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Official Records

Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

314th meeting

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New York

Chairman: Mr. Badji (Senegal)

The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): Today, the Committee is holding a solemn meeting to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977.

It is my honour and pleasure to bid a warm welcome to His Excellency Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, President of the General Assembly; His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations; Mr. Jorge Ballester, representing the President of the Security Council; His Excellency Mr. H. M. G. S. Palihakkara, Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories; His Excellency Mr. Riad Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Palestinian Authority, representing Palestine at this special meeting; and Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

To all of you — ambassadors, permanent representatives and observers, ministers plenipotentiary and representatives of States Members of the United Nations, representatives of intergovernmental organizations, high dignitaries of international diplomacy, representatives of non-governmental and civil society organizations, and guests who have responded in large numbers to the Committee's

invitation to participate at this solemn meeting — I convey my most cordial greetings and wish you all a warm welcome.

I shall now make a statement on behalf of the Committee.

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is holding a solemn meeting today to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977. The tradition of organizing solemn meetings, such as today's, goes back 30 years. Every year, members of the international community in their diversity and from throughout the world come together on this day to voice their enduring support for the aspirations of the Palestinian people to fully enjoy its inalienable rights.

The inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, as defined by the General Assembly, are the right to self-determination without external interference, the right to independence and national sovereignty, and the right of displaced and uprooted Palestine refugees to return to their homes and recover their property. The exercise of these rights represents an important element of any comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

This year's observance assumes particular meaning in view of its convergence with the sixtieth anniversary of the dispossession of the Palestine refugees. Six decades later, Palestine refugees remain unable to return to their homes, which may be only a

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short distance away. Sixty long years have elapsed since hundreds of thousands of Palestine refugees were compelled to leave their homes. Subsequent generations have swelled the ranks of the 1948 refugees. The number who are registered with and in the care of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is today more than 4.6 million. The situation of some 1 million refugees currently living in the Gaza Strip is of particular concern.

Over the years, the principal organs of the United Nations have adopted innumerable resolutions on the question of Palestine, most of which remain to be implemented. Moreover, for 41 years the Palestinian people have lived and continue to live under occupation and remain dispersed, internally displaced, stateless, exiled and otherwise in uncertainty with regard to their present and future.

As has been rightly noted by many observers, we are on the brink of a major man-made humanitarian disaster in Gaza, to which even the United Nations has been prevented from delivering emergency humanitarian aid. The shortage of fuel, of which Israel is the sole supplier, has plunged Gaza into darkness and cold with the onset of winter. Chronic malnutrition is on the rise, and there has been a progressive deterioration in food security affecting at least 70 per cent of the population. According to UNRWA, the ongoing closure of checkpoints in and out of Gaza, whose population has reached 1.4 million people, is both a physical and a mental punishment of the population.

At this point, allow me to pay tribute to the dedication of the staff of United Nations agencies and programmes, who work tirelessly in the field so as to bring the Palestinian people the vital help they sorely need. These problems are only likely to be compounded by the current world financial crisis. The situation in the Gaza Strip represents a growing threat to peace.

In the West Bank, some 630 checkpoints and the separation wall impede the free movement of Palestinians and erode the institutions of the Palestinian Authority. Palestinians in the West Bank are also subject to daily raids and arrests by Israeli troops. The number of Palestinians in Israeli prisons is well in excess of 10,000. Palestinian prisoners are held on Israeli territory in violation of international law.

Moreover, despite Israel's obligations under the Road Map, settlements continue to be built, undermining the political process. Of late, the unprecedented level of violent acts perpetrated by settlers against Palestinians and their property has been particularly worrying. The Committee has repeatedly condemned acts of violence, in particular those against civilians, be they Palestinian or Israeli. It has called for a cessation of rocket attacks against Israel, as well as incursions, air strikes and other disproportionate measures of collective punishment undertaken by Israel against the population of Gaza, which are explicitly prohibited under article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The Committee urges the immediate opening of the checkpoints between the Gaza Strip and Israel, in particular for the sick requiring urgent treatment unavailable in Gaza and for humanitarian aid and other needs of the population there.

It also urges the international community to support the Palestinians and Israelis in their pursuit of peace. The Palestinian issue should be the world community's top priority in the maintenance of peace. The Committee and the international community have placed great hopes in the revival of the peace process, to which the Annapolis meeting, held a year ago, was expected to give significant impetus.

However, instead of being closer to the creation of a Palestinian State, we have seen the completion of 57 per cent of the separation wall; the recent authorization of new settlements, particularly in and around East Jerusalem; a 25 per cent increase in the destruction of Palestinian homes; excavation near the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound; a 12 per cent increase in checkpoints and other obstacles to movement in the West Bank; systematic arrest campaigns throughout the West Bank and an unprecedented increase in Israeli settler violence.

Recently, Israeli and Palestinian leaders alike have said that very little time remains to find a two-State solution. The Committee urges the international community to maintain the momentum created by the Annapolis meeting by supporting and facilitating the regular contacts the conference established between the two sides. We have high hopes that significant progress can be made in the permanent status negotiations thanks to that new impetus. Any progress in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiating process will be difficult without

Palestinian unity. The international community and the principal regional actors should do all they can to bring the Palestinian people together.

A prerequisite to progress in the negotiations should be appreciable change in the situation on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Only concrete changes will establish a climate conducive to facilitating permanent status negotiations towards a comprehensive, just, lasting and permanent agreement on all outstanding issues. At the very least, all entry points into the Gaza Strip should be opened immediately and all settlement activity and the demolition of Palestinian homes should cease. The international community should take more determined steps to protect the Palestinian people, ensure respect for international law throughout the region, and uphold the relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003).

