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Official Records

President: Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 37 (continued)

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/66/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/66/367)

Draft resolutions (A/66/L.15, A/66/L.16, A/66/L.17 and A/66/L.18)

Mr. Benmehidi (Algeria): First of all, I would like to thank the Permanent Representative of Senegal, Ambassador Abdou Salam Diallo, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and the Permanent Representative of Malta, Ambassador Saviour Borg, Rapporteur of the Committee, for their statements and their dedication, together with that of Committee members, to the work of the Committee.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered at the 67th plenary meeting by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (see A/66/PV.67).

Our meeting today comes at a time when, despite intensified efforts to revive the negotiating process, Israel continues to carry out its illegal actions in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. On a daily basis, the occupying Power violates the most basic human rights, including the

right to life, education, livelihood, housing and countless other fundamental rights.

Israel's malicious policies are wide-ranging and have a severe impact on all segments of the population. In that regard, in addition to its inhuman blockade of the Gaza Strip and collective punishment of the entire civilian population, Israel continues to launch military attacks against the Gaza Strip, with abject disregard for human life and the safety of civilians in that densely populated territory.

It is highly condemnable that Israel, the occupying Power, continues to pursue its illegal settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Recent announcements regarding the construction of thousands of additional settlement units, particularly in and around occupied East Jerusalem, as well as continued Israeli demolitions of Palestinian homes and properties, accompanied by escalating violence by settlers and forced evictions, are seriously exacerbating the situation on the ground and undermining efforts to revive the negotiating process.

In addition to the illegal actions to which I have referred, Israel continues to withhold Palestinian tax revenues, in an outrageous act of piracy and political extortion of the Palestinian people and their leadership. That is Palestinian money that Israel is obliged to transfer to the Palestinian Authority in accordance with signed agreements.

With regard to the plight of Palestinian prisoners and detainees, while welcoming the recent prisoner

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swaps that led to the release of more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners and detainees, my delegation strongly condemns the continuing detention and imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians in Israeli jails, where ill-treatment is common and torture is widely used. Those prisoners, who include children and women, should be immediately released and a proper international review of their current condition should be a priority for the international community.

The Israelis' unlawful actions on the ground provide the starkest evidence of the contrast between its actions and its professed intention to participate in the peace process. That clearly demonstrates that Israel is not on the path to peace and that the only goal being pursued under the Israeli policy seems to be the undermining of any future prospects for a peaceful settlement.

It is regrettable that all serious efforts made to date by international and regional parties, including the most recent Quartet statement of 23 September (see SG/2178), to resume direct negotiations have failed, owing mainly to the lack of clear parameters for those negotiations and the insistence of Israel, the occupying Power, on continuing its actions, which are aimed at cleansing the occupied Palestinian territory of its indigenous Palestinian population and altering its demographic composition and cultural character.

Israel's respect for its obligations is imperative for resuming direct negotiations towards achieving a two-State solution on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008) and the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the road map.

The international community must make every effort to compel Israel to abide by its obligations and commitments forthwith and to resume final status negotiations based on clear parameters, which would include the cessation of all settlement activities, an agreed time frame that recognizes the urgency of the matter and the 4 June 1967 borders as the foundation and starting point of the negotiations.

My delegation reiterates that any negotiated outcome between the parties must result in the emergence of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State within the 1967 borders and with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, in accordance with

international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

Finally, Algeria would like to congratulate the State of Palestine on its admission to UNESCO, and reiterates its unwavering support for its right to membership in the United Nations, in compliance with international law.

Mr. Alrowaie (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation is pleased to take this opportunity to express its appreciation for the ongoing and crucially important role of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. We thank the Chairman of the Committee, Permanent Representative of Senegal to the United Nations Abdou Salam Diallo, as well as the other members of the Committee, for their efforts to fulfil their noble tasks. We also wish to thank the Department of Public Information of the United Nations for establishing the Special Information Programme on the Question of Palestine.

We are deeply concerned by the details in the report before us (A/66/35) regarding the tensions in the occupied Palestinian territories and the serious worsening of the situation. The report provides a gloomy and disturbing account of the humanitarian and economic situation caused by the occupation and the settlement policy, which violate international conventions, in particular The Hague Convention of 1907 and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.

Despite the difficult conditions under the occupation, the Palestinian Authority has made progress in its State-building programme, with strong support from the international community, as detailed in the Committee's report before us. The Committee referred to a World Bank report asserting that the Palestinian Authority had continued to strengthen its institutions, deliver public services and promote reforms. In his report (A/66/367), the Secretary-General expressed his commitment to ensure that the United Nations works towards the establishment of an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State, living side by side in peace with a secure Israel, in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy.

Yesterday, in a message of solidarity with the Palestinian people and to mark the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, His Majesty King Hamad bin Issa Al Khalifa of Bahrain called on

the international community to demonstrate solidarity with the Palestinian people and increase its political, moral and financial support so as to alleviate the grave humanitarian crisis affecting the Palestinian people as a result of the Israeli occupation and annexation of Palestinian territories and its Judaization of those lands to benefit settlers.

We hope that the Committee will be able to fully carry out the mandate given to it by the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, in particular to define the parameters for resolving the Palestinian question, monitor the practices of the Israeli occupation and support the just struggle of the Palestinian people to gain their freedom and independence, establish national development institutions and live in dignity in their independent homeland like other peoples of the world. The decision of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to admit Palestine as a fully fledged member is a positive step towards recognizing similar status in other United Nations bodies and organizations. That decision enjoys international consensus, given that now is also the time to recognize the independent State of Palestine based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, as a solid basis comprised of innumerable resolutions of international legitimacy exist for it, whether through the General Assembly or the Security Council. There is also broad international support from the Arab world, including the Arab Peace Initiative, the road map and many other initiatives that envision the two-State solution and that recognize the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people as well as the fact that Israel has the right to security and peace with its neighbours. In that context, my country reiterates that Palestine's fully fledged membership in the United Nations would in no way contradict the regional and international efforts being made to return to the negotiating table.

The commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People embodies the international community's recognition of its special responsibility with regard to the need to strive to ensure the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

Mr. Wetland (Norway): The deep impasse between Israel and Palestine and the standstill, close to a rollback, of the peace process cannot be allowed to endure. There must be a meaningful diplomatic path forward. If not, the foundation for a viable two-State solution will erode. A main obstacle to establishing an

effective Palestinian State remains the occupation and the continued building of Israeli settlements on occupied land. Those undermine negotiations and are illegal according to international law. Israel must therefore end that practice.

We call on the parties to resume negotiations with a view to reaching a durable political solution. In our view, the United Nations has a major role to play in mobilizing the international community and providing a multilateral framework to support the parties on their path towards a negotiated peace.

The bid for Palestinian statehood has a legacy that goes back to the United Nations partition plan of 1947, and even further. In 1949, Norway voted in favour of admitting Israel as a State Member of the United Nations. We then based our decision on the declarations and explanations provided by Israel. Israel had persuasively explained why its recognition and membership should not await a resolution of the outstanding final status issues.

Since then, Norwegian policy has been based on the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. Norway therefore stands ready to recognize a Palestinian State. Meanwhile, we fully support all international efforts leading to a comprehensive agreement on the outstanding final status issues, including the Quartet's efforts to resume substantive talks between the two parties.

Norway has consistently stood by Israel and supported its inherent right to self-defence in accordance with international law. In parallel, we have also supported the Palestinian right to statehood and the institution-building of the Palestinian Authority. At its last meeting in September, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee affirmed the success of Palestinian institution-building. The joint conclusion by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations, after scrutinizing the performance of Palestinian public institutions, was that the Palestinians were fully capable of running a State. Prime Minister Fayyad has succeeded in what he promised two years ago: establishing the necessary institutional foundation for achieving international recognition of Palestinian statehood.

In September, President Abbas submitted the Palestinian application for United Nations membership (see A/66/371). He reiterated the need to resolve the

final status issues through negotiations. Moreover, he assured us of the Palestinian commitment to comply with the Charter of the United Nations and relevant United Nations resolutions, and to uphold democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

We take note of the report by the Security Council Committee on the Admission of New Members (S/2011/705) and the views presented therein. Consistent with our view regarding the Israeli application for membership in 1948, we believe that both recognition and membership would serve as incentives for negotiations to resolve the outstanding issues. We therefore support that steps be taken to effectively reunite the whole Palestinian people and territory under one single political authority, in ways that strengthen capacity to carry out the obligations contained in the Charter of the United Nations.

Recognition of statehood and accession to United Nations membership are issues that are best addressed in the context of discussions in the main United Nations bodies here in New York. We urge the Palestinian leadership to focus on the main United Nations bodies as regards the consideration of those issues.

Last week, in Oslo, Palestinian Prime Minister Fayyad agreed with the Norwegian Foreign Minister, in his capacity as Chair of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, to continue to mobilize international support towards deepening and broadening the readiness of the Palestinian institutions for statehood. Those efforts will focus in particular on the continued viability of the Palestinian Authority. It was also agreed to reconvene the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in Brussels on 21 March 2012. That meeting will focus on ways to enhance the sustainability of the Palestinian Authority, including means to strengthen private sector-led growth in the Palestinian economy and improve the situation in Gaza.

