establishing a vast web of illegal practices and crimes and violating every human rights standard. That has caused extensive hardships for the Palestinian people, including widespread socio-economic devastation and the fragmentation of the unity, contiguity and integrity of the occupied Palestinian territory, thereby fuelling the cycle of violence and instability and undermining every effort at peace.

In the past year, Israel's occupying forces have continued to use excessive and indiscriminate military force against Palestinian civilians and their property, in grave violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. That has resulted in major losses of innocent lives, including children and women, as well as thousands of injuries and psychological trauma among the population and the further destruction of property, homes, agricultural land and infrastructure.

Death, injury and property destruction have also continued to be perpetrated by extremist armed Israeli settlers who have been illegally transferred to the occupied Palestinian territory. They continue to carry out acts of violence, harassment, incitement, provocation and terror against Palestinian civilians. The situation, which is especially severe in Al-Khalil (Hebron), is worsening as settler attacks intensify and the occupying Power continues to fail to halt their lawlessness and to hold them accountable for their crimes.

In addition, Israel, the occupying Power, has arbitrarily detained and imprisoned approximately 11,000 Palestinian civilians, including women and children. Despite the release of some prisoners in recent months, ongoing Israeli raids and arrests have kept the number of prisoners at a high level. Moreover, Palestinian prisoners and detainees continue to be subjected to physical and mental ill-treatment, abuse, solitary confinement and torture. They are denied family visits, adequate medical care and food and are held in completely unsanitary and inhumane conditions.

Israel is also continuing its policy of collective punishment against the Palestinian people by imposing closures and restrictions on the movement of persons and goods within, into and out of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, which has been virtually cut off from the rest of the territory. Palestinian access to schools, hospitals, employment, agricultural land, food supplies, holy places and humanitarian assistance, as well as to each other, is being severely obstructed by the complete closure of the Gaza Strip and by a labyrinth of more than 630 checkpoints and roadblocks in the West Bank — to say nothing of the settlements, the wall, the bypass roads, the permit regime and, in particular, the imposition of residency restrictions on Jerusalem residents. All of that has had a tragic and catastrophic impact on the Palestinian economy and the social fabric.

In that regard, Israel's continuing siege of the Gaza Strip has transformed the area into a huge prison. That is the most inhumane form of collective punishment, and is tantamount to a war crime. That deplorable situation has continued despite a ceasefire brokered by Egypt in June, which aimed at breaking the cycle of violence as well as the blockade. The sealing of border crossings, the restrictions on the movement of persons and goods in Gaza — including humanitarian personnel and the import of food, medicine and other essential supplies — the complete prohibition of exports and the cutting off of fuel and electricity have increased socio-economic deprivation in Gaza and deepened the already dire humanitarian crisis. Every aspect of life has been disrupted; poverty, hunger, disease and unemployment are continuing to increase, with 80 per cent of Gaza's civilians now living below the poverty line and completely dependent on food aid to survive. In addition, half of the labour force is unemployed and more than 90 per cent of industry and businesses are closed.

At the same time, Israel is continuing its massive settler colonization campaign in the occupied Palestinian territory, in grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention and its Additional Protocol I. That effort, also in violation of United Nations resolutions, shows complete disregard for the 9 July 2004 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice and flouts the commitments made by Israel in the peace process. That campaign includes ongoing illegal confiscation of Palestinian land, the construction and expansion of settlements and outposts, the transfer of hundreds of thousands of Israeli settlers, the construction of the wall, the establishment of a bypass road system prohibited to Palestinians and intended to connect the settlements to each other and to Israel and numerous other illegal measures.

Israel is continuing its intensive settlement activities, especially in and around occupied East Jerusalem, where it is expanding settlements and transferring settlers. In pursuing its efforts there, Israel continues to demolish Palestinian homes, impose residency restrictions and carry out excavations. The purpose is to alter the city's demographic composition and character and to force the "quiet transfer" of Palestinians and ensure a Jewish majority in the city.

Taken as a whole, the settlements, the wall, the bypass roads, the checkpoints and other Israeli military installations occupy huge swaths of Palestinian land,

including areas with water and natural resources that are daily being exploited and which total approximately 50 per cent of the West Bank's occupied land area. Moreover, that vast settler colonial network is separating Palestinian communities, especially in East Jerusalem, transforming many of them into walled-off cantons, thereby causing the displacement of thousands of civilians.

In addition to the direct humanitarian consequences for the Palestinian people, the continuation of Israel's unlawful colonization campaign seriously jeopardizes future prospects for peace. That campaign is altering the demographic composition, character and status of the occupied Palestinian territory and is undermining its contiguity, integrity and unity. It is the main obstacle to efforts to politically and physically achieve the two-State solution of Palestine and Israel, living side by side in peace and security on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map.

All of Israel's illegal actions must be firmly repudiated and condemned. A complete cessation of all Israeli settlement activity and human rights violations is required, both in order to stem the human suffering caused by the occupation and to create a more stable environment conducive for peacemaking. It is the collective duty of the international community, including the Security Council, to uphold the law, implement all relevant United Nations resolutions and act in unison to compel Israel to abide by its legal obligations, truly pursue peace with the aim of achieving the two-State solution and end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as well as the entire Arab-Israeli conflict.

The continuation of the current situation is unacceptable. There can never be peace and security in the Middle East as long as the question of Palestine remains unresolved. Moreover, peace can never be achieved as long as Israel continues to defy the law, remains an unwilling or absent partner in the peace process and continues to attempt to impose an unlawful, unilateral military solution. Only a peaceful settlement, including a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem, can bring an end to the conflict and establish the peace, stability and security that we all seek and to which all peoples are entitled.