The pursuit of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace settlement must be based on the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, which must be revived. Months of continuous negotiations have not yet bridged the gap between lofty rhetoric and the stark reality in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

I now have the honour to give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Miguel D'Escoto Brockmann, President of the General Assembly.

Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann (Nicaragua), President of the General Assembly: It is with mixed emotions that I join you today to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People at this event organized by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. As you know, solidarity is a concept that is central to my work as President of the General Assembly. I want to thank the Committee for its dedicated efforts to rally our solidarity with the Palestinian people, pursuing the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly.

Today we recall that, 61 years ago this month, the General Assembly adopted the historic resolution 181 (II), calling for the creation of a Jewish State and an Arab State. The State of Israel, founded a year later in 1948, is now celebrating 60 years of its existence. Shamefully, there is still no Palestinian State to celebrate. All explanations notwithstanding, this fact

makes a mockery of the United Nations and gravely hurts its image and prestige.

As I stated in my first address to the General Assembly last September, I believe that the failure to create a Palestinian State as promised is the single greatest failure in the history of the United Nations. It has been 60 years since some 800,000 Palestinians were driven out of their homes and away from their property, forced to become refugees and an uprooted and marginalized people.

We cannot avoid the bitter irony that next month we mark the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which enshrines the right to self-determination of these very same people. We are witness to decades of the terrible conditions endured throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, yet the promise — the right — of the Palestinian people to a homeland remains as elusive as ever.

As I speak here today, almost 1.5 million Palestinians are enduring an unprecedented blockade in the Gaza Strip. I heard this morning that these measures have been somewhat relaxed, but I do not know how real or extensive that relief is. All border crossings into Gaza are closed, blocking even the delivery of emergency humanitarian relief supplied by the United Nations. Lack of fuel is plunging the population into darkness and cold. Basic medicines are running out. Malnutrition is chronic and the coping mechanisms of the people are being exhausted.

In solidarity, I urge the international community to raise its voice against this collective punishment of the people of Gaza. We must call for an end to this massive abuse of human rights. I call on Israel, the occupying Power, to allow humanitarian and other supplies to enter the Gaza Strip without delay.

The situation in the West Bank is often overshadowed by the humanitarian crisis facing Gaza. We cannot overlook, however, the existence of over 600 checkpoints and other obstacles to freedom of movement within the West Bank. We must denounce the resumption of house demolitions during the cold months and the unabated settlement expansion that is still being officially authorized. The unprecedented rise in violent attacks by settlers against the Palestinian population must also end.

Although different, what is being done to the Palestinian people seems to me to be a version of the hideous policy of apartheid. That cannot and should not be allowed to continue. This untenable situation highlights the urgent need for the resumption of a genuine peace process that can yield tangible results in the foreseeable future. So far, the endless negotiations between two very unequal partners have not borne fruit. What we need is a renewed sense of solidarity to inspire political will, courage and a broader perspective on the conflict. This should include the revival of the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002.

The international community should spare no effort in assisting Israelis and Palestinians alike to reach a solution that will fulfil the goal of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. The United Nations has an ongoing responsibility to resolve the question of Palestine in all its aspects and in accordance with international law. Let us be sure that this not become a permanent, never-ending responsibility.

The enmity between our Palestinian and Israeli brothers and sisters is a bitter and self-perpetuating tragedy. We must find new ways to defuse this enmity and to enable both peoples to reassert their historic bonds of brotherhood and sisterhood. I urge the international community to defuse the political deadlock that cynically perpetuates this hatred, isolation and abuse. Our solidarity must prompt concrete action to realize those elusive rights that most of us can take for granted.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank the President of the General Assembly for his important statement.

I would like to give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations.

The Secretary-General: It is a pleasure to join you for this annual observance. Every year on this day, we express our solidarity with the Palestinian people. For my part as Secretary-General, I underscore my commitment to doing my utmost in the search for a just, lasting, comprehensive and urgent settlement of the question of Palestine.

The Palestinians have been deprived of their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and statehood, for more than 60 years.

Israelis live with an ever-present sense of insecurity. There is only one way to address such legitimate rights and fears — a peace agreement that results in an end to occupation, an end to conflict and the creation of a State of Palestine living side by side in peace with the State of Israel.

The Israeli and Palestinian leaders relaunched bilateral negotiations a year ago at Annapolis. They agreed to try to reach a peace treaty by the end of 2008. I regret that this goal appears unlikely to be achieved. However, the parties have succeeded in creating trust and a framework where none existed only two years ago. We must not diminish that achievement.

I commend the commitment made by President Abbas and Foreign Minister Livni during the recent Quartet meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh earlier this month to continue talks into next year and to seek a full and final settlement. The present negotiations have been promising and substantial. This must be an irreversible process, not an open-ended one, and it must resolve the issues of permanent status for Jerusalem, settlements, borders, refugees, security and water.

My biggest concern in the immediate period ahead is the situation on the ground. In the West Bank, the determined efforts of the Palestinian Authority led by Prime Minister Fayyad have achieved progress in the security sector and institution-building. The cities of Hebron, Jenin and Nablus are safer places today than they were just a few months ago. I hope these efforts continue in a manner that ensures deepening respect for human rights and the rule of law.