The Palestinian institutions rely on their domestically generated revenues to sustain public services to the Palestinian people. Two thirds of those Palestinian revenues are collected by Israel and subsequently transferred to the Authority on a monthly basis. Technical studies carried out by both Israeli and Palestinian authorities conclude that there is a need to improve the collection system and to increase revenue clearance, which would effectively reduce the donor dependency of the Palestinian Authority.

It is totally unacceptable that the transfer of those taxation revenues is postponed or withheld. Such unilateral acts violate unequivocal legal obligations contained in the Oslo Accords, namely, the so-called Paris protocol to the 1994 Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area. They undermine all efforts by donors and threaten the Palestinian Authority altogether. The economic revival and security improvements witnessed in recent years in the West Bank have resulted from successful, tripartite cooperation among the Palestinian Authority, the Government of Israel and the international community, including donors. That continued cooperation is crucial for stability in the Palestinian occupied territory.

Mr. Pham Vinh Quang (Viet Nam): I thank you, Mr. President, for convening this timely plenary meeting of the General Assembly on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, at a time when the situation in the Middle East has again emerged as a matter of grave concern to the international community. I am grateful to Mr. Abdou Salam Diallo for his important briefing.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

My delegation is deeply concerned by the continuous conflicts in the Middle East for the past 63 years. We hope to see progress towards a durable ceasefire between the parties concerned, and the required resumption of peaceful negotiations.

Israel, as the occupying Power, has yet to cease the construction and expansion of settlements and the separation wall or the demolition of Palestinian homes and the eviction of families, thereby directly endangering and altering the demographic composition, character, nature and status of the occupied Palestinian territory. The blockade has kept millions of Palestinians under dire circumstances and displaced many more from their homeland.

Proceeding from Viet Nam's long-standing recognition of the Palestinian people's fundamental and inalienable right to self-determination, first and foremost the right to create an independent and sovereign State of Palestine, we support the application submitted by President Mahmoud Abbas for the State of Palestine's full membership in the United Nations — with all the criteria for statehood satisfied, namely, a peace-loving State that is willing and able to carry out

the obligations contained in the Charter of the United Nations.

In that regard, Viet Nam welcomes the agreement reached on Thursday, 24 November, in Cairo among the Palestinian parties to hold presidential and parliamentary elections in May 2012 and to release each other's detainees from their respective prisons. At the same time, the occupying Power's deplorable reaction to the granting of full membership status to Palestine by UNESCO has further complicated the situation.

Viet Nam shares the commonly held view that, for an independent State of Palestine to thrive and for all peoples in the region to coexist in peace and security, all parties concerned need to pursue dialogue and negotiations along the lines of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 425 (1978), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008), as well as to respect, among other things, the frameworks provided under the road map, the Madrid terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Viet Nam therefore attaches importance to the renewed efforts by the Quartet, the League of Arab States, countries of the region and the United Nations to help to revitalize the Middle East peace process on all tracks and to promote Israeli-Palestinian negotiations on all core issues. We call for intensified efforts by the international community, in particular the Security Council and the Quartet, to address the current political and humanitarian crisis. We reiterate Viet Nam's continued commitment to joining the international community's collective efforts towards a two-State solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict, the peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the ultimate attainment of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Louilchki (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting. I would also like to thank His Excellency Mr. Abdou Salam Diallo, Permanent Representative of Senegal, for his valuable work in chairing the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. I also wish to commend the work of the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat in raising awareness of the various aspects of the Palestinian question.

My delegation associates itself with the statement made by the representative of the brotherly country of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

I shall first focus my comments on the application by Palestine for full membership of the United Nations. In that context, it is important to note that such a step was a logical and inevitable result of the stalemate in the peace process and the deadlock in negotiations. It also followed the expiration of the deadline set by the international community through the General Assembly to achieve a peaceful two-State solution. Moreover, the Palestinian request crowned extensive diplomatic efforts by the Palestinians over the past two years to establish State institutions, something that encouraged more than 130 States to recognize the State of Palestine.

Those efforts also led regional and international organizations to recognize and commend Palestinian institutional ability and capacity to undertake the responsibilities issuing from the declaration of statehood. Moreover, we support the progress made by the Palestinians towards achieving national reconciliation with the help and sponsorship of the friendly country of the Arab Republic of Egypt and with the effective encouragement and contribution of other Arab States.

My delegation has taken note of the report submitted to the Security Council by the Committee on the Admission of New Members (S/2011/705) on the application of Palestine for admission to full membership in the United Nations and on whether it has fulfilled all of the criteria set out in Article 4 of the Charter of the United Nations. We also note its conclusion that the Committee was unable to make a unanimous recommendation to the Security Council on the application owing to a lack of the necessary political will to support it at this time.

The Kingdom of Morocco will continue to support the just and legitimate quest of the brotherly Palestinian people. We hope that the Organization will follow in the footsteps of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which has just admitted Palestine to full membership.

My second point relates to the stalemate in the negotiations due to Israel's ongoing settlement policy. Israel continues to insist on implementing its policies aimed at altering the situation on the ground by continuing to accelerate its annexation of more

Palestinian territory; demolishing Palestinian homes; evicting residents from their towns and villages and expanding settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, not to mention its refusal to transfer tax revenues to the Palestinian Authority.

The Kingdom of Morocco, whose monarch chairs the Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, reaffirms its strong condemnation of the accelerated settlement activity in Jerusalem, which has a special status as the site for worshippers of the three divine religions. We also condemn all policies that aim at entrenching a solely Jewish character on that city and at removing any Arab, Islamic or Christian presence there, in addition to altering its historic and demographic character.

My country also condemns the attempts by Israeli authorities to demolish the bridge of the Mughrabi Gate, which connects the Western Wall with different parts of the grounds of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Al-Quds Al-Sharif. In that regard, we call upon the international community to hold Israel responsible and to request that it postpone that plan indefinitely — better yet, to cancel it completely. I also wish to express our support for the steadfast Palestinian people, especially the residents of Jerusalem, in their peaceful struggle and efforts to protect their holy city and places and their land.

In that context, we note that the Al-Quds fund established by the Al-Quds Committee has intensified its efforts in various sectors, including housing, health, education and the restoration of historic buildings that have been targeted by the Israeli authorities under various restoration or archaeological justifications and excuses without giving due attention to their religious or cultural value.

My third point is that the humanitarian situation of the Palestinians, especially in the Gaza Strip, remains a grave source of concern to the international community, civil society and humanitarian organizations. This is a disastrous situation that must be ended by calling on the Israeli authorities to lift the siege of Gaza and open all border crossings to the movement of goods and persons, in accordance with international humanitarian law and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

My delegation would also like to note the efforts of various United Nations agencies and programmes to improve the humanitarian situation of Palestinians, in

particular the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). In that regard, we note the mandate bestowed on UNRWA by the General Assembly in resolution 302 (IV) of 1949 and stress the need to avoid encroaching upon its mandate and responsibility to provide services to Palestinian refugees in all areas of operation until this issue is resolved in a final and satisfactory manner.

My fourth point pertains to the Kingdom of Morocco's continued commitment, despite the difficult conditions of the peace process, to supporting and contributing to any genuine and creative initiative aimed at creating conditions conducive to relaunching the negotiation process based on clear foundations and within an acceptable time frame in order to achieve results. That is in line with our principled and strategic position in favour of choosing the option of a just peace in the Middle East based on the Arab Peace Initiative, international resolutions and agreements and the agreed terms of reference.

We are concerned about the continued international and regional initiatives that have failed to achieve any tangible results, as well as the continued declarations by the sponsors of the peace process, the most recent of which was issued by the Quartet on 23 September (see SG/2178) and which has set a 90-day limit. However, despite all of those declarations and initiatives, no progress has been made towards peace. We can only express our profound conviction that peace is an inevitable option. In that regard, we insist on a just peace that guarantees the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to an independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital. A final and durable peace will guarantee security for all peoples in the region and end painful decades of futile struggle. It will also serve as a fruitful peace that provides a gateway for partnership and integration among all countries of the Middle East, including Israel. Lastly, we desire a comprehensive peace whereby Lebanon regains its remaining occupied land and Syria regains the occupied Golan.

Mr. Haniff (Malaysia): My delegation wishes to align itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

For more than half a century, the international community, through the United Nations, has undertaken intensive and extensive efforts to address

what is known as the question of Palestine. Despite all of those efforts, we are concerned that the peace process faces a bleak impasse, with no clear sign of progress.

Israel's illegal policies and inhuman practices, which continue with impunity, will continue to diminish the efforts towards realizing the aspiration of creating two sovereign States living side by side in peace. Israel's intransigence is evident from the following.

First is its continued expansion of illegal settlement activities in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the recent plans to construct 1,557 settlement units in parts of East Jerusalem and 673 in other areas of the West Bank.

Second is its forced evictions of the Palestinian people, the demolition of Palestinian homes and other infrastructure and the confiscation of Palestinian lands, including through the ongoing construction, still today, of the illegal separation wall despite the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (see A/ES-10/273) to stop its construction, as well as the revoking of the residency rights of Palestinians living in Jerusalem.

Third is the increase in violent attacks by extremist Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians, properties and agricultural produce, as well as of places of worship and holy sites. Such brutal acts continue unabated.