The Palestinian people and their leadership remain committed to the peace process on the basis of the clear principles of international law and the resolutions of the United Nations, which serve as the terms of reference for peace. We urge all concerned parties, including the Quartet, to seize the historic opportunities created by the Arab Peace Initiative and the Annapolis conference and make every effort necessary to help the parties to advance their negotiations to bring an end to Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and all other Arab territories occupied since 1967. We also call for their help in realizing the Palestinian people's inalienable rights, including their right to self-determination and to their independent State of Palestine, as well as a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

Indeed, at this critical time, it is incumbent upon the international community to redouble its efforts to uphold its legal, political and moral responsibilities to promote a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. After 60 long years, during which both Palestinian and Israeli peoples have lived in conflict, no effort should be spared to bring an end to this tragedy and to the suffering and loss on both sides. In that regard, we firmly believe in the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law. We will continue to seek international support to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace settlement, in the hope that one day soon we shall gather here to celebrate the inclusion of a free and independent Palestine among the family of nations.

Mr. Hossain (Bangladesh): Let me begin by thanking the President for scheduling this very important meeting to coincide with the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. While reaffirming our full solidarity with the Palestinian people and lending our unwavering support to their legitimate struggle for self-determination, Bangladesh stands firm in its position on the Arab-Israeli conflict in favour of achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The delegation of Bangladesh aligns itself with the statement that will be made by the representative of Cuba on behalf of Non-Aligned Movement. In addition to that, we would like to highlight some of the points that are of particular concern to us.

The people of Palestine have been under Israel's illegal occupation for the past four decades. Their fundamental rights to self-determination and to establish a sovereign State remain unrealized. Bangladesh is deeply concerned over the continued suffering of the Palestinian people and the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the occupied territory.

Israel has continued to violate international humanitarian law by committing systematic human rights violations against the Palestinian people. The situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, remains critical. The blockade of the Gaza Strip is yet another example of Israel's violation of international humanitarian law. Indiscriminate closures enforced by Israel are impeding access on the part of humanitarian assistance workers to the occupied territories, halting commercial activities and causing the loss of thousands of jobs. That has brought the economy to the verge of irreversible collapse. Not only has it restricted access to basic necessities of life, it is also destroying the social fabric of the Palestinian people by causing widespread displacement. We demand the immediate withdrawal of all restrictions on the movement of Palestinian civilians.

The continued expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories and the construction of the separation wall threaten to derail the ongoing peace negotiations. With the unabated construction of the wall, which ignores the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, the occupied territories are increasingly being fragmented into smaller parts, which will seriously affect the viability of a Palestinian State. Bangladesh reiterates its call for the immediate dismantling of the wall.

My delegation would like to draw attention to the fact that Israel, as a signatory to the relevant provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which stipulates the responsibilities of an occupying Power, cannot, legally or morally, absolve itself of its responsibilities to guarantee basic human rights to the people under its occupation. The General Assembly and the Security Council, in their resolutions adopted over the years, have reconfirmed the obligation of Israel to ensure the basic human rights of the Palestinian people. Bangladesh believes that only the full and sincere implementation of the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council can resolve the Palestinian crisis.

The situation in the occupied territories has further deteriorated during the past year in the face of relentless violence, destruction, killing, curfew, closures and systematic violations of human rights and legal norms by Israeli forces. The concerted Israeli actions to subdue the resistance of the Palestinian people in the form of collective punishment have broken all known international humanitarian norms. As mentioned in the Secretary-General's latest report (A/63/368), the situation on the ground in Israel and the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, has hampered political efforts to achieve the vision of two States living side by side in peace and security.

We concur with the Secretary-General's observation that, with the launch of the Annapolis process and regular bilateral negotiations between Israel and Palestinians, new hopes for the achievement of a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine have emerged. Bangladesh is ready to play a supportive role in that collective endeavour to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. But unless the two parties join the process in all sincerity and with genuine political willingness, the process, like many other attempts in the past, will only raise some optimism before unravelling into yet another let-down.

The just and legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people for self-determination and freedom from foreign occupation enjoys the strong support and solidarity of the entire international community. We welcome all recent regional and international efforts, including the revival of the Arab Peace Initiative and the Conference on the Middle East hosted by the United States in Annapolis last year. We welcome the commitment to the establishment of the Palestinian State and the agreement to start final status negotiations to resolve all core issues, including those pertaining to borders, refugees, settlements and Jerusalem. In order to be fair, those issues must be resolved on the basis of previous agreements, especially the relevant resolutions of the United Nations and the Security Council, the principle of land for peace, the Madrid Peace Conference terms of reference, the Quartet's Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative. That will entail Israel's complete withdrawal from occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. We are hopeful that a peace treaty will be achieved without further delay in the near future, and then implemented quickly and earnestly. Delay and obstruction will only exacerbate

the situation and make the prospects for peace even bleaker.

The Secretary-General's report reflects the dire humanitarian situation in the occupied territories. The international community must exercise its clout to ensure Israel's full compliance with its obligations in all the occupied territories. Israel must also end policies and actions that seek to change the reality on the ground and that could prejudice a final settlement, including the integrity and viability of the future Palestinian State. The discussions at Annapolis also recognized the crucial importance of addressing all aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict in order to achieve comprehensive peace. We hope to see tangible progress on those parallel tracks, so as to reach a just and durable resolution of the conflict.

A lasting and sustainable resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the issue of Palestine, which is at the core of that long-lasting crisis, must be our collective strategic objective. All Member States must pledge complete commitment to that objective and extend their full moral, diplomatic, political and economic support for its early realization. We strongly believe that that would not only help to stabilize other simmering situations in the region but also have a resounding positive impact on regional and international peace and security as a whole.