Israel must do more to enable and empower these Palestinian efforts. I strongly call on Israel to adhere to its commitments under the Road Map, reaffirmed at Annapolis and again at Sharm el-Sheikh, to cease settlement activity, remove outposts and open Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem.

Israel must also refrain from unilateral actions in Jerusalem, such as demolitions and evictions, that undermine trust or alter the status quo. I recognize Israel's security concerns, but the improved environment of security cooperation must lead to an easing of closures in the West Bank in order to increase stability and to give a much-needed boost to the Palestinian economy.

The situation in the Gaza Strip remains of major concern. I call for immediate measures to ease the

near-blanket closure of Gaza, which leads to the worrying deprivation of basic supplies and human dignity. And I unreservedly condemn the rocket fire.

The way forward is for all parties to respect the calm brokered by Egypt and to reach out to the civilian population of the Gaza Strip instead of wrongly punishing them. I call on Israel to allow sufficient and predictable supplies to reach the population, to ensure access for humanitarian workers and to facilitate stalled United Nations projects.

I also reiterate my profound concern at the ever-deepening Palestinian divide. I call on Hamas and, indeed, all Palestinian factions to work urgently to reunify the Gaza Strip and the West Bank within the framework of the legitimate Palestinian Authority. This should be done in a manner that allows the peace process to move forward. At this crucial time in their quest for freedom and statehood, the people of Palestine deserve to have their leaders to put nation above faction and the pursuit of peace above all other considerations.

I commend the efforts of the international community, including leaders in the region who are working hard to support the parties. At this time of uncertainty and change, the role of the international community is vital. I will be urging the new administration of the United States to be actively engaged in this process from the outset as a matter of utmost priority. I will also press the Quartet to assume the full measure of its responsibilities and to continue showing a firm political commitment. Quartet members are actively considering having another meeting before the end of this year. I will continue to advocate more attention to the Arab Peace Initiative.

I continue to urge donors to be generous and to fulfil the pledges made at the Paris Donors Conference in support of the Palestinian Authority. Above all, I will ensure that the United Nations plays its full role in the quest for peace, even as it continues to provide assistance in the humanitarian, economic and social areas.

We have seen many difficulties in the past year, but it has also been a crucial time in setting the stage for peace. 2009 must be the year that these preparations bear fruit. Let us all work constructively, tirelessly and consistently to help the parties make this happen. The Palestinian people need and deserve no less.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General for his important statement. On behalf of the Committee, I would like to express our profound gratitude to him for his tireless personal efforts to achieve a just and lasting resolution of the Palestinian question.

I now have the pleasure of giving the floor to the representative of the President of the Security Council.

Mr. Ballester (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour for me to address the Committee on behalf of Ambassador Jorge Urbina, Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the United Nations and President of the Security Council for the month of November. He personally regrets being unable to join this group of friends to commemorate this important day. At present, he is away from New York on official Security Council business and has asked me to read out the following statement on his behalf.

“I would like to convey to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People my sincere gratitude for the invitation to address this solemn meeting in my capacity as President of the Security Council for the month of November.

“We are gathering on this day, as we have done since 1978, to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This year, the international community has witnessed a series of constructive efforts and initiatives undertaken by relevant actors in the region and beyond. The Security Council hopes sincerely that these initiatives will advance the process towards the achievement of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on the attainment by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights and in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions, including those of the Security Council, and the Charter of United Nations.

“The annual observance of this day as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People provides an opportunity to reaffirm the Security Council’s role in support of the parties in their efforts to realize a two-State solution with the establishment of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State, living in peace and security side by side with Israel.

“The Council, of course, remains seized of the situation in the Middle East, including — again, of course — the Palestinian question. The Council holds debates on that situation and continues to receive monthly briefings from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the Department of Political Affairs. While some progress has been made in the peace process in the past year since the Annapolis Conference and the resumption of direct, bilateral negotiations between the Israeli and the Palestinian sides, the situation on the ground continues to be a matter of serious concern to the Security Council.

“The Security Council reiterates that, to make progress in the peace process and improve the situation of the Palestinian people on the ground, the parties must avoid actions that undermine confidence and prejudice the outcome of negotiations.

“At the same time, the Security Council would like to highlight the efforts of the Palestinian Authority to reform the security sector and the cooperation between the two sides in this regard, taking as an example the progress in security seen in the city of Jenin and the recent deployment of Palestinian security services in Hebron. The Security Council hopes for continued cooperation in order to extend this progress to other major Palestinian population centres.

“The Council underlines in particular the importance of the Paris Conference of December 2007 in terms of mobilizing donors and investors to provide financial to provide financial and political support to the Palestinian Authority. In this regard, the Council also stresses the importance of the Bethlehem and Berlin conferences held this year.

“Regarding the seriousness of the humanitarian situation the Palestinian people is enduring in the Gaza Strip, the Security Council remains profoundly concerned by the rapid decline of socio-economic conditions as described by numerous United Nations agencies and programmes on the ground. We continue to support all steps that have been taken to provide the emergency and humanitarian assistance

necessary to relieve the suffering of Palestinian people, and we call for these measures to be implemented without obstruction.

“Since the early part of this year, we have seen a reduction in the level of violence on the ground, mainly as a result of the period of calm that began in June, and in this regard we recognize the efforts of Egypt in facilitating this understanding between the parties. We hope this period of calm will continue and be consolidated, despite recent incidents of violence. I would like to stress that for the Security Council both parties need to exercise the utmost restraint and refrain from any measures that could destabilize the fragile situation and incite a deadly escalation of violence, including attacks on Palestinian and Israeli territory.