Fourth is the imprisonment of approximately 5,000 Palestinians in Israel, including Palestinian women and children, who are subject to ill-treatment and torture by the Israeli authorities.

Fifth is the imposition of measures that constitute a form of collective punishment, which is strictly forbidden by international humanitarian law. Such measures include the illegal blockade of Gaza, which has restricted the passage of essential goods and the much-needed construction materials for the reconstruction of Gaza, as well as the imposition of hundreds of checkpoints and roadblocks, the permit system and other obstacles that violate Palestinians' right to freedom of movement.

Sixth is the withholding of the value-added tax and customs revenues, which amount to approximately \$100 million monthly and which is collected on behalf of the Palestinian Authority pursuant to the Paris

protocol. Withholding those funds, which represent two thirds of the Palestinian Authority's annual revenue, debilitates the latter's State-building gains. Israel should heed the calls of the Secretary-General and of the international community to release those funds pursuant to its existing agreements.

It is obvious that such exploitation is not only illegal and immoral, but also counterproductive to the aim of achieving genuine and lasting peace. Israel cannot cloud the eyes of the international community by simply enumerating actions undertaken to diminish the suffering of Palestinians. Instead, Israel needs to focus due attention on the views and sentiments of the people of the 166 countries that voted in favour of the resolution on the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, in order to end this long-standing conflict. It must stop all provocative acts and improve the situation on the ground by immediately and without any conditions, halting the construction of illegal settlements, lifting the blockade in Gaza, addressing humanitarian needs and improving the atmosphere for negotiations, among other things. In that connection, the Quartet must compel Israel to stop its intransigence, particularly the construction of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Malaysia also believes that the achievement of political unity among Palestinians is equally important to moving the peace process forward and further accelerating the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip.

Yesterday, we observed the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. I wish to take this opportunity to pay our highest tribute to all Palestinians who have suffered through the years in their struggle to live in freedom and in dignity in a State that they can call their own. The people of Palestine can count on Malaysia's unwavering support in their efforts to create an independent and sovereign State of Palestine, based on the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. In that regard, we fully support the application of Palestine to become a full Member of the United Nations and call upon the Security Council and the General Assembly to favourably consider that legitimate application.

Mr. Elbahi (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, my delegation extends its appreciation to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and reiterates, on this occasion, its solidarity with, and support for, the legitimate

struggle of the Palestinian people for the sake of their just cause of attaining their rights to self-determination and to the establishment of their independent State on their land, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

My delegation also aligns itself with the statement made at the 67th meeting by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Israeli occupation authorities continue their blatant defiance of the international community by denying the rights of the Palestinian people and by their violations of international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law, as well as by continuing their illegal and inhuman practices, in violation of the rights of Palestinians on their occupied land. Such violations have become manifest and have been highlighted in United Nations reports, including the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories (A/HRC/16/72). In addition, there were previous reports, such as the comprehensive report prepared by the independent United Nations Fact-Finding Mission headed by Judge Richard Goldstone (A/HRC/12/48), which was considered by the General Assembly and regarding which resolutions 64/10 and 64/254 were adopted, and the consolidated report submitted to the Human Rights Council by 10 special rapporteurs regarding the effects of the embargo on Gaza.

Mr. Meetarban (Mauritius), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The continuous acts of aggression perpetrated by the Israeli occupation authorities against the Gaza Strip have resulted in thousands of victims, including the dead, the wounded and those who have been permanently disabled, a large number of whom are women and children. In addition, homes, hospitals, schools, universities, factories, shops and houses of worship have been destroyed, and United Nations headquarters have been attacked.

In East Jerusalem and the West Bank, Israel continues to build settlements, demolish the homes of Palestinians, expropriate their land and expel them, in blatant violation of all international laws and in an attempt to alter the demographic character of those areas and prevent the establishment of an independent Palestinian State.

The Palestinians have been hobbled by the expansion of the apartheid wall in the West Bank despite the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (see A/ES-10/273). They also suffer from arrests and detentions, including of children, in addition to the attacks by Israeli settlers, the checkpoints and the closures that increase day after day. The Palestinians also suffer from the violation of their rights to food, clothing, shelter, water, work, health, education and life.

The Israeli occupation authorities are still perpetrating their violations against Palestinians by expanding their settlements and increasing the number of settlers therein, expropriating more Palestinian land, demolishing more homes of Palestinians, expelling them and continuing to impose restrictions on residency, all in a flagrant attempt to Judaize Palestinian land and change its character. That is in addition to the continuous, dangerous excavations targeting the Al-Aqsa Mosque, which threaten its structure, in blatant defiance of the feelings of millions of Muslims around the world.

Despite hundreds of United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolution 497 (1981), calling on Israel to withdraw from the occupied Arab territories, including the occupied Syrian Golan, Israel continues its occupation of the Golan. My delegation calls for Israel's withdrawal from the Golan and from the remaining occupied territories in the south of Lebanon.

The solidarity and support enjoyed by the Palestinian people have strengthened their steadfastness on their land and their ability to stand up to injustice and occupation. In that regard, it is the historic responsibility of the United Nations to achieve a comprehensive, just solution to the question of Palestine — the crux of the conflict in the Middle East — by compelling Israel, the occupying Power, to fully withdraw from the Arab territories occupied in 1967 and enabling the Palestinian people to return to their land and establish their independent State, in accordance with the hundreds of resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to affirm its full support for the application that the Palestinian Authority submitted to the Secretary-General for full membership in the United Nations so that the

Palestinian people may live in their independent State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Mr. Shaanika (Namibia): Let me add my voice to join those who spoke before me in extending Namibia's appreciation to the Secretary-General and to His Excellency Mr. Abdou Salam Diallo, Permanent Representative of Senegal and Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, for their respective reports, contained in the documents before us (A/66/367 and A/66/35, respectively). Namibia fully concurs with the observations and recommendations contained in both reports.

While my delegation aligns itself with the statement made at the 67th meeting by His Excellency Mr. Maged Abdelaziz, the Permanent Representative of Egypt, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and by the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I would like to make additional comments on behalf of my country, Namibia.

Yesterday, in this very Hall, we heard a representative acknowledge how hurtful the truth was. However, I would like to add that the truth is hurtful only to those who try to hide it or who are in denial of reality. The truth is like a beacon that illuminates the darkness of falsehood and deception. It exposes the lies that are spread to cover the nakedness of injustice. History has taught us the valuable lesson that those who spread injustice often bury their heads in the shifting sands of denial, pretending not to see injustice. But each time they lift their heads, they are confronted by reality. Thus they revert to denial mode.

Yesterday morning we held a solemn meeting to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Sixty-four years ago, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), which partitioned Palestine into two States. The State of Israel was created through a resolution adopted by the General Assembly, yet when the people of Palestine opted to take the same route, they were told that it is counterproductive to the peace process — which in any case has been stalled since last year.

On this occasion every year, the international community reiterates its full support for the Palestinian people in the exercise of their inalienable rights, aimed at establishing a sovereign and independent State based on a two-State solution, the relevant resolutions of the

Security Council and the General Assembly, the Madrid Principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the road map. I take this opportunity to reaffirm our unwavering solidarity and support for the right of the people of Palestine to self-determination and an independent State of Palestine, which should take its rightful place among the family of sovereign nations.

On 23 September, the people of Palestine took a step closer to their most cherished dream, that of establishing a sovereign State of Palestine. They applied for full membership in the United Nations, in accordance with the relevant procedures enshrined in the Charter of the Organization. It is ironic and disappointing that Palestine's application for full membership has not been treated with the sense of urgency that it deserves. It is also regrettable that there is a lack of consensus among Security Council members on whether to recommend Palestine's membership to the General Assembly.

What the main reason can be for the Security Council's paralysis on this issue is incomprehensible. If and when Palestine becomes a State Member of the United Nations, it will assume the responsibilities and obligations enshrined in the Charter. When President Mahmoud Abbas announced from this very rostrum that Palestine had applied for membership, the people of Palestine rejoiced in high expectation, hoping that the United Nations was going to accept their application.

It is our firm belief and conviction that freedom is indispensable to human progress; it is not a privilege for the few. While the international community has applauded the sweeping and profound changes in the Middle East this year, the people of Palestine continue to face uncertainty under occupation and economic hardship. The international community cannot welcome sweeping change in a region and at the same time remain unresponsive to the genuine desire of the people of Palestine, in that same region, to enjoy a better standard of life in a viable State of their own, free from occupation and hardship.

We deplore the action of the Israeli Government in withholding Palestinian tax revenue, which appears to be a punishment for Palestine's admission into UNESCO. That admission is a fulfilment of the legitimate desire and aspiration of the people of Palestine and a sovereign decision of member States in the exercise of their rights and free will.

Israel's occupation of Palestine remains the major source of Palestinians' continued suffering and relegates them to refugee status. Israel, the occupying Power, has continued with its illegal construction of settlements and demolition of Palestinian homes, as well as the construction of an apartheid wall of separation, in total disregard of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (see A/ES-10/273). Such acts are inconsistent with international law and are thus a clear and present danger to peace and stability and an impediment to the peace process.

We therefore condemn any action that frustrates genuine efforts to achieve a durable peace between Israel and Palestine. However, the Israeli authorities, as the occupying Power, must demonstrate beyond any reasonable doubt that they are committed to peace, and they must refrain from counterproductive actions that are likely to have a negative impact on the peace process.