In conclusion, we would like to underscore that Israeli activities in the occupied territories remain a matter of grave concern to us. We express our full solidarity with the Palestinian people and reiterate our steadfast support for their legitimate and inalienable rights to a sovereign and independent State with Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Delacroix (France) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia; and Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova align themselves with this statement.

This debate on the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine is being held one year after the Annapolis conference, whose outcomes opened up new prospects for the peace process. The EU wishes to welcome the commitment of both parties to finding a solution that, in accordance with the

Quartet's Road Map, must permit the creation of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State, living in peace and security alongside the State of Israel and its other neighbours.

The EU stresses the importance of the negotiation process between the parties initiated at Annapolis, which makes it possible to address all major problems without exception, in accordance with the commitments previously agreed between the parties. The commencement of the negotiations also renewed the involvement of regional and international partners in the efforts to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. The EU fully supports the ongoing negotiation process and requests that the parties maintain a constructive dialogue in order to find a just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as quickly as possible, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Road Map and previous agreements between the parties.

In order to consolidate the progress made thus far, the parties must make further efforts to honour their previous commitments, in particular those set out in the Road Map and in the Agreement on Movement and Access. In that regard, the EU is particularly concerned at the settlement activities in and around Jerusalem and in the remainder of the West Bank. Those activities, which run counter to international law and to Israel's Road Map commitments, must be suspended. They undermine the credibility of the Annapolis process and affect the future viability of the Palestinian State. Furthermore, they make the development of the Palestinian economy more difficult. The EU also calls on the parties to refrain from any unilateral measure that could jeopardize the outcome of the negotiations on a final settlement.

If the peace process is to succeed, it is essential to put an end to all acts of violence and terrorism between the parties. The EU firmly condemns the rocket attacks on Israeli territory carried out by Palestinian militias. While recognizing Israel's legitimate right to self-defence, the EU calls on Israel to exercise the utmost restraint and stresses that its actions must in no way be disproportionate to or contravene international law. The EU condemns in the strongest possible terms the acts of violence and brutality committed against Palestinian civilians by Israeli settlers in the West Bank.

The EU commends Egypt's efforts to overcome inter-Palestinian divisions and to reunite Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip under the legitimate Palestinian Authority. The EU is concerned at the recent return of violence in Gaza and southern Israel. We call on the parties to respect the calm and hope that it will lead to increased support for the civilian population of Gaza, including regular opening of the crossings for humanitarian or commercial flows, and to a lasting peace on Israel's southern border.

The EU appeals once again for the immediate release of Corporal Gilad Shalit and would like to commend the efforts made to that end, in particular by partners in the region. We also call for the immediate release of Palestinian ministers and legislators held by Israel.

The EU supports the efforts being made in many areas by the parties within the framework of the Annapolis process. In particular, we support the development of the Palestinian security sector as a result of the efforts of the European Union Police Mission for the Palestinian Territories. The EU also supports the economic development of the future Palestinian State with continued humanitarian and financial assistance, in close cooperation with the Quartet Representative and the EU Special Representative.

In that connection, the EU wishes to highlight the importance of the donor conference held in Paris on 17 December 2007, which represented vital support for the political process initiated in Annapolis. It is now essential to carefully monitor the outcomes of the conference in order to ensure that the pledges made in Paris are actually translated into financial assistance. The EU thus calls on the donor countries to commit themselves as soon as possible to fulfilling those pledges. We also welcome the holding of the Conference in Support of Palestinian Civil Security and the Rule of Law, held in Berlin on 24 June 2008.

Mrs. Núñez Mordoche (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): On this important occasion, I have the honour to address the General Assembly on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is a special opportunity for the international community to reaffirm its support for the efforts of that heroic people to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination and to achieve

independence and freedom. Today, we recall that, for more than 60 years, the Palestinian people have suffered from statelessness, dispossession and dispersal in exile, hoping to be able to exercise their right to return to their lands. For more than 40 years, they have endured a brutal foreign occupation and have been denied their inalienable human rights. On this occasion, we must reaffirm our commitment on the basis of the Charter of the United Nations, the norms and principles of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, and we must pledge to redouble our efforts to bring an end to this injustice by making the efforts necessary to resolve the question of Palestine in all its aspects, including a just resolution of the plight of Palestine refugees, and to achieve long sought peace and justice.

Regrettably, over the past year, the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, has continued to deteriorate and to be characterized by extreme violence, instability and high tension. The toll in terms of human lives, the injured, the displaced, the homeless, the impoverished and those lacking access to basic needs in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in the besieged Gaza Strip, continues to increase at an alarming rate. The poverty rate currently stands at 65.8 per cent in the occupied Palestinian territory and at 80 per cent in the Gaza Strip, where the majority of the people depend on food aid for survival and nearly 50 per cent are unemployed.

NAM expresses its great concern at the constant deterioration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, particularly as a result of the excessive and indiscriminate use of force by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian civilian population and many other illegal policies and practices carried out by Israel, including its inhumane and destructive measures of collective punishment against the Palestinian civilian population. Those measures by Israel constitute grave breaches of international humanitarian law, violate virtually all of the Palestinian people's human rights and have devastated their socio-economic conditions, resulting in a dire humanitarian crisis.

In that regard, Israel is continuing to impose closures by completely sealing off the Gaza Strip, thereby obstructing the movement of persons and goods such as food, medicine, fuel and other essential humanitarian supplies. It is also continuing to impose a

humiliating and discriminatory network of hundreds of checkpoints and roadblocks throughout the entire occupied Palestinian territory. That has resulted in serious fragmentation and undermined the contiguity and integrity of the territory, completely isolated East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank and caused significant damage to the Palestinian economy and society as a whole.