“The Security Council welcomes with great satisfaction the briefing to the Quartet by the Israeli and Palestinian negotiators on 9 November, during which they reaffirmed their commitment to ongoing bilateral negotiations to conclude a peace agreement resolving all outstanding issues, including core issues, without exception, as specified in previous agreements. The parties also reaffirmed a number of mutual understandings on the principles governing their negotiations and requested the continued support of the international community. We also note the Quartet statement earlier this month on the possibility of holding an international meeting in Moscow next year, after further consultations with the parties, as an important step towards reaching an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement in the near future.

“In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the Security Council’s support for existing initiatives aimed at achieving a two-State solution with Palestine and Israel living side by side in peace and security on the basis of the 1967 borders, and to reaffirm the importance in this regard of the relevant Security Council resolutions. The Council recognizes the role of the Quartet as well as the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative issued by the League of Arab States. They represent a key regional element in this peace process, and the Council encourages continued active efforts in this regard.

“In conclusion, I would like to assure the Committee of the commitment of the Security Council in supporting and contributing to the advancement of all efforts aimed at achieving peace and stability in the region, as well as the Council’s intention to work closely with the parties in the important period ahead, on the basis, once again, of the relevant Security Council resolutions.”

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Riad Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Palestinian Authority, who will read out a message from the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority, His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas.

Mr. Malki (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am pleased to be with the Committee today to participate in this commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. His Excellency President Mahmoud Abbas, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian National Authority, asked me to represent him at this meeting and to read out his message to the Committee on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The message reads as follows:

“On behalf of the Palestinian people and their leadership, the Palestine Liberation Organization, the sole legitimate representative of our people, I wish to extend our warmest and friendliest greetings, coupled with deepest gratitude and appreciation, to all those who join us in commemorating this occasion, which was designated by the General Assembly as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People in their legitimate struggle to end the occupation and to exercise their right to self-determination, in accordance with resolutions of international legitimacy and the consensus of the entire world.

“We highly appreciate the significant role of participants in supporting our efforts to enable our people to realize their goals. We are certain that these efforts contribute in clear and effective ways to enhancing international solidarity with our just cause and enlarge the circle of international support for the aspirations of our

people to freedom and independence as well as to the establishment of their State, which would live in peace, security and mutual respect with its neighbours and which would uphold the values of justice, equality, democracy, pluralism in the expression of opinions, beliefs and religions, and the peaceful transition of authority, as an embodiment of the declaration of independence which was adopted by the Palestinian National Council at its meeting in Algiers in 1988.

“Participants’ support for our people bolsters our deep conviction in the justice of our cause and our trust that the immense sacrifices by the Palestinian people, generation after generation, have indeed generated deeper international understanding of and solidarity with our cause and objectives, which have been legitimized by man-made laws and divine teachings. We could even venture to say that there is no one who could challenge this massive solidarity with our rights and that, however long it takes, the occupying Power will eventually have to yield to the demands of the international conscience, which this Committee exemplifies in the best possible way.

“Our people continue to endure excruciating pain and unbearable suffering. Not only does the continued occupation deprive our people of their political right to live in a free and secure homeland; the brutal practices and measures deny them their human rights and strip them of their inalienable rights guaranteed under international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, especially those rights related to the right to life, the protection of property, the right to a livelihood and the right to leave behind humiliation and deprivation.

“Israel, the occupying Power, continues its expansionist policies, persisting in the settlement and colonization of our land at an accelerated pace, in addition to continuing to build the annexation and expansion wall, which separates brother from brother, father from son, patient from doctor, student from teacher and farmer from the land.

“The occupying Power also continues to carry out its brutal and inhumane policies through military incursions into our cities, towns and

villages, extrajudicial assassinations; it is killing the children of our people and imprisoning thousands of them in its oppressive jails. It also persists in its intensification of collective punishment through its punitive blockade of the Gaza Strip, preventing almost 2 million Palestinian civilians from receiving the necessary food, medicine, fuel and education — the minimal requirements of a dignified life.

“In addition, the occupying Power continues to impose more than 600 checkpoints and roadblocks between our cities and villages, impeding the movement of our people. At times, this brings life, including internal commercial activities, to a near standstill. The impact of all of these measures has been disastrous for the future development of our country.

“With regard to Jerusalem, the capital of our future independent State and the cornerstone of any just and lasting solution, the occupying Power is doing all it can to Judaize the city by measures aimed at suffocating the population, compelling them to leave and surrounding their neighbourhoods with settlements. All such practices endanger the Arab, Islamic and Christian character of the city. In spite of the ruthlessness of the occupation and its deliberate daily affronts to our people’s rights and human dignity, we are determined, without hesitation, to continue with our strategy, which is based on negotiation and dialogue as the only path towards resolving the conflict and achieving an outcome guaranteeing freedom and sovereignty for one party and security and recognition for the other.

“In defining our goals, we are not making any new demands. All that we are asking for is the implementation of relevant United Nations resolutions, namely: the withdrawal of Israel from the territories it occupied in 1967; a just and agreed solution to the refugee question on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III); and two States for two peoples, living side by side in peace, security and mutual respect.

“We remain committed to the Arab Peace Initiative, which was broadly welcomed by the international community, and we consider it to be the way forward for accomplishing a comprehensive regional peace that gives Israel

recognition and normalization with the Arabs in exchange for withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories and implementation of the two-State solution. However, we do not see a clear response from the other side to this courageous initiative. We have also been committed to the Annapolis process and have fulfilled our obligations in that regard. We have worked and continued to work very hard in cooperation with the Quartet to harmonize our actions with those principles. We have also undertaken serious in-depth negotiations with the Israeli side to reach a settlement on all final status issues. Yet we have been unable to reach a satisfactory solution on any of those issues.