Namibia shares the conviction that achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine — the core Arab-Israeli conflict — is imperative for the attainment of peace and stability in the Middle East. We have therefore come here today to express our support for restarting the Middle East peace process, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative, as well as the arrangements made in good faith between the peoples of Palestine and Israel. However, for the peace negotiations to succeed, two committed and willing partners are required to carry them through to their logical conclusion. While we support the resumption of the peace process, it should not become a perpetual orbit with no destination.

Yesterday the same representative I mentioned earlier told the General Assembly that the resolutions we adopt each time have been copied and pasted over the years. If that is the case, perhaps it is the occupation that has been perpetually copied and pasted over and over again. If there are no changes in the occupation and the plight of the people of Palestine continues to put them in mortal danger, we will continue to adopt resolutions that correspond to the reality of the situation.

Time and again, my delegation has repeatedly acknowledged that Israel, like any other country on

Earth, is duly entitled to adequate security. However, in its pursuit of security, Israel should not violate human rights and extinguish any rays of hope for the people of Palestine. It is our firmly held conviction that the only way that Israel can guarantee its security is through the creation of a Palestinian State existing side by side with Israel within internationally recognized borders. The people of Palestine, like any other people on Earth, have a right to their land and the creation of a viable State.

Namibia also believes that the right to self-determination is a fundamental human right that for too long has been denied to the people of Palestine. They continue to look to the United Nations to give them hope, so that they can join all of us in declaring that we, the peoples of the United Nations, are determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in greater freedom. If we fail to heed the voice of the people of Palestine, history will pass harsh judgement on our collective failure.

Mr. Al-Sallal (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, my country's delegation would like to express its gratitude and appreciation to the Chair and the members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for the outstanding efforts that they have made in support of the just cause of the Palestinian people.

We would also like to express our satisfaction at the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This is a tradition that has political, moral and humanitarian significance, as enshrined by the Organization, including the support for the struggle of oppressed peoples under occupation. This commemoration is an affirmation of the legitimacy of the Palestinian people's struggle and their legitimate right to resist occupation and establish an independent State on their national soil, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

My country's delegation also associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (see A/66/PV.67).

This meeting is being convened even as Israel continues its illegal settlement activities in the occupied Arab territories, including East Jerusalem, under a policy of murder, State terrorism and eviction, as well as the construction of the wall separating the Palestinian people from their land.

Furthermore, Israel is continuing its policy of collective punishment and siege, contravening the provisions of international law and international humanitarian law. These hostile Israeli practices have extremely dangerous implications that are aimed at burying the peace process alive and the efforts of the international Quartet, which had the support of the international community. Moreover, this escalation warns of real dangers that could drive the entire region into a cycle of violence and terrorism, causing severe damage to the stability of the region and the world and to international peace and security.

The Israeli Government's insistence on moving forward with its settlement policies and practices in the Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, represents a continued violation by Israel of international law and of the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy, as well as the requirements of peace. These actions also affect the potential for achieving peace and establishing a sovereign Palestinian State.

We hold Israel solely responsible for the stalemate in the negotiations process because of its insistence on continuing its settlement activities at a feverish pace instead of seeking to establish peace, despite clear international agreement on the fact that the settlements are illegal and illegitimate and despite the severe negative impact they have on the possibility of resuming negotiations and establishing a just and comprehensive peace in the region and achieving a two-State solution.

My country would like to congratulate the State of Palestine on its accession to full membership in UNESCO. That was a crowning achievement of the intensive diplomatic efforts made by the Palestinians, and we also look forward to the accession by the State of Palestine to full membership in the United Nations and its various bodies.

My delegation would like to reiterate that a just and comprehensive peace with Israel can be achieved only if Israel withdraws fully to the 4 June 1967 borders, including from the occupied Syrian Golan and the territories still occupied in southern Lebanon. That will also require the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in implementation of the relevant United Nations and, in particular, Security Council resolutions on the matter.

Here we call on the United Nations and the international community to shoulder the responsibility of guaranteeing the rights of the Palestinian people, and to compel Israel to put an end to its policy of violence and State and international terrorism. It must also fully implement the relevant international and regional resolutions, initiatives and agreements, in order to revitalize the peace process and move towards just and comprehensive solutions that would guarantee the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. These include the Arab Peace Initiative, whose political framework was to achieve peace in the region, as well as the relevant United Nations resolutions. We call for the rejection of any partial or temporary solutions in this regard.

The Gaza Strip, which has been under an illegitimate and inhumane siege for more than four years now, has suffered from a complete paralysis of its economy, and the health, social and living standards of its more than 1.7 million residents remain at the brink of collapse. We therefore call on the international community to take the steps necessary to end the unjust and inhumane Israeli siege imposed on the Gaza Strip. We call for the immediate lifting of the siege, and we stress the need to rebuild the Strip and to open all crossings so as to enable the free movement of people and goods, in order to alleviate the suffering of the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip.

Mr. Jerandi (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): We are meeting this morning to consider the question of Palestine in the light of the historic developments taking place in the region and of the broad international support for the cause of justice, freedom and dignity, and fundamental rights, despite the lengthy struggle to establish those same rights, principles and values. The Palestinian people have been deprived of their legitimate and fundamental rights, in particular the right to independence and freedom and to the establishment of their independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on the basis of the 1967 borders.

The Israeli practices of repression, its settlement policies and its programmes aimed at changing the religious, geographical and demographic situation target the peace process, which remains in a stalemate. The negotiations for peace must be based on the good intentions of both parties and their willingness to keep their commitments in full. Many international, governmental and non-governmental organizations

have confirmed that Israeli practices in the occupied Palestinian territories are a direct threat to the resumption of talks and are in contradiction with the provisions of international law, international humanitarian law, the agreements previously reached and the underlying terms of reference for the peace process, in particular the Arab Peace Initiative.

Tunisia is following with great concern the developing situation in Palestine. Unfortunately, the situation is at a stalemate following two decades of sterile peace talks that have not led to the expected settlement. That is due to the intransigent position of the Israeli Government, which does not wish to respond to the positive international proposals and initiatives and which continues to implement its settlement plans and repressive policies.

In the light of the deadlock in the process of reaching a serious and just settlement, Tunisia reiterates its full support for the Palestinian leadership, which has approached the United Nations with an application for Palestine's full-fledged membership in the Organization. We call upon the United Nations system, specifically the Security Council, to support the application, which is in line with law, justice and the requirements of international legitimacy as set forth in the relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular resolution 181 (II), of 29 November 1947.

Tunisia believes that the fairness and legitimacy of the Palestinian application was reflected in Palestine's entry in UNESCO as a full-fledged member, which embodies and consecrates the efforts made by the Palestinians with the broad support of the member States of UNESCO. That international unanimity was met with even greater Israeli intransigence in the form of withholding tax revenues and customs — a coercive measure that is in violation of international law and the Geneva Conventions.

President Abbas made a statement yesterday, on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in which he affirmed that Palestine's application was legal, legitimate and based on the principles of the partition decision adopted 64 years ago. The Palestinian people are seeking to establish their own State in line with the relevant international law and resolutions. They are not taking any unilateral actions; rather, they are acting within their legal rights under international laws and norms as a free, independent and sovereign State.

The recognition of the State of Palestine, in contrast to the speculation in some quarters, could create a proper framework for negotiations and could encourage such prospects. We know that the contraction of historical Palestinian lands has today reached about 20 per cent, which threatens to cause a deadlock in the negotiations as long as Israel's settlement and annexation policies remain in place and seek to establish a de facto situation on the ground, in contradiction of Israel's claim that it is sincere in its search for peace.

In a statement made on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the Secretary-General clearly stated that, more than ever before, a solution must be found to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He further pointed out that the establishment of an independent State was a legitimate aspiration of the Palestinian people. It is clear that the current circumstances in the region, which is experiencing a wave of liberation from injustice, oppression and tyranny and whose people aspire to free, just and democratic life, should prompt us to reach a lasting, just and comprehensive settlement to the question of Palestine and to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict.

We must now undertake concrete measures on the ground and see to their implementation if we wish to resume the peace process. Such measures include an immediate and total halt to settlements, the lifting of all obstacles to the freedoms and basic rights of the Palestinian people and protecting Al-Quds Al-Sharif from plans that are designed to strip that city of its proper Arab and Islamic identity. These initiatives must be undertaken with great seriousness, credibility and commitment, otherwise it will not be possible for negotiations to resume.

Tunisia began its peaceful revolution at the beginning of this year in order to restore its people's dignity and their legal rights. The people of Tunisia have always called for an independent and sovereign Palestine on its historic land, while they have simultaneously demanded their own national rights. The brotherly Palestinian people must at last come to enjoy justice through an end to their occupation and repression and an end to the denial of their fundamental rights.

My country would like to draw attention to the threats resulting from the deadlock and the

provocations and sanctions of the Israeli occupation authorities, which fly in the face of international opinion and the will of the international community. Tunisia would also like to draw attention to the vacuum that has been created by the deadlock in the peace talks, which has been accompanied by a policy of collective punishment, both of which have led to increased tension, frustration and violence in the region and to a lack of security and change in the situation.