Moreover, Israel is continuing to detain and arrest thousands of Palestinian civilians, who are imprisoned in inhumane conditions and subjected to all forms of ill-treatment. It is also carrying out intense military raids and incursions into Palestinian population centres. That has led to extensive loss of life and injury to Palestinian civilians, including children, and the deliberate and widespread destruction of property and land.

The Non-Aligned Movement condemns Israel's prolonged military occupation of Palestinian territory since 1967 and expresses its grave concern over the distressing developments and ongoing deterioration of the situation in the recent period. For four decades, in its actions in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, Israel has unrelentingly violated international law, international humanitarian law and human rights law. As a result, it has caused immense suffering to the Palestinian people and obstructed all efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace agreement.

In addition to the illegal practices and measures to which I have referred, for four decades, Israel has carried out deliberate and unlawful policies and practices aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and nature of Palestinian territories and de facto annexing them, in particular through such measures as the confiscation of large areas of Palestinian land, the implementation of its illegal colonial settlement policy and, since 2003, its illegal construction of a wall in the West Bank, including in and around East Jerusalem. Israel continues to pursue those illegal policies and measures to this day, in total disregard for and in contravention of international law, including in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention, United Nations resolutions and the 9 July 2004 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice.

The Non-Aligned Movement expresses its grave concern that, even under the peace process, Israel

continues and has accelerated its unlawful settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, especially in and around East Jerusalem. Moreover, the Movement is alarmed by the rising incidence of Israeli settler violence, harassment and intimidation against Palestinian civilians, their properties and agricultural land. We call on the occupying Power to take every necessary measure to bring an end to settler violence and lawlessness and to hold the perpetrators of crimes against Palestinian civilians accountable for their actions.

NAM condemns all illegal actions by Israel, the occupying Power, and calls for their immediate cessation. Israel must cease all settlement activities and all other illegal policies and practices infringing upon and violating the human rights of the Palestinian people. In addition, NAM believes that such illegal Israeli actions, including ongoing military attacks, have seriously undermined the functioning of the Palestinian Authority and have undoubtedly contributed to the growing polarization of Palestinian society. In that regard, NAM hopes for a speedy restoration of Palestinian national unity, which is a crucial element to achieving the legitimate national aspirations and goals of the Palestinian people. NAM also calls upon all concerned parties to make the necessary efforts to promote reconciliation and unity.

NAM underscores the severity of the situation faced by the Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip as a result of the suffocating siege and closure of all its crossings by Israel, the occupying Power. Such unlawful collective punishment against the Palestinian civilian population has caused the further deterioration of socio-economic conditions. That has led to poverty and hunger and worsened the humanitarian situation to alarming levels. In that regard, it is incumbent upon the international community to demand that Israel respect all of its obligations under international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, and cease all such illegal and inhumane practices against the Palestinian civilian population of Gaza.

Israel has clear responsibilities as an occupying Power, from which it must not be absolved. Moreover, nothing justifies its violation of its obligations and responsibilities. Israel must comply with its legal obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention, which is applicable to the entire occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. In that regard, it must be emphasized that the Gaza Strip clearly remains

part of the occupied Palestinian territory. NAM therefore once again urges Israel, the occupying Power, to put an end to all serious violations of international law and to fully abide by international humanitarian law, as it is obliged to do as the occupying Power.

In that regard, NAM demands that Israel open all crossings to allow for the movement of persons and goods and the unfettered access and movement of humanitarian personnel and supplies, including those of United Nations agencies on the ground. NAM also demands that Israel honour its responsibility to repair all the damage caused to the infrastructure of the Gaza Strip.

Today, we also urge all States and the international community as a whole to continue to urgently provide economic and financial assistance to the Palestinian people during this critical period in order to alleviate the current financial and humanitarian crisis they continue to experience.

NAM member countries once again call upon the Security Council to assume its responsibilities under the Charter, take the necessary actions to implement its own resolutions and take the necessary steps to compel Israel to respect international law and end its occupation and all illegitimate and illegal practices in occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. It is unacceptable that the Security Council, whose primary responsibility is to maintain international peace and security, continues to fail to carry out its permanent responsibility with regard to the Palestinian question until it is resolved in all its aspects on the basis of international law.

Israel's unilateral measures in occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, are a serious threat to the prospects for achieving a negotiated agreement in the form of the two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders, and consequently pose a threat to the prospects for peace. In that regard, NAM expresses its concern about the little progress that has been made since the re-launching of the peace process following the Annapolis Conference, in November of 2007, and the resumption of direct bilateral negotiations between the Israeli and Palestinian sides.

Despite ongoing negotiations and meetings between the two sides, the process continues to be obstructed and undermined by Israel's continuing pursuit of illegal policies and practices in the occupied

Palestinian territory and its disrespect for the commitments it has undertaken in the peace process. NAM calls upon all concerned parties, including the Quartet, to make the efforts necessary to promote the peace process towards the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

On this occasion, as we gather once again to address the question of Palestine more than 60 years after the conflict began, NAM reaffirms its support for the just cause of the Palestinian people and their efforts to realize their legitimate national aspirations. NAM will continue to support the Palestinian people and its leadership in order to bring an end to the Israeli occupation begun in 1967, in accordance with the norms and principles of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions.

We reaffirm our unwavering commitment to a just and peaceful solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to the exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights, including their right to self-determination and sovereignty in their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Dwivedi (India): We thank the President of the Assembly for convening this discussion on the question of Palestine in the General Assembly today as we mark the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people.