“That is not the result of bad fortune. It is rather the result of intentional obstruction of the peace process and a determination on the Israeli side to impose a solution that does not guarantee the return of our land, the rights of our refugees or the possibility of establishing a contiguous and viable State. What we mean by a just and lasting solution that will end the violence in the region once and for all is not a partial solution; that would only create a fertile environment for a continuation of the conflict. If we do not all exert the efforts necessary to contain the conflict and eliminate its causes, it could become more intense and deadly and, God forbid, could spread within the region.

“It is imperative in this connection that I thank all the parties that have sponsored or supported the peace process. However, we must pay particular tribute to the United Nations, acknowledge its particular role and express our gratitude and appreciation for its work as the primary international organization that has defended our cause and kept it alive. It has extended the hand of help to our people and adopted the legal rules and recommendations that constitute foundations that cannot be bypassed in any just, lasting and comprehensive solution. We call on the United Nations to continue its central role until the rights of the Palestinian people have been fully realized.

“We reiterate to all participants our appreciation and gratitude for their dedicated and sincere efforts and their unshakable solidarity with the cause of our people. We also reaffirm

our commitment to remain steadfast in our belief in peace, for which all the peoples of our region are striving, asking almighty God to bestow upon us a future where we can all enjoy peace, security, stability and prosperity.”

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): Mr. Minister, your presence today lends significant weight to this ceremony. We are very grateful to you for having come here in person to take part. I would ask you please convey our respectful greetings to His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority, as well as our sincere thanks for this message of profound political importance.

On behalf of us all, I should like to convey to the President of the Palestinian Authority our feelings of solidarity with the Palestinian people in its aspirations and in its struggle to bring about a prosperous future in a secure, viable and sovereign State, fully recognized by the international community. I would also like to assure President Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian Prime Minister and, you, Mr. Minister — and through you the Palestinian people as a whole — of the firm determination of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to continue its efforts, as we have been called upon to do by the General Assembly, with a view to promoting a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question.

I shall now suspend the meeting for a few minutes to enable our guests to leave the Chamber. On behalf of the Committee, I wish to thank once again Their Excellencies the President of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, the representative of the President of the Security Council and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Palestinian Authority for honouring us with their presence at this commemorative ceremony and for their importance messages.

The meeting was suspended at 11.45 a.m. and resumed at 11.50 a.m.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I call now on His Excellency Mr. H. M. G. S. Palihakkara of Sri Lanka, Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human

Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.

Mr. Palihakkara (Sri Lanka), Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories: As the new Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka I have assumed the responsibility of chairing the Special Committee.

It is a great pleasure to participate in the present meeting under your leadership, Mr. Chairman. Please allow me to offer my compliments to you regarding your guidance of the important Committee you lead.

As we mark this important Day of Solidarity, peacemaking remains the most ubiquitous theme for discourse in the many United Nations forums. However, the elusive nature of peace is no more apparent than in the conflict in the Middle East, as the agreed goal of Palestine and Israel coexisting, securely and peacefully, as two States remains unfulfilled.

The Annapolis Conference gave new impetus to direct negotiations towards a achieving two-State solution by the end of 2008. However, as noted by many, including the Secretary-General this morning and of course our Special Committee, those goals appear unreachable within the time frames set. We nevertheless derive some optimism from the fact that parties continue to engage in dialogue at different levels and that facilitators remain active in supporting and driving such processes.

In particular, we appreciate the constant and untiring efforts deployed by the Secretary-General and the United Nations in that regard. That will naturally help prevent negative developments overshadowing or overtaking the dialogue that is so vital to the goals we all strive for, namely the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people through the two-State solution.

Meanwhile, the Special Committee remains deeply concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories. The report it submitted to the current session of the General Assembly records the facts of this situation. The Palestinian economy continues to shrink in the West Bank as a result of the closures, checkpoints, ongoing construction of the separation wall and the increase in the number of settlements and settlers. The effects of

those activities on the population are worrisome. Not only are the freedom of movement of Palestinians and their enjoyment of their basic economic and social rights severely curtailed, but also the continuing reliance on humanitarian aid and support runs the risk of creating a society afflicted with dependency. Such a society, of course, would not be able to sustain and provide for itself in the future.

The deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza, with more than 70 per cent of the population living below the poverty line, is deeply distressing, particularly the suffering endured by women and children. The policy of isolating and sanctioning Gaza has resulted in an ever-worsening humanitarian crisis, not only increasing dependence on humanitarian assistance in the short term, but also creating an environment of physical destruction and psychological scars that will deprive Palestinians of their enjoyment of human rights for generations to come.

The ceasefire that took effect on 19 June 2008 gave rise to some optimism that after a year of heavy restrictions, fuel and other essential goods might enter the Gaza Strip. However, since the ceasefire, there has been no significant improvement in the humanitarian situation in the Strip. However, in November, more than four months into the ceasefire, Israeli troops entered the Gaza Strip. Rocket attacks have started again, as have Israeli army incursions inside the Strip.

As usual, it is the civilian population that pays the higher price. Crossings into the Gaza Strip have been closed. Fuel has not been allowed into Gaza for its power station. No food has been allowed in for the United Nations aid distribution centres on which most Gazans rely. Journalists are not being allowed into Gaza. Hospitals and water-sanitation structures are also affected by the lack of electricity and fuel. There are news reports this morning of the opening of certain crossing points, which we hope will ease the situation and endure.