Finally, we would like to reiterate that Tunisia, like other delegations, fully and strongly supports the Palestinian people and its leaders in reaching a just settlement of the question of Palestine. Tunisia will always be ready to contribute to all efforts and initiatives aimed at a just and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine and of the Arab-Israeli conflict, all of which will contribute to security, peace and stability in the Middle East.

Mr. Escalona Ojeda (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to begin by thanking the Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for its tireless work, both inside and outside the United Nations, in order to give importance and visibility to the cause of the Palestinian people.

My delegation associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The debate that brings us together today provides a suitable opportunity to remember the systematic violation of the rights of a people and the unresolved obligation of the international community to what Edward Said called the last great cause of the twentieth century. The huge number of dead or crippled civilians, the ongoing demolition of houses, the steady and deliberate dismantling of basic infrastructure, and the imprisonment of a people inside an inhuman and shameful blockade are today's painful reflection of a conflict that began more than 60 years ago.

Therefore, Venezuela joins the cry that demands, unequivocally and without further delay, the end of the Israeli presence in the occupied territories as a basic prerequisite for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. Venezuela reaffirms its full support for the recognition of the Palestinian State as a full Member of the United Nations.

Since the establishment of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the human tragedy that has accompanied the Israeli-Arab political conflict has only become more acute and the access of the inhabitants of the occupied territories to their most basic rights grows more uncertain every day.

My delegation notes with great concern the lack of progress in the peace process, which is aimed at realizing the inalienable, permanent and unconditional right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, including the rights to live in freedom, to justice and dignity and to establish a contiguous, sovereign, independent, democratic and viable State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the provisions of resolution 10/20 of the Human Rights Council.

During the past year, the Israeli Government has undertaken some new initiatives as part of its campaign to destroy the peace process in the Middle East, while part of the United Nations community, which sees the double standards in the application of international law, remains frustrated and powerless. Those initiatives can be summarized as follows.

First is the deliberate territorial and economic disintegration of the life of the population and attempts to alter the demographic composition of the territory. Secondly, from our viewpoint, the violations and occupation policies and practices not only persist, but are becoming increasingly evil and sophisticated, contravening all norms of peaceful coexistence.

We are dismayed by the continuing blockade of Gaza, which violates the right to freedom of movement, housing, food, water, employment, health care and education. The blockade is untenable from every point of view, and it is a lie to say that it has in any way been relaxed.

In the West Bank, in particular East Jerusalem, the demolition of houses, the building of settlements, the annexation of land and the construction of the separation wall, which contravenes the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, continue. As a result of repressive measures, access by Palestinians to agricultural land, schools, medical facilities and places of worship is prevented, and thousands of families are compelled to live apart.

There has been a significant increase in violence by Israeli settlers towards Palestinians. That includes the burning of mosques, the destruction of olive groves, the burning of farmland, the slaughter of cattle and direct attacks on villagers, without the Israeli authorities intervening to stop the violence and arrest and prosecute the perpetrators.

All those policies and practices of the Israeli Government threaten the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, international legality and a peace that both the Palestinian and the Israeli peoples deserve. The United Nations must move from words to actions in order to stop the impunity on the part of the State of Israel, since that is the main obstacle to the pursuit of a just and comprehensive peace to the conflict in the Middle East. The legitimacy of the United Nations has been undermined and its impartiality seriously called into question when we see the harshness with which it acts towards other States, going as far as to topple Governments.

The Security Council cannot remain blind and deaf to what happens in Palestine, while it acts particularly harshly in other places. The State of Israel flouts, with impunity, the resolutions of the United Nations. It commits serious crimes; it tramples international law; and the Security Council feigns ignorance. That double standard cannot continue without threatening international stability and the progress in the areas of human rights, democracy, law and international justice that humankind has achieved through centuries of struggle.

Stopping the impunity and the crimes is a great commitment to present and future generations, to humankind and to the planet. On behalf of those principles, we declare our most resolute support for the declaration of Palestine as a State Member of the United Nations, with full sovereignty and independence.

Mr. Kohona (Sri Lanka): My delegation associates itself with the statement made on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement by the Permanent Representative of Egypt.

This year generates a little more hope as we return to the issue of Palestine. On the one hand, we see the many efforts on the part of the international community to create a Palestinian State inch closer to fruition. On the other hand, the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to statehood remains an aspiration.

My Government and the people of Sri Lanka remain steadfast in our position with regard to the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. We reaffirm our unequivocal support for the two-State solution. Permit me, at this point, to convey the sentiments of my President, His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa, to the Assembly.

“On this solemn occasion, as we commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I wish to reaffirm, on behalf of my Government and the people of Sri Lanka, our sincere support for the just struggle of the Palestinian people to achieve their inalienable rights, including the right to statehood.

“Peace ensures security, and that fundamental factor underscores the urgency of resolving the Middle East conflict. The long-standing unresolved conflict is a challenge to the values and aspirations of humanity. Having personally associated myself with the cause of Palestine for nearly 40 years, I reiterate that the Palestinians have been denied their basic human rights for far too long and renew the consistent call of my Government for the realization of a two-State solution.

“This year’s International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People comes at a fundamentally changed time, with noteworthy developments. The Palestinian Authority leadership has submitted an application for admission of the State of Palestine to full membership in the United Nations. Palestine has been successfully completing its own State-building programme, which has been widely endorsed by the international community. There is emerging internal reconciliation between the relevant local political stakeholders.

“Therefore, now is the time for collective resolve and action to usher in an independent and viable Palestinian State within secure borders, in peace and security. As I said in my address to the Assembly in the general debate (see A/66/PV.19), it is a matter of profound disappointment that that has not yet happened. We have a window of opportunity now and must make the best use of it before it is too late. It is time for decisive action, rather than more desultory discussion. This will

be in the interest of the security and the well-being of the entire region.

“It is the earnest hope and wish of Sri Lanka to see the dawn of a Palestinian State flourishing in peace, harmony and prosperity in the near future.”

The developments since our last opportunity to discuss the question of Palestine are particularly important. The international efforts and tender hope for the early resumption of negotiations between Israel and Palestine continue unabated. Palestine has been successfully completing its State-building programmes, which have been endorsed by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the United Nations and others, as well as by the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians. Internal reconciliation is being strengthened.

We hope that the application for admission of the State of Palestine to full membership in the United Nations will receive positive consideration by all States. Sri Lanka has called upon all parties to ensure a climate conducive to that goal. Negotiations are a must to realize that goal. The two-State solution is the only sustainable solution. The key stakeholders involved in the Middle East peace process have called upon all parties to meet their obligations under the road map.

The recent exchange of prisoners and the limited relaxation of the Gaza blockade are encouraging developments. The issue of Palestinian political prisoners in Israel is critical to a satisfactory settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and as a vital confidence-building measure. However, the punitive measures undertaken by Israel following the admission of Palestine as a member State of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, such as withholding the funds due the Palestinian National Authority, are regrettable and will hinder the positive momentum needed for peace talks.

I take this opportunity to commend the work that has been carried out by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, for all these years and against all odds, in assisting millions of Palestinians in need, especially the people of Gaza. We underline the need to further relax the restrictions imposed under the blockade and allow for the freedom of movement and the importing of materials necessary for much-needed reconstruction of

basic facilities, including schools and housing. We also appreciate the ongoing efforts by international donors, regional organizations and United Nations agencies to mitigate the suffering of the innocent civilians, especially women and children, in providing protection to them.

Sri Lanka wishes to reiterate its support for the Palestinians' quest for their legitimate human and national rights. It is also our sincere wish that Israel, Palestine and their neighbours coexist in peace and harmony. Peace in the Middle East is essential not only for the region but also for the world. Realizing the two-State solution would be the greatest investment in peace in the region and the most defining moment of our time. The Government and people of Sri Lanka would like to reassure the Assembly of our continued support and solidarity in that regard.

Mr. Dabbashi (Libya) (*spoke in Arabic*): I do not think that any of the peoples on our planet have suffered as the Palestinian people are currently suffering under foreign occupation. Out of approximately 12 million Palestinians, only 5 million currently live in Palestine's historical territory. The rest have been dispersed throughout the world. They have lost all of their rights to historical Palestine, the land of their fathers and their forefathers. The Palestinians have less than 15 per cent of their historical land, and even the small patches of land that they still retain are either under the complete control of the Israeli occupation forces or else under full siege and are prey to the continuous threat of confiscation by every illegitimate means.

The Israeli occupation authorities have used every means possible to empty Palestine of its original inhabitants and to settle it with Jews brought from all parts of the world. It seeks by every possible means to control every inch of Palestine's land so that Israel can expand to fill it, making it into a racist State that is strictly for Jews. To entrench that reality, the Israeli authorities use the construction of settlements and the demolition of Palestinians' homes and severely punish Palestinians themselves by evicting them from their land, especially in Jerusalem and the West Bank.

The practices of the Israeli entity leave no room for the Palestinians to establish their independent State, despite all the concessions that they have made during negotiations, held between two unequal sides, and despite the fact that Palestinians have agreed to

establish their State on only a small part of Palestine's historical land.

The international community's silence, the blind eye it turns to Israel's crimes and its avoidance of punishing or even criticizing Israel have only encouraged Israel to go ever further in violating human rights. It does so while using the excuse of negotiating with the Palestinians to gain time in order to entrench a fait accompli, gain control over still more Palestinian territory and eliminate any chance of establishing a viable Palestinian State.