There can be little doubt that this issue remains of great concern to the international community. Instability in that ancient and holy land began with the question of Palestine, and has since impacted upon the wider situation in the Middle East and upon the entire world. As a nation that has had historical and cultural relations with all the communities of the Middle East through the millennia and a strong tradition of support for a just and mutually acceptable solution to the question of Palestine, India has an abiding interest in the early resolution of this long-festering problem. The question of Palestine is a matter for which there is strong support among all the sectors of society and political parties in India.

Our meeting takes place almost one year after the international conference at Annapolis. We in India shared the sense of anticipation and hope that earnest and results-oriented discussions would commence at the earliest time possible, aimed at finding the just, mutually acceptable and durable solution whose contours are well-known and hardly need reiteration.

We had also hoped that the process of dialogue would help quickly to address the daily litany of violence, blockades, rhetoric and privation.

And yet our hopes remain unfulfilled. Settlements continue to expand in the occupied territories, in contravention of the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Road Map. The separation wall continues to be built, in derogation of the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice and resolutions of the General Assembly. The division of Palestinian territories endures since the events of June 2007, despite efforts to unify the leadership.

Most damagingly, the blockade of Gaza persists. Restrictions on movement and the enduring blockade of Gaza have serious humanitarian consequences in an already precarious situation. Restrictions on supplies of fuel and electricity in Gaza have only intensified the humanitarian challenge.

The announcement late last week of the suspension of humanitarian aid into Gaza as a result of the resumption of the blockade was very unfortunate, troubling and a cause for great concern. While we, too, hear reports of some resumption of access for humanitarian relief, we call for the lifting of the blockade to afford full access to Gaza for the supply of humanitarian aid and essential commodities.

The security situation also remains a challenge. Despite efforts to maintain a ceasefire, incidents of indiscriminate violence and retaliation continue to erupt, thus perpetuating the cycle of violence. The rise of incidents of violence by illegal settlers is particularly disturbing as it runs the risk of inciting further violence in those highly sensitive locations. In this context, India notes with satisfaction the positive progress recorded by the Palestinian Authority in securing several towns in the Palestinian territory.

It is important that we retain clarity regarding fundamentals. India believes that all violence must be eschewed if there is to be a positive atmosphere for any serious dialogue. However, this is not in itself adequate. There also needs to be a serious effort to dismantle the barriers to free movement within the West Bank and the blockades around Gaza.

Apart from facilitating the entry of humanitarian relief, it is also essential that normal supplies of basic facilities, such as power, water and essential commodities, be resumed. Citizens of Gaza, like any

other people, also have the right to expect normal access to medical facilities. The construction of new settlements in the occupied territories and of the separation wall must stop forthwith.

A sovereign, viable and independent State of Palestine, to which the international community is committed through all relevant resolutions, cannot be created under the present circumstances. Our collective commitment to resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) is devoid of meaning if we do not ensure that all parties to the conflict abide by their commitments under the Road Map.

As the Quartet leads the international community's efforts to assist the negotiations between Palestinian and Israeli leaders, we urge the Quartet to do much more to ensure that the process progresses in a manner that helps us achieve the desired outcome at the earliest. India remains in support of a political solution, based on the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative, which remain the only widely endorsed framework for an agreement.

While India is not directly involved in supporting these negotiations, we have maintained our effort to help avert a larger humanitarian crisis. Last month, during President Abbas's visit to India, our Prime Minister not only reaffirmed India's earlier commitment of \$20 million — \$15 million in project assistance and \$5 million in assistance — but also announced a grant of \$10 million as budgetary support for the Palestinian National Authority. An additional sum of \$10 million was announced for project assistance for Palestinian development programmes. India's assistance programmes in capacity-building, and in support for educational programmes were also expanded.

This leads us to the larger point: The only lasting solution to the question of Palestine is a just, lasting, mutually acceptable and comprehensive solution, drawn up along well-known contours that are set out and recognized in the relevant Security Council resolutions. The ongoing violations of the Road Map and the persistence of actions that vitiate the atmosphere only make the prospects of an eventual peace more remote. It remains critical for the parties to the conflict and the international community, in particular the Quartet, to redouble efforts to settle the question of Palestine in the year ahead.

India reiterates that an early, amicable and mutually acceptable solution, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, brooks no delay.

Mr. Hoang Chi Trung (Viet Nam): On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, allow me to convey the most heartfelt greetings of the Government and people of Viet Nam to the Government and people of Palestine.

The Vietnamese delegation associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Looking back to a year awash with mixed developments with regard to the Middle East situation, my delegation welcomes the positive signs visible across the region, including the continued engagement of Israel and Palestine in negotiations on final status issues, guided by the Annapolis process and the Road Map; the strong support at the international conferences held in Paris, Bethlehem, London and Berlin for a viable Palestinian State; and the high-level diplomacy initiatives and mediation efforts of the Quartet, the League of Arab States and regional countries.

Along with the tangible progress reached between Israel and relevant parties on ceasefires, prisoner exchange and other areas of mutual concern, further steps undertaken by the Palestinian Authority to enhance national unity, security and the rule of law and to promote foreign investment and socio-economic development reforms deserve our recognition and encouragement. We share the intense aspiration for the process of peace to prevail despite so much frustration and despair.

This measured progress, albeit doubly prized in the light of the difficult situation of the past two years, cannot conceal the fact that, more than six decades after the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II) on the partition plan, and more than four decades after the Security Council adopted resolution 242 (1967) on the Arab-Israel conflict, peace in the Middle East remains elusive and the Palestinian people continue to suffer immensely.

This year, despite the investment of so much hope, energy and effort in the peace process, we continue to witness a perpetuation of the longest military occupation in contemporary history, the

continued denial and violation of the inalienable rights of Palestinians, including the right to self-determination and the right of Palestinian refugees to return, and unjustifiable attacks against civilians on all sides.