The key question remains whether the political process will lead to tangible results in terms of the enjoyment of human rights of the Palestinian people. The Special Committee would like to recall that the protection of human rights is an essential element if the peace effort is to sustain itself and eventually succeed. Respect for and the protection of the rights of the Palestinian people cannot be put on hold. On this day of solidarity, the parties concerned and the

international community must recommit themselves to pay immediate attention and take immediate measures to address and rectify this situation.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Mr. H. M. G. S. Palihakkara, Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka, for his important statement and for his leadership of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, which is our twin, if I may say so. I also thank him for the effectiveness with which he has presided over that Committee. Once he had arrived in New York, he immediately took the trouble to visit us to coordinate our work, and I thank him for his work at the head of that Committee.

I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Ileana Núñez Mordoche, Chargé d'affaires of the Permanent Mission of Cuba to the United Nations, who will read out a message from His Excellency Mr. Felipe Pérez Roque, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Cuba, as President of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Mrs. Núñez Mordoche (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to read out a message on behalf of Mr. Felipe Pérez Roque, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Cuban people, on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

"I am honoured to address again the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Cuban people, on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People this 29 November.

"Once again, we would like to show our solidarity with the Palestinian people and to reflect on the tragedy of that people in the context of the illegal occupation of its territory by Israel. We reaffirm our resolve to redouble efforts to peacefully, justly and comprehensively resolve the question of Palestine, including the adverse situation of its refugees, in accordance with the rules and principles of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions.

"Last year, the Palestinian people solemnly commemorated the sixtieth anniversary of the

General Assembly's adoption of resolution 181 (II) in 1947, which partitioned historic Palestine and led to the injustice and tragedy imposed upon its people in 1948, known as the *nakba*. Over three quarters of the historic Palestine was forcibly seized, 531 Palestinian towns and villages were destroyed and 85 per cent of the population were expelled or displaced. As a consequence, some 4.6 million of Palestinian refugees are still scattered throughout the Middle East.

"For four decades, Israel has carried out deliberate and unlawful policies and practices aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and nature of the Palestinian territories. It has de facto annexed those lands by implementing its illegal settlement policy and, since 2003, by illegally building a wall in the West Bank, including in and around East Jerusalem.

"On this important date, it is imperative to reaffirm the support that the Non-Aligned Movement has given to the fight of the Palestinian people to regain its inalienable rights, a position that we have strongly defended through the years. The Movement reiterates its concern at the growing deterioration of the political, economic, social and humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory as a result of Israel's continued illegal policies and practices, including serious human rights violations and ongoing war crimes, which have resulted in great suffering and hardships for the Palestinian people.

"The Non-Aligned Movement has systematically raised its voice in numerous international forums to support the Palestinian people in their just claim for a sovereign and independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The conferences of heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement have reaffirmed that commitment at the highest level.

"At the fifteenth NAM ministerial conference, held last July in Tehran, the non-aligned countries again reviewed the serious situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and deeply deplored the suffering of its people under the prolonged and brutal Israeli military occupation. Likewise,

they rejected the ongoing deprivation of their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and the return of the Palestinian refugees to their territories, as well as the full enjoyment of their sovereign and independent State.

"Faced with the especially critical situation in the Gaza Strip, NAM has reiterated its call for an end to the unlawful closure of Gaza and the collective punishment of the entire Palestinian civilian population. It is imperative to halt the wave of violence in that territory, including its spread into the West Bank, and to promptly open the borders with Gaza, enabling the movement of goods and people and the alleviation of the dire humanitarian crisis.

"Our Movement reiterates the need and urgency to put an end to the prolonged and illegal Israeli occupation of all of the Arab territories occupied since 1967 and to establish an independent and sovereign Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Israel continues to flout the rules of international law and systematically and with impunity fails to comply with over 100 resolutions of various United Nations bodies, including more than 60 resolutions of the Security Council. The international community must not delay the search for a comprehensive and definitive solution to this issue because the Palestinian people has suffered and waited for too long for justice and freedom.

"In the search for peace, the Arab peoples can always count on the total solidarity of the Cuban people. Allow me to reaffirm the aspiration of Cuba to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace for all Middle East peoples, without exception, that allows the Palestinian people to exercise its right to self-determination and sovereignty in its independent State, based on the borders prior to 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

"I take this opportunity to reiterate the expression of my highest and most distinguished gratitude, and to reaffirm the resolute support and solidarity of the Cuban Government and people to the fulfilment of your important duties as Chairman of the Committee."

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank Ambassador Núñez Mordoche for conveying the important message of the President of the Non-Aligned Movement. I would ask her to convey the sincere gratitude of the Committee to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Cuba in his capacity as President of the Non-Aligned Movement.

I am pleased to give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Francis Butagira, Permanent Representative of Uganda to the United Nations, who will read out a statement on behalf of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uganda, Chairman of the thirty-fifth session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers.

Mr. Butagira (Uganda): I deliver this statement on behalf of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uganda, Mr. Sam Kutesa, in his capacity as Chairman of the thirty-fifth session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers.

“The International Day of Solidarity With the Palestinian People has continued to provide an opportunity for the international community to focus its attention on the fact that the question of Palestine is still unresolved and that the Palestinian people are yet to attain their inalienable rights as defined by the General Assembly. The observance of this Day today comes at a time when Palestinians continue to live under occupation and conflict, but also at a time when several initiatives have been made in an effort to resolve the Palestinian question.