The international community cannot stand idly by as the Palestinian people's basic rights are violated, as they are systematically oppressed, as they live in misery and deprivation because of abuse and siege, and as they are driven to despair of any hope to regain their legitimate right to return to their territories, to enjoy self-determination and to establish their independent State. That would give them the right to use all necessary and available means to regain their rights and live in peace like all other peoples of the world.

The increasing number of Member States that have recognized the State of Palestine confirms the great responsibility of the United Nations to ensure justice for the Palestinians and to help them to regain their rights and establish their independent State. The United Nations must spare no effort to uphold that immediate responsibility so that it does not lose credibility in the eyes of the international community, whose members look forward to a new era in which all peoples of the world can enjoy freedom, justice and human rights.

The Palestinian Authority has submitted an application for full membership in the United Nations. The Secretary-General in the United Nations referred that application to the Security Council after verifying that the State of Palestine had met the criteria for membership. Unfortunately, some members of the Security Council continue to prevent that body from carrying out its duties and refuse to grant membership to the State of Palestine. In no way does that stance serve the cause of international peace and security, nor does it serve the long-term interests of the Israelis or the Palestinians.

The time has come for all Members of the United Nations to uphold their responsibilities regarding the rights of the Palestinian people and towards peace and security in the Middle East region. Everyone must

realize that the Palestinian people will not forfeit their inalienable rights and that they will find support from many peoples and countries so as to regain those rights some day, even if through the use of force. We must all work together now to achieve the aspirations of the Palestinian people and to guarantee peace and security for everyone in the future.

Mrs. Phommachanh (Lao People's Democratic Republic): My delegation wishes to thank the President for convening this important debate on the question of Palestine, which necessitates the urgent and serious attention of the international community in solidarity with the Palestinian people.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic aligns itself with the statement made at the 67th meeting by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and reiterates its long-standing solidarity with, and unwavering support for, the heroic people of Palestine and their just and legitimate cause of regaining their fundamental rights and establishing an independent and sovereign State on Palestinian soil.

This year is perhaps the most critical. It holds great political significance, as the leadership of the Palestinian Authority has submitted an application for the admission of the State of Palestine as a full Member of the United Nations. It is a critical issue of global justice and a defining test of the world Organization's readiness to move in that direction. Member States must therefore work to ensure that the Palestinians are able to realize their inalienable rights, including the right of return and the right to self-determination, as well as their earnest aspirations for freedom, prosperity, peace and justice in an independent and sovereign State of Palestine, based on the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

We must acknowledge that the Palestinians' approaching the United Nations to gain their rights as a recognized Member State does not negate their firm commitment to resolving the conflict through dialogue and peaceful means. We can well understand their suffering and struggle over the past several decades, without any glimmer of hope, while the international community remains unable to take decisive action at the levels where it matters most.

Over time, we have seen the growing ability of the Palestinian Authority to establish the institutional foundations necessary for international recognition of Palestinian statehood, as endorsed by all major

international organizations and institutions, the United Nations and the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians. We commend the Palestinians for making those heroic efforts despite the most grave obstacles and challenges that have been imposed.

Israel's continuous settlement activity and its destruction of properties, homes and economic institutions in the occupied territory have exacerbated the already critical socio-economic situation facing the Palestinian population. Those provocative acts not only constitute a breach of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law, but also cause the failure of the peace process and the collapse of opportunities for negotiations and jeopardize the two-State solution.

We therefore call on Israel to completely stop the illegal construction and expansion of settlements and to abrogate all policies and practices that contravene the basic standards of human rights and social justice. Israel should not be allowed to alter the demographic and cultural profile of the Palestinian people on their own land, and especially East Jerusalem. It is imperative that Israel commit to terms of reference for the negotiations that are based on international legitimacy.

While we welcome the recent prisoner exchange, the imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians in Israeli prisons and detention facilities constitutes one of the many injustices against the Palestinian people. Member States must shoulder their responsibilities by addressing the practices of the Israeli Government in that regard, which contradict the principles and laws of the international community, and demand that Israel release those Palestinian political prisoners without any preconditions.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic joins the vast majority of delegations that share the conviction that a strong and determined decision and action are currently the only way to promote a just, lasting, comprehensive and peaceful solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, in keeping with the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Quartet road map. The road map envisages a sovereign, independent and viable State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living in peace with the State of Israel within secure and internationally recognized borders.

In conclusion, I wish to reaffirm the consistent support of the Lao People's Democratic Republic for the Palestinian people's efforts to attain their long-delayed goal of a viable, peaceful and prosperous State of Palestine that is a full-fledged Member of the United Nations.

I also take this opportunity to commend the United Nations agencies, especially the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, on their role and their work in assisting millions of Palestinian people in need over many years and amid multiple difficulties. We wish the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People every success in its noble endeavour to achieve a peaceful, just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the question of Palestine.

Mr. Laram (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): Since the Israeli-Arab negotiations began on their various tracks, our position has remained clear that they should lead to upholding Arab and Palestinian rights in all their aspects on the basis of international legitimacy, in particular the relevant Security Council resolutions and the principle of land for peace.

In that context, we would like to recall that Israel is obligated under resolution 242 (1967) to put an end to the Israeli military occupation, while preserving the territorial integrity of the West Bank and Gaza. That is the decision that gave birth to the Camp David Accords, in which Israel agreed to a peaceful settlement to the conflict with its neighbours. The Oslo Accords also provided that the West Bank and Gaza were a single territorial unit whose integrity and status must be preserved during the transition period and that no side may take any steps that change the situation in the West Bank or Gaza while awaiting for the results of the permanent status negotiations. Those undertakings are contractual and are legally binding on Israel.

In the wake of the signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements between the Palestinian Liberation Organization and Israel on 13 September 1993, the Arab States indicated the need for that agreement to achieve Israel's full withdrawal from the West Bank, including Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. That is a step towards comprehensive peace that must be supplemented with urgent steps on the other tracks, guaranteeing Israel's withdrawal from all the occupied Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip.

We have watched developments since the signing of the accord in 1993, in the hope that the desired prosperity and peace would be achieved. However, regrettably, we have been disappointed. Day in and day out, we have witnessed the illegitimate practices and acts of aggression by the Israeli occupation authorities against people in the Palestinian territories, including occupied Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. That has occurred in contravention of the will of the international community and despite the relevant Security Council resolutions calling on the occupation authorities to maintain the territorial integrity of the entire occupied territories, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, to guarantee freedom of movement and to refrain from arbitrary actions against the Palestinian people. The occupation authorities did not heed any of those decisions and, in blatant defiance of the international community, entrenched the status quo.

The occupying Power, with all its military, Government and civilian institutions, pursues expansion and settlement and the exploitation of resources in the Palestinian territories, the destruction of the environment as a result of the destruction of trees and orchards, and the closing of roads used by Palestinians. Water resources have also been adversely affected, especially sanitation facilities.

The settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories have been geographically distributed so as to surround local Palestinian communities and limit their natural growth. Additional measures to strengthen the occupation in the West Bank include the establishment of the wall of separation and the building of bypass roads by the occupation authorities all over the West Bank. That settlement policy is in and of itself a blatant violation of Article 49, paragraph 6, of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Settlement colonialism takes place in the Palestinian territories in numerous ways, including the demolition of Palestinian homes and the construction of the illegal wall of separation against the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (see A/ES-10/273). The entire Palestinian territories and their infrastructure are subject to expropriation for Israeli purposes, and the destruction of infrastructure has a devastating effect on the socio-economic situation of the affected families.

The health services provided by the Palestinian Authority and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East have been gravely affected. The severe restrictions imposed

on movement from the West Bank led to a great decrease in the rate of child immunization in 2010, a delay in the registration of pregnant women in prenatal care programmes, and an increase in the incidence of anaemia. The economic situation and financial flows to the Palestinian Authority have been adversely affected as well, especially after Israel announced the withholding of the transfer of Palestinian funds deposited with it, which no doubt has a negative effect on the Palestinian economy.

Finally, we would like to affirm that the question of Palestine and the solution of the conflict with Israel in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative — which affirms the establishment of the Palestinian State on the basis of the 1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital and living side by side with Israel in return for recognition by Arab States of the State of Israel — is a prerequisite for the establishment of stability in the region and will remain part and parcel of Arab geostrategies in the region.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate under this item.

I would like to inform Members that action on draft resolutions A/66/L.15, A/66/L.16, A/66/L.17 and A/66/L.18 will be taken immediately following the debate under agenda item 36.

Agenda item 36

The situation in the Middle East

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/66/338 and A/66/367)

Draft resolutions (A/66/L.19 and A/66/L.20)

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt to introduce draft resolutions A/66/L.19 and A/66/L.20.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): The General Assembly is today considering agenda item 36, entitled “The situation in the Middle East”, in the context of the resolution of the conflicts and constant tensions in the Middle East in the light of the illegal Israeli occupation of Arab territories since 1967 and Israel’s failure to respect the international will, international law, international humanitarian law and various United Nations resolutions, in spite of all the efforts made internationally and regionally to reach a comprehensive negotiated settlement that allows for a

peaceful, lasting and fair settlement of the Palestinian question, which lies at the heart of that conflict. It is clear that the Middle East is today experiencing a very dangerous phase, while Israel daily defies international will by continuing its settlement policy and its expansion of the settlements in an illegal manner, particularly in and around East Jerusalem. This is taking place in spite of the demands of all the parties in the international community, including the United Nations, the Quartet and the European Union, which have been calling for an end to those illegal activities with immediate effect.