Viet Nam shares the concerns of the international community over Israel's continued military incursions into the West Bank, its expansion of illegal settlements in the Palestinian territory, its ongoing construction of the separation wall, its imposition of closures and restrictions on freedom of movement and access to persons and goods in Gaza, and its continued detention of thousands of Palestinian prisoners.

In order to further facilitate the ongoing negotiations, Israel must put an immediate end to its restrictive measures, open border crossings, and ensure unfettered access for humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people in Gaza. We underline the importance of the unflagging commitment and contributions of the international community, especially the United Nations, the League of Arab States, the Quartet and regional countries in this respect.

Peace processes have never been easy ventures. They can be satisfactorily nurtured only as long as the peaceful settlement of disputes, diplomatic negotiations and dialogue prevail over violence, the use of military force and confrontation. The Middle East conflict will remain unresolved unless all parties concerned go beyond the ordinary in their efforts to renounce violence, refrain from any action that might destabilize the explosive situation, implement hard-earned agreements and abide scrupulously by their reciprocal obligations under the Road Map and international law, particularly human rights and humanitarian law.

In conclusion, Viet Nam reaffirms its support for a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East on the basis of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), the Madrid terms of reference and the principle of land for peace, as well as the Arab Peace Initiative.

Mr. Edrees (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Despite the convening of the Annapolis Conference to revive the Middle East peace process, new hopes for achieving a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine and realizing the objective of establishing an

independent sovereign and viable Palestinian State before the end of 2008, this objective was not accomplished, regretfully. The negotiations have not resulted in any notable progress, while the humanitarian conditions of the civilian population in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip have continued to deteriorate. The progress to which we aspire in exercising the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people has not been met, because of the illegal practices by the occupying Power and its constant rejection of United Nations resolutions.

The General Assembly considered the agenda item on the question of Palestine in 2007; the negotiating process continues between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Yet, Israel, the occupying Power, has not ceased its unlawful practices in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the imposition of collective punishment on the civilian population of the Gaza strip, as underscored by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs before the Security Council in successive meetings. Moreover, Israel has continued to carry out extrajudicial killings, has used excessive and indiscriminate force against Palestinian civilians and has expanded its construction of settlements, the separation wall, confiscated Palestinians lands and destroyed their property. All of this has prevented the establishment of the necessary supportive political environment to achieve the peace objective. It has also affected the endeavours of both parties to reach an agreement on the final status core issues, including the Road Map and the Annapolis understandings.

Consideration of this agenda item on the question of Palestine by the sixty-third session of the General Assembly obtains great importance in re-emphasizing support for the Palestinian people's endeavours to restore their inalienable rights, prominent among which is the right to self-determination and to establish a viable, independent, geographically contiguous State of Palestine, living side by side with Israel, within a clear time frame that addresses the crucial six issues of final status negotiations with the same effectiveness, through intensive negotiations between both Israeli and Palestinian sides, and with the support of the United Nations and other members of the international Quartet.

Regrettably, as highlighted in the current report of the Secretary-General on the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine (A/63/368), despite all efforts

made by the international community to advance the bilateral negotiations between the Palestinian Authority and Israel, and notwithstanding the efforts made by the Palestinian Authority to fulfil its commitments under the Road Map, the Israeli side has not honoured its commitments. The report also refers to the progress made by the Palestinian Authority in imposing law and order in the West Bank. It emphasizes that Israel has not fulfilled its commitments to end its unlawful settlement activities and states that Israel has continued to expand settlements at an unprecedented rate, with the purpose of creating a fait accompli on the ground and annexing large areas of occupied Palestinian territory. That has a negative effect on the chances for successfully carrying out final status negotiations on such issues as the future border of the Palestinian State and its geographical contiguity and viability.

Similarly, Israel is continuing its construction of the separation wall, whose purpose is to bolster its settlement policy, in contravention of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly. That effort is also part of Israel's attempts to change the legal and demographic character of the West Bank in order to deviate from the 1967 border with the State of Palestine, established by the Green Line, and to isolate East Jerusalem from the rest of the occupied West Bank. It also shows flagrant disregard for the judicial and moral content of the Court's advisory opinion and is a flagrant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

That is the current situation in the West Bank. However, the situation in the Gaza Strip is deteriorating even further as a result of the suffocating siege imposed by the occupying Power, its closure of border crossings and its restrictions on movement. Consequently, there are huge shortages of fuel, food and medical supplies. Poverty has increased and the socio-economic and health conditions of the civilian population have deteriorated. Israel's most recent escalation in the Gaza Strip could lead to a resumption of the horrific vicious cycle of violence and counter-violence. Egypt calls for mutual respect of the truce agreement and for a halt to the firing of rockets and shells against civilians in Israel and Palestine. Moreover, Israel should commit itself to halting all military operations against Palestinian civilians.

The implementation of the Road Map and the Annapolis understandings requires that we step up

international efforts to achieve agreement on core final status issues. First, both sides must commit to implementing several confidence-building measures under the supervision of the Quartet and the international community. They must also translate the outcome of negotiations into reality on the ground, with a view to achieving a final, lasting and just solution to the question of Palestine based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), General Assembly resolution 194 (III), the Arab Peace Initiative, the Road Map, the Madrid terms of reference and the principle of land for peace.