“The United Nations has responsibility towards the question of Palestine until that issue is resolved. The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) has a strong attachment to the issue of Palestine and is deeply committed to its just and peaceful settlement. Its position, and the basis and principles for resolving the conflict, have been clearly spelled out in its communiqués, declarations and resolutions.

“The OIC remains steadfast in its support for and solidarity with the Palestinian people. To this end, the OIC is ready to work with the international community in assisting the Middle East peace process to reach its objective of establishing a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East in accordance with relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions, the

Arab Peace Initiative, the Road Map and the commitments of the Annapolis Conference.

“The OIC supports the resumption of direct negotiations between the leaders of Palestine and Israel and the establishment through peaceful negotiations of a sovereign, independent and viable State of Palestine, living side by side with the State of Israel.

“There is a need for renewed intensification of efforts by the international community, including the Quartet, to support the Annapolis process negotiations between the two sides and the full implementation of the Road Map towards ending the occupation of the Palestinian territory. The outcome of the Annapolis conference presented a great opportunity for a permanent two-State solution, but a lot still remains to be done in following that through.”

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I would ask Ambassador Butagira to convey to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uganda and Chairman of the thirty-fifth session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers the sincere gratitude of the Committee for his important statement.

I now give the floor to the His Excellency Mr. Augustine Mahiga, Permanent Representative of the United Republic of Tanzania to the United Nations, who will read out a message sent by His Excellency Mr. Jakaya Kikwete, President of the United Republic of Tanzania, in his capacity as Chairperson of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union.

Mr. Mahiga (United Republic of Tanzania): It is an honour for me to represent and to deliver a message of solidarity with the Palestinian people on behalf of His Excellency Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, President of the United Republic of Tanzania and the current Chairperson of the African Union.

“This day in the calendar year has been designated by the United Nations as a special event to express with heightened symbolism our collective concern and support for all the inalienable rights which the Palestinian People have been fighting for every day in the history of their nation. Our substantive solidarity must also be a daily preoccupation and a moral obligation of the whole international community. We must

accompany and support their legitimate struggle under the banner of the United Nations until their aspirations and rights are fully realized.

“The Palestinian people are entitled, like all of us here today, to enjoy the sovereign status of a nation State in the international community that they have been fighting for throughout their struggle. They have been struggling heroically to exist as a nation State. Palestinians have all the historical and cultural attributes of a nation. What they need is a homeland to translate their national aspirations into statehood. Their legitimate claims were further attacked in 1967 by the occupation of the territory that they rightly claim to be theirs.

“On that score, we support the two-State solution to establish a Palestinian State side by side with the State of Israel. We reaffirm our commitment to and urge a peaceful solution to this complex problem, which has remained elusive for decades. We trust that all the stakeholders in the peace process, including the United Nations, will continue to work relentlessly towards the overdue settlement of the Middle East problem. The current opportunity for a solution in the ongoing peace initiative in the Middle East between Israel and Palestine should not be lost again. Violence should not be allowed to derail the peace process. Violence can only be counterproductive and lead to more violence. We urge all parties to exercise maximum restraint against the military actions and reprisals that have characterized the situation in the Middle East over the past six decades.

“The demand for self-determination by the Palestinian people is the most fundamental right and must find expression not only in the establishment of a Palestinian State, but also in the entitlement to and respect of all other human rights embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The catalogue of Palestinian human rights violations assembled by human rights bodies and experts is reprehensible and morally repulsive as it reveals violations and indignities against Palestinians that are totally unacceptable by any human rights benchmark. As we prepare to observe the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights next month, we must rededicate ourselves to protecting and respecting the human rights of the

Palestinians and other victims of human rights violations throughout the world.

“The member States of the African Union have remained firm and consistent in their support of the Palestinian people. Tanzania, as a member and current Chair of the African Union, wishes to salute the Palestinian people on this day and to convey our support to their leaders in their historic endeavour to find a lasting peaceful solution to the Palestinian cause and a just peace throughout the Middle East.”

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Mahiga for reading out that important message from His Excellency Jakaya Kikwete, President of Tanzania and Chairperson of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Yahya A. Mahmassani, Ambassador, Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States to the United Nations, who will deliver a message on behalf of Mr. Amre Moussa, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Mahmassani (League of Arab States) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is an honour for me, Mr. Chairman, to convey to you and to the other members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People the greetings of Mr. Amre Moussa, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, and to express his deep appreciation for the positive and effective role the Committee plays in defending the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people, particularly their rights to self-determination and to establish an independent State, with its capital in East Jerusalem, on the basis of international legitimacy and the terms of reference of the peace process.

Today's observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is being held in the shadow of the Israeli occupation and the blockade of the Palestinian people in all its many forms, including the Israeli State's intensified settlement policy and land seizures in the Gaza Strip, the construction of the separation wall, the consolidation of measures tantamount to collective punishment, daily incursions into the cities and villages of the West Bank, the destruction of homes, and the uprooting of olive trees, all of which defy all Arab and international efforts towards a peace process leading to an independent Palestinian State.

All those continuing measures, the intensity of settlement activity in the West Bank and attacks against Palestinian villagers by Israeli settlers under the protection of the Israeli army have made the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations unproductive. The League of Arab States has reaffirmed several times that the current negotiations between the Israeli and the Palestinian sides must be serious if they are to lead to a serious peace process. As long as Israel continues to build settlements, excavate in the West Bank and in and around East Jerusalem and carry out population transfers in Palestine, the establishment of a genuine Palestinian State will be gravely jeopardized.