We have recently seen an increase in Israeli violations of international law, human rights law and international humanitarian law in the occupied Palestinian territories, with many illustrations of that fact. In spite of the exchange of one Israeli soldier for more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners and detainees, thousands of other prisoners, including women and children, continue to be held in Israeli prisons without any legal justification. Moreover, the Israeli Government has continued to build the barrier wall, in defiance of the International Court of Justice advisory opinion (see A/ES-10/273) and Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. All of that is in addition to the construction of barriers and checkpoints in the West Bank, which have made life a living hell for Palestinians. There have also been other violations, to which I referred in my speech on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement in our debate yesterday on agenda item 37, entitled "Question of Palestine" (see A/66/PV.67).

It is highly regrettable that all those practices represent an effort to ensure that direct negotiations are not successful. That reflects Israel's rejection of any peaceful settlement, which has a negative impact not only on Israelis and Palestinians but also on the entire region and, indeed, on the whole world. That is why the international community, which the General Assembly represents, is now called upon more than ever before to undertake the measures necessary to resume negotiations along clear parameters. Those include putting an immediate and unconditional halt to the illegal settlement policy, negotiating on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders and setting a clear timetable. There must also be a follow-up mechanism on the commitments taken on by Israelis and Palestinians, to ensure a lasting and peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict in all its aspects. We must proceed in

line with the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative, the road map and United Nations resolutions.

Against that backdrop, the international community, represented by the United Nations, must express the international will to support the Palestinian quest for full membership in the United Nations, as enunciated by the Palestinian President when he addressed the Assembly in September (see A/66/PV.19), as well as recognize the Palestinian State, along the lines of the 4 June 1967 borders. Such international recognition would give a positive impetus to the negotiations on a final status settlement. In that connection, I would like to welcome the courageous recommendation by the Parliament of Iceland, announced by the Permanent Representative of Iceland yesterday, to recognize the Palestinian State. I commend that decision, which will be formally adopted very soon.

The international community, represented by the Assembly, must insist on the illegality of any measures taken by Israel to change the legal status and the facts on the ground in the occupied Syrian Golan. All such measures are illegal, indeed null and void, because they constitute a violation of all the relevant United Nations resolutions on the matter. The General Assembly must call on Israel to respect its commitments under Security Council resolution 497 (1981) and to withdraw its occupation forces from the Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

The international community refuses to accept illegal Israeli activities in the occupied Arab territories. In the light of the sharp deterioration in the peace process, I am pleased to introduce to the General Assembly, under agenda item 36, entitled "The situation in the Middle East", two draft resolutions of extreme importance — draft resolution A/66/L.19, entitled "Jerusalem", and draft resolution A/66/L.20, entitled "The Syrian Golan".

Draft resolution A/66/L.19 recalls the decisions of the General Assembly and the Security Council on the special status of occupied East Jerusalem and considers null and void and illegal the administrative, legislative and other measures taken by Israel to alter the demographic and legal character of the city. Any just and comprehensive solution to the question of

Jerusalem must include international guarantees of freedom of religion and belief for all citizens — rather than the settlements, Judaization and other illegal actions taken by Israel and Israeli settlers that violate Palestinians' right to practise their religion, including repeated attacks on the Al-Aqsa Mosque, which threaten not only the building itself, as well as the excavations being conducted in and around the Holy City of Jerusalem.

Draft resolution A/66/L.20 recalls Security Council resolution 497 (1981) and the Assembly's concern about Israel's ongoing disregard for that resolution and for The Hague Convention of 1907 and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 in the matter of the Syrian Golan, occupied since 1967. It also reiterates the illegality of the imposition of Israeli law and of Israeli settlements in the Golan and calls on Israel to withdraw from the Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967 and to respect all its previous commitments and agreements in that regard.

The sponsors of the two draft resolutions believe that now is the time for the international community to deal with the Middle East conflict in a holistic way. The people of the region are suffering from the negative impact of war and aggression and they aspire to peace, stability and coexistence, which cannot come about without serious political will and commitment by Israel to withdraw completely from all occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, in accordance with the principle of land for peace, the provisions of international law, the Arab Peace Initiative, the road map, the Madrid terms of reference and relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council. The sponsors call on all Member States in the General Assembly to support and vote in favour of the draft resolutions, so as to assert the determination of the international community to achieve those noble purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, which the Member States have continued to support over many years.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, allow me to join my voice to that of my colleague the Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt. I thank him for the statement he delivered on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and for introducing two draft resolutions, A/66/L.19 on occupied Jerusalem and A/66/L.20 on the occupied Syrian Golan, under agenda item 36, entitled "The situation in the Middle East".

We meet today in the General Assembly Hall, as we do every year, to consider the agenda item on the situation in the Middle East and to call on Israel to end its occupation of Arab territories and to halt its continued aggression, its racist and inhuman policies and its violations of international norms and instruments, including international humanitarian law and human rights law. We are also meeting today to call upon Israel to halt its feverish settlement campaigns and its systematic killing of civilians in the occupied Arab territories.

We affirm that any measures adopted by Israel, the occupying Power — as it is referred to at the United Nations and in its resolutions, which number in the hundreds — to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration on the city of Jerusalem and the occupied Golan are illegal, have no validity whatsoever and are to be considered null and void. These are not just the words of the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic, they are legal terms and descriptions that appear verbatim in the text of Security Council resolutions 478 (1980), which rejected Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem, and 497 (1981), in which the Security Council also rejected Israel's annexation of the occupied Syrian Golan.

Unfortunately, despite all the demands made by the Security Council, no progress has been achieved at all in ending the Israeli occupation and halting Israel's aggressive practices. On the contrary, matters have gotten worse with Israel's continued escalation of aggression and unprecedented settlement frenzy, which portend disastrous consequences for the region and increase the likelihood of war, at the expense of the prospects for peace. That is because Israel flouts the will of international legitimacy and all humanitarian and moral standards. It also ignores more than 1,000 resolutions adopted by the United Nations and its various organs and specialized agencies over many decades, all of which call upon Israel to withdraw from occupied Arab territories in order to establish a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

It is worth noting here that this Israeli escalation, be it in terms of its settlement activities or its hostile practices that target Arab citizens under Israeli occupation, enjoys unlimited political, military, financial and technological support, some of it overt and some of it clandestine, from some States that have falsely appointed themselves as defenders of human rights and protectors of civilian lives. Those same

States recently declared that they supported the rights of Palestinians, but they have only done so in words while threatening to use the veto to deny the simplest right that any people can enjoy, namely, the right to an independent State. In that way, they have granted Israel illegitimate immunity for all the crimes that it has committed in the occupied Arab territories, at the expense of legitimate Arab rights, especially Palestinian rights.

In that context, we are very puzzled by what two States Members of the Organization have done in punishing UNESCO for granting membership to Palestine. Those two States have used weak and unconvincing excuses that could only be understood in the context of protecting Israel at the expense of the basic rights of Palestinians.

Some States claim that they are against settlements and support the two-State solution. However, their hypocrisy is belied by their actions, for we have not seen them adopt a single measure to put a stop to the escalating Israeli settlement activity. The settlement campaigns are known to all, near and far, to undermine any hope of achieving a two-State solution and peace in the region.

Those same States do not even try to criticize Israel or exert any pressure on it; rather, they continue unjustly to hold the Palestinians fully responsible for the failure to achieve peace. It is as if the Palestinians, who are deprived of their basic human rights, were the ones occupying the lands of others with settlements and gathering their citizens from diasporas from the four corners of the world to live in a land that they did not own, in violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law and while practising State terrorism. It is as if the Palestinians were the ones who were doing all those things, and Israel were the victim of those practices.

Within the framework of the same Israeli policy that challenges international legitimacy and enjoys support from some States, Israel continues to refuse to return the occupied Syrian Golan to its motherland, Syria. It refuses to comply with international resolutions, especially Security Council resolution 497 (1981), which considered Israel's decision to annex the occupied Syrian Golan to be null and void without legal effect. Furthermore, Israel continues its policies of terrorism and oppression against Syrian citizens under occupation in the Golan and continues its policy

of racial discrimination against them — for example, by denying employment to those citizens for refusing to carry Israeli identification papers and to join the Israeli army.

Moreover, Israel maintains its policy of arresting Syrian civilian citizens in the occupied Golan and continues with its grave violations of the rights of prisoners: people in the Golan are subjected to the worst forms of inhumane and arbitrary detention, conditions that do not meet even the minimum standards for the treatment of prisoners set by the United Nations.

In addition, the Israeli occupation authorities, as part of their ongoing campaign to dismember the occupied Syrian Golan and isolate it from its geographic context and its Syrian motherland, have started to build a racial separation wall in the Golan, east of the town of Majdal Shams, with the aim of entrenching a new security and political reality, which Israel wants to use to influence any peace negotiations over the occupied Golan in the future.

We have drawn the attention of the Secretary-General and have submitted an official complaint in that regard, demanding that the United Nations, and the Security Council in particular, assume their responsibilities, as well as demanding that they adopt all the necessary measures against Israel to put an immediate stop to those activities, which blatantly violate the provisions of international law and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.