The success of the peace process requires serious efforts by the international community to rectify the current unlawful situation in the occupied Palestinian territory and to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to implement its commitments under the Road Map and the relevant provisions of international law. It also requires the immediate cessation of all settlement activities, the removal of obstacles imposed on freedom of access and movement, reopening border crossings into the Gaza Strip, including Palestinian institutions in occupied East Jerusalem, and the release of Palestinian prisoners and officials. The Gaza Strip must also continue to receive fuel supplies and crossing points should remain open. The contiguity aspired to by the Palestinian people must also be ensured, so as to end the suffocating crisis in Gaza.

In that regard, Egypt continues to support efforts aimed at restoring the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and to achieve their legitimate aspiration to establish an independent and viable State on the basis of two States living side by side. The solution must also include compensation and the right of return of refugees, as well as an effort to achieve Palestinian national reconciliation and the preservation of the integrity of Palestine's territory as a single contiguous political entity in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip under the leadership of the Palestinian Authority. Egypt will continue its efforts to maintain international support until those goals are achieved.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of Syria, I would like to express our deep gratitude to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian people and its Chairman, Ambassador Paul Badji, as well as to the Secretariat's Division for Palestinian Rights. I would also like to express our gratitude to the Department of

Public Information's special information programme on the question of Palestine for its contributions to implementing resolutions of international legitimacy related to the Palestinian cause, which call for putting an end to the suffering of a people that has lasted for approximately 60 years — the Nakba. I should also like to thank the President of the General Assembly for his conscientious appeal in his statement at the opening of this meeting.

This year's meeting on the question of Palestine coincides with six decades of the Palestinian people's Nakba and continuous pain and suffering. That has included their forced displacement and eviction from their Palestinian homeland and has prevented refugees from returning to their cities and villages after foreign settlers seized their homes. All that took place in blatant disregard for resolutions of international legitimacy, international law and human rights law.

The General Assembly is meeting to debate the agenda item entitled "Question of Palestine" in order to reaffirm its support for the Palestinian people in their struggle against Israeli occupation and so they can achieve self-determination and establish their independent State on their land and fully regain their legitimate rights. Those include the right of refugees to return on the basis of resolution 194 (III) of 1948. Despite the fact that the United Nations has adopted hundreds of resolutions calling on Israel to end its occupation of Arab territories, Israel continues to refuse to heed the will of international legitimacy. The Palestinian people continue to suffer under the yoke of Israeli occupation and to be the victims of a policy of murder and destruction.

In the light of this unfortunate dichotomy of Israel's non-compliance with the will of the international community, on the one hand, and the continued suffering of the Palestinian people on the other, it is critical for the United Nations to uphold its responsibilities to the Palestinians in order to find a just solution to this question. It was, after all, this international Organization that adopted resolution 181 (II); therefore, all Member States bear the consequences of the lack of implementation of that resolution to the present day. The President of the General Assembly was indeed correct and courageous when he described the United Nations inability to secure the establishment of a Palestinian State as the most significant failure of this Organization since its inception.

We recall General Assembly resolution 273 (III) which set the conditions for the acceptance of Israel to membership in the United Nations. Among the conditions were Israel's abidance by the principles of the Charter and respect for these principles and for relevant resolutions, particularly resolutions 181 (II) and 194 (III), both of which affirm the right of the Palestinians to establish a Palestinian State on their national soil. These resolutions also establish the right of return to Palestinian refugees who were forcibly removed from their homes.

We must recall that the General Assembly when accepting Israel's United Nations membership, duly noted Israel's statements and explanations presented to the Special Political Committee at the time as well as its commitment to implement those two resolutions. This commitment, however, was very interestingly removed from the framework of Israel's international accountability.

The Security Council has taken no serious decision on this question because of the objections of a well-known permanent member State and because of the automatic bias of some other countries in favour of Israel's rejection of its obligations. All of this has sent the wrong message from the international community to Israel, declaring, in fact, that Israel is above the rule of law.

This year, our meeting is being held while the entire world is watching the Palestinian people being subjected to destruction, killing and displacement that are unprecedented in contemporary history. All of this is a result of Israel's practice of State terrorism against the defenceless Palestinian people.

Israel continues to desecrate places of worship and demolish safe homes. It continues to prevent medical supplies, water, food and electricity from reaching an entire population. Using the pretext of archaeological interests, it continues to excavate in areas surrounding places of worship, including the Al-Aqsa Mosque, Al-Haram al-Sharif and Al-Maghariba Gate.

Israel continues its policy of collective punishment and intentional destruction. The most recent example is the targeting of the entire infrastructure of the Gaza Strip, which is under a suffocating siege. Israel has closed border crossings, thus transforming the Gaza Strip into the largest open-air prison in the world.

Israel continues to expand its settlements, build the racist separation wall, destroy infrastructure and confiscate land. It continues to detain and liquidate key political personalities who were democratically elected by the Palestinian people. Nor has Israel spared the United Nations; Israeli occupation forces continue to detain and kill members of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and to limit the movement of its staff, inspect its vehicles and storm its buildings in violation of the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations of 1946.

At a time when Arab States are seeking to make peace, Israel is pursuing its policy of annexing land by intensifying settlement activity in the occupied territories and by its continued construction of the racist separation wall, in blatant violation of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

Most countries of the world and the United Nations itself, in all its bodies and organs, have adopted a clear position on Israeli settlement activity, condemning and demanding a halt to it. The intensification of Israeli settlement activity contradicts the desire to achieve peace, is a real obstacle to peace, and only worsens the situation in the region.

Syria reaffirms its continuing support for the rights of the Palestinian people to regain their occupied territories and to establish their independent State, with Jerusalem as its capital. Syria underscores the need to regain Palestinian national unity through a national dialogue that would strengthen the Palestinians' negotiating position and bolster the will of the Palestinian people. Furthermore, Syria is working to that end in its capacity as Chair of the Arab summit.

Syria has always believed that a just and comprehensive peace can be achieved only through Israel's implementation of the relevant United Nations resolutions, at the forefront of which are Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), as well as Council resolution 497 (1981), pertaining to the Syrian Golan Heights. Syria also calls for a revival of the peace process launched at the Madrid Conference of 1991.

The Arab Peace Initiative, which was endorsed by the 2002 Arab Summit in Beirut and reaffirmed by the Arab Summit Conference held this year in Damascus, reflects the desire of Arabs to achieve a just and comprehensive peace and is a sound foundation for the

achievement of this peace in a manner that is in line with resolutions of international legitimacy.

Mr. Mansour (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Today as we are discussing agenda item 16 on the question of Palestine, we are also commemorating the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

This is an opportunity of particular meaning, because it allows us once again to consider the difficult situation endured by the Palestinian people, the deep suffering that they experience every day and the denial of their basic rights. That is why we reaffirm our commitment to step up our efforts in order to put an end to this human tragedy. We also urge all those who can bring their influence to bear to step up their efforts in order to bring about a prompt and appropriate settlement of the crisis in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Tunisia would like to express its deep concern regarding Israel's continuing settlement activities and its provocative practices against the Palestinian people. In fact, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians are enduring great difficulties owing to the siege imposed by Israel, which impedes the delivery of basic humanitarian assistance and food. This also impedes the progress of negotiations and undermines peace and stability in the region.

At a time when the international community hopes to reinvigorate the peace process and negotiations, Tunisia is committed to the protection of rights based on justice and the legitimacy and principles of international law. We have always been a champion of the just cause of the Palestinian people. This courageous people has always had the full support of Tunisia, which has stood with the Palestinian people in their struggle and has always demonstrated that solidarity, so the Palestinian people can restore their legitimate national rights and establish their independent State on their own soil.

My country has spared no opportunity to reaffirm its ongoing principled support for these policies and the President of the Republic, Zine El Abedine Ben Ali, has on many occasions expressed that Tunisia would always stand with the just Palestinian cause, the cause of justice and peace in the region and worldwide and a cause that Tunisia holds most dear.

The responsibility to find a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question is a

historical and shared responsibility of the international community, including all its components. Here we will not fail to reaffirm our appreciation of the continuous efforts of the international community and the United Nations to provide the necessary support for the Palestinian people. I would like, in particular, to highlight the action of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the actions of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

It is crucial that we step up our efforts and provide all the necessary support to the Palestinian people so that we can restore peace in the region. President Ben Ali has stated that Tunisia, based on its commitment to peace as a strategic choice and its tireless commitment to the just Palestinian cause, calls upon the United Nations to step up its efforts to implement the rights of the Palestinian people so that that people can live as it deserves in freedom and dignity. Tunisia reaffirms its commitment to continue its efforts and to join any actions or any initiatives that are pursued in order to bring about a just overall settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict and in order to enable peace and security to reign in the Middle East region.

It is necessary to pool all the efforts of the international community in order to put an end to the suffering of the brotherly Palestinian people. We also urge the Quartet and the international community to lay the groundwork for Israeli-Palestinian negotiations in order to achieve the peace to which the peoples of the region aspire, based on international legality, the relevant Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Mr. Al Oyaidi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish to thank the President of the General Assembly and His Excellency the Secretary-General for the efforts they are exerting to establish international peace and security, given the evolving conditions and threats that are currently facing the world. The contemporary issues that we are facing require cooperation among States in order to maintain international peace and security in the world, as well as to establish stability. The situation also requires the United Nations to play a double role: to ensure the effective and efficient power of international legitimacy in order to keep the dangers of war and conflicts at bay, as well as to work to resolve all issues through peaceful means in

accordance with the principles of international legitimacy.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia participated, along with other Arab States, at the peace talks held in Madrid in 1991 and in various other rounds of multilateral negotiations, in the hope of ending the unjust occupation of the Palestinian territories and other occupied Arab lands. All Arabs look forward to an end of the Arab-Israeli conflict. However, Israel has not implemented any of the agreements, and stability continues to be an unlikely possibility in light of Israel's continued construction of settlements, the racist separation wall, the confiscation of land, the demolition of homes, as well as the practices of depriving the Palestinian people of their rights and of preventing humanitarian access.

Palestinians are still suffering from violence and terrorism committed by armed and fanatical Israeli settlers. Moreover, Israeli occupation forces continue to carry out operations aimed at destroying the Palestinians and their establishments and at further oppressing and torturing them. Furthermore, current Israeli practices are aimed at forcing the Palestinians to surrender to despair and frustration.

Arabs chose peace, not surrender, and their demands remain as follows: implementation of international legitimacy, especially Security Council

resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace, as well as a just and comprehensive peace. This requires a full Israeli withdrawal from the Arab lands occupied in 1967, as well as a return of Palestinian refugees to their homes and the restoration of their rights and compensation for those who do not wish to return. Moreover, the Palestinian people must be allowed to exercise their right to self-determination and to establish their State on their national soil, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. There must also be an Israeli withdrawal from the Syrian Golan Heights and from the Sheba'a Farms in South Lebanon.

The Israeli-Arab struggle is still a dominant factor in many of the issues in the Middle East, as it has been for the past six decades. It has given rise to terrorism and extremism and is a basic obstacle for development and reform efforts in the area. All Arab States have underscored their commitment to a just and comprehensive peace based on international legitimacy, and these countries are still waiting for a serious Israeli commitment to that. Partial solutions do not support the ongoing negotiations between the two sides to reach a comprehensive final status solution. This requires the Israeli side to immediately halt settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory. Israel's continued settlement activities only empties those negotiations of any meaning.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.