Unfortunately, however, that complaint fell on deaf ears. In fact, the representatives of the Secretary-General did not even mention this dangerous Israeli violation in their monthly briefings to the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East. This has only encouraged Israel to continue its actions by expanding and strengthening the wall, last week. That raises many questions about the impartiality and objectivity of those who deal with our legitimate and just complaints; this at a time when we see some rushing to weaken discussion of this item by adding to it internal issues that lie outside the historic definition of the agenda item, with the sole purpose of interfering in our internal affairs under feeble pretexts that have no basis in reality.

I would like to inform the Assembly that Israel, the occupying Power, has placed a two-year-old Syrian child under house arrest, separating him from his

mother and father, who were students at the University of Damascus. After completing their university studies, they returned to the occupied Golan with the help of the Red Cross. Israel greeted them and their child by kidnapping the child, taking him from his parents and putting him under house arrest. He is only two years old. I wanted to inform those who claim they want to defend civilians of this.

A just and comprehensive peace will be achieved only through a complete Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories to the borders of 4 June 1967, the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, and the attainment of a just solution to the refugee issue, based on resolution 194 (III) of 1948, with no partial or interim solutions aimed at procrastination. That must be achieved on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, chief among them being Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 497 (1981), which I mentioned earlier and which pertains to the occupied Syrian Golan.

It has become clear to all that the only obstacle to peace in the region is Israel. Israel has subordinated the concept of peace in the region to the goal of war and aggression through its intransigence, which is blindly and unreservedly supported by the United States and some European nations even when it conflicts with their own interests. That has only entrenched the feeling of frustration among Arabs and further inflamed their anger, which could have disastrous consequences for all.

I say that despite our conviction that the item on the agenda has nothing to do with the tactics of some States that are trying to force discussion of Syrian internal affairs into our debate, with the aim of diverting attention from Israel's continued occupation of Arab territories in Palestine, the Golan and southern Lebanon and of creating a smokescreen to conceal Israel's actions in terms of crimes, settlements and daily infringements of international law as exemplified by the hundreds of United Nations resolutions.

However, we would like to say that the Syrian leadership is now moving ahead with the implementation of a comprehensive programme of reform. It is undertaking a range of new measures and laws aimed at enhancing the process of national democracy-building, improving and expanding citizens' participation in the economic and political

process, and consolidating national unity, as well as guaranteeing public law and order and the security of our homeland and citizens.

I wish to note here that the national committee tasked with drafting a new, modernized constitution that meets the aspirations of the Syrian people has completed a first draft of this pilot project. Among the basic principles on which the draft constitution is based are national sovereignty and unity, the people as the source of authority, and political pluralism, with equal opportunity for all political parties that are granted authority to govern only through public polling, based on the popular will. Moreover, today a decree was issued releasing 912 citizens who had been detained for breaking public law but had no blood on their hands.

Once more, I call on States that falsely claim to care about the will of the Syrian people to look at the public squares in the various Syrian cities that have seen millions of Syrians come out in support of the ongoing reforms in our country and in rejection of all forms of foreign interference, regardless of their source. Such States should reject pressure, sanctions, lies and fabrications. We hope that Member States, if they do indeed care about human rights, will heed the call and message of those millions of people and respect their aspirations and will.

Finally, I can only call on Member States to vote in favour of the draft resolutions on Jerusalem (A/66/L.19) and the occupied Syrian Golan (A/66/L.20) — as they always do, thankfully, at every session — because that positive vote will reaffirm the importance of international legitimacy that is embodied in the Organization and in its implementation of international law and the protection of the rights of Member States.

Mr. Quinlan (Australia): As we all know, this has been a very turbulent year. The historic changes taking place across the Middle East and North Africa have demonstrated, almost preternaturally, the common human aspiration for freedom, justice and peace.

The Tunisian people have led the way. The historic democratic elections to Tunisia's National Constituent Assembly in October, and the Assembly's successful opening session last week, are impressive steps towards establishing the institutions necessary to underpin democracy.

Egypt's transition faces many challenges and will require tolerance, respect and patience. The democratic aspirations of the Egyptian people must of course be respected, the rule of law maintained and human rights protected. We are troubled by the deaths and injuries in recent clashes. It is obviously crucial that all parties work together to re-establish calm and to progress Egypt's democratic transition to civilian rule. We are encouraged by the initial positive reports of strong participation by the Egyptians in the elections. That is a credit to the Egyptian people.

Australia recognizes the courage of the Libyan people, as we all do, in standing up to a regime that had long lost touch with the rights of its own people. We welcome the United Nations system's decisive response to the threat to Libyan civilians. We further welcome the commitment shown by the new Government of Libya to uphold the principles of the revolution, including respect for the rule of law, democracy and the protection of human rights. Australia was the third-largest humanitarian donor during the conflict, and we will provide further support for Libya's political and economic transition.

As the transition in Libya showed, the Arab League has a leading role to play in assisting positive transformation in the Arab world. We wholeheartedly support the League's efforts to end the bloodshed in Syria. We urge Syria to cooperate with the Arab League, to stop its brutality and to implement credible democratic reforms. President Al-Assad should step aside to allow those changes to begin without delay. In circumstances where the Syrian authorities are failing to implement meaningful reform and renegeing on their commitments to regional leaders to end the violence, we call on the Security Council to demonstrate the same courage as the Syrian people themselves, to continue to condemn the violence and to refer the situation to the International Criminal Court.

We welcome the agreement on Yemen signed last week and commend the work of the Gulf Cooperation Council in brokering it. On Lebanon, we remain firm in our support for its sovereignty, independence and unity. We continue to call on all parties to cooperate with the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1757 (2007), and to allow the Tribunal to complete its work.

We have not lost sight of long-standing threats to the region's stability, notably Iran's nuclear programme

and the still-unanswered question about Iran's nuclear weapons-related activities. We urge Iran to comply with its obligations under successive Security Council resolutions and to engage seriously and without preconditions in talks on its nuclear programme. We condemn the storming of the British embassy in Tehran yesterday and call on Iran to ensure that it fulfils its international obligations by preventing any such incidents in future, including by investigating the attacks and prosecuting those responsible.

It is obvious that events in the Middle East and North Africa are changing the wider political dynamics even as we watch. People throughout the region are making their voices heard and are demanding Governments that are responsive to the legitimate aspirations of their peoples for greater transparency, democracy and inclusiveness. We need to recognize that that profound shift in the dynamics of the region demands that efforts to resolve long-standing conflicts in the region be re-energized.

Pre-eminent among those is, of course, the situation of Israel and Palestine. Australia remains genuinely committed to a negotiated two-State solution that allows a secure Israel to live side by side with a secure and independent Palestinian State. We commend ongoing international efforts to promote direct talks, including by the Quartet and in the framework of the Arab Peace Initiative. We have consistently called on Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas to resume direct negotiations. Those should occur on the basis of the 1967 lines, together with mutually agreed land swaps. Other final status issues should also be resolved through those direct negotiations.

We recognize the legitimate concern of Israel that its security be assured. That is an essential condition to be met through the negotiations for an enduring solution. However, we are concerned that in the absence of a negotiated settlement, the security situation could actually deteriorate in the year ahead. It is therefore of pressing importance that Israelis and Palestinians refrain from provocative actions that undermine confidence. That includes, above all, the new construction and expansion of Israeli settlements and outposts, which are an obstacle to the peace process.

It is also essential for the continued success of the Palestinian State-building effort and the viability of the Palestinian Authority, which we all support and many

of us fund, that Israel maintain tax transfers to the Authority without any interruption.

We applaud the success of Prime Minister Fayyad in building the necessary economic and institutional base for statehood. We seriously commend the progress that has been achieved — against the odds — in the implementation of the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan, including the greatly improved security control of the West Bank and the strong economic performance of the Palestinian Authority.

In September, Australia itself signed a five-year partnership agreement with the Palestinian Authority and will provide well over \$300 million to the Authority over the next few years. We will provide a significant scholarships programme to train Palestinians in Australia. That is because an independent and viable Palestinian State obviously requires predictable funding to plan ahead and to budget for the provision of services that any functioning State must be able to provide to its citizens. We are also increasing our support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to provide predictable support through a new five-year partnership.

The situation on the ground in Gaza remains extremely serious. We welcome the relaxation of some Israeli restrictions on access to and from Gaza, but we still remain seriously concerned about the humanitarian situation there. We recognize Israel's legitimate security concerns, and we unambiguously condemn ongoing rocket attacks on Israel. However, more must be done to ease the situation in Gaza.

The parties can help shape the rapidly changing geopolitics of the region by reaching a peace agreement now. If we do not see the Middle East peace process concluded in the near term, the prospects of a lasting settlement may become irretrievable. As a long-standing friend of Israel, we encourage the Netanyahu Government to engage a Palestinian leadership that is committed to the goal of achieving a two-State solution. As a friend of the Palestinian people, we believe that the time has come for direct negotiations.

As, in fact, we all know, it really is a very simple linear equation. A successful outcome to the process would provide the conditions for the Israeli people to realize their right to live in security and for the Palestinian people to realize their right to self-determination through their own State. My own country steadfastly supports both those rights.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.