The 1 September 2008 report of the Archbishop of South Africa, Desmond Tutu, who headed the investigation into abuses by the Israelis in Beit Hanoun, mandated by the Human Rights Council, has confirmed that the bombardment and blockade carried out by the Israeli authorities are a humiliation of the international community and that Israeli military activities in Beit Hanoun violated international humanitarian law and human rights law and are, in fact, war crimes.

There is great fear over the tension and the attempts by Israel to Judaize the city of Jerusalem and alter its historical and demographic characteristics. The League of Arab States has warned of the danger of such activity and has asked the Quartet and the Security Council to take urgent steps to make sure that Jerusalem is protected because it is an occupied territory. The 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention, which establishes the importance of protecting the sacred heritage of mankind, must be implemented. Israel must protect Jerusalem. That is a fundamental final status issue. That city is important to many different believers and any infringement and attempts against it or the Al-Aqsa Mosque must be banned.

Regrettably, none of the hopes and efforts to revitalize the peace process after the Annapolis Conference has borne fruit. It has not been possible to achieve any progress in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. We are once again in the same old vicious circle. Conditions today are not conducive to the revitalization of the negotiations, since there are too many obstacles, a lack of clarity and a dearth of vision on the part of the Israeli side, which has not adopted the path of peace.

The Arab side remains committed to the Arab Peace Initiative, based on international legitimacy, which aims at achieving a just and lasting solution to this conflict and providing peace, security and prosperity for all the people of the area. For many decades, these people have suffered instability, bloodshed and wars. The Arab side seeks a complete and comprehensive peace that restores the Palestinian people's inalienable rights and guarantees stability and security for all in that unstable part of the world.

The international community, in particular the Security Council, must assume its weighty responsibilities if we are to arrive at a serious peace process that restores the rights of the Palestinians and rolls back all Israeli practices and violations. The occupation has already wasted so many opportunities for peace.

Finally, I would like to thank you, Sir, all the members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and all the organizations of civil society that work in the field of human rights for your efforts to support the Palestinian people, to help them retrieve their inalienable rights, to roll back the Israeli occupation and to establish their State on their national soil.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Mahmassani for this important message from His Excellency Mr. Amre Moussa, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, who we thank most sincerely.

I now have the pleasure of giving the floor to Reverend Edwin Makue, Secretary-General of the South African Council of Churches, who will speak on behalf of the organizations in civil society active on behalf of the Palestinian cause. Reverend Makue is currently leading a mission to raise awareness in the United States of America, organized by the United States Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation.

Mr. Makue (South African Council of Churches): I thank you, Sir, very much for your work as the Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and for having granted us this honour to address this meeting today as we observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. I will use this opportunity to link my experience under apartheid in South Africa with what I have recently observed with regard to the situation in the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza.

Under apartheid in South Africa, we experienced a system of discrimination and oppression, where racial hatred was very rife. Apartheid in South Africa used ideology and laws making use of the police and the army to criminalize black people in our beloved country. Such criminalization led to detentions and imprisonments, resulting in a whole range of political prisoners, people placed under house arrest, the banning of political organizations and legitimate political leaders.

Apartheid also used the law so that the final interpretation of the law could only rest with the apartheid rulers. Of the laws that we have had, the 1913 and 1936 Land Acts created bantustans in our country, separating black people from each other and from our white counterparts, resulting in the majority of the people occupying only 13 per cent of the land. We had various racial departments, such as the Department of Native Affairs, the Department of Coloured Affairs and the Department of Indian Affairs, to control the movement and the influx of people in various parts of the country. This was further solidified through the introduction of a Group Areas Act, confining people to particular group areas based purely on race. We had a duplication of the education departments in our country and a duplication of social services, which put a tremendous strain on the treasury. These inequalities of apartheid are very often expensive.

But these inequalities also show a lack of respect for human rights. We have been denied the right to vote; the franchise was granted to one of the great leaders of the world, former President Nelson Mandela, only when he voted in 1994, way beyond the age of 60.

Job descriptions resulted in particular jobs being available only to particular parts of South African society. It was none other than one of the founding fathers of apartheid, Dr. Hendrick Verwoed, who in 1954 made the statement that the black child must learn that we can only be drawers of water and carriers of wood. It was the same Hendrick Verwoed who drew the linkages between apartheid in South Africa and Israel. The apartheid system in South Africa also used our faith in Christianity, Puritanism, Calvinism and national fundamentalism to protect and promote its ideological position.

We, however, had an anti-apartheid movement inside South Africa, and we were fighting for a

non-racial South Africa and not just for a South Africa with black rights. Our President, Nelson Mandela, said in 1994 that never shall it be that this nation will again experience the oppression of one person by another. Our struggle for liberation was an affirmation of our struggle to affirm the human dignity and equality of all people and the human rights of all people. This resistance that we engaged in was a resistance of all people of South Africa opposed to apartheid, particularly as it found expression in the early 1980s through the black local authorities, the Tricameral Parliament and the South African Indian Congress, structures that were primarily based on enhancing the principle of separating the people of South Africa. We made it very clear that separate can never be equal.

We believed in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights in the same way that we drew courage from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, because it is in those instances that an affirmation was given that apartheid is a crime against humanity. The international apartheid movement, where ordinary peace-loving and justice-serving people demonstrated the rejection of the injustices and diabolical nature of apartheid, served as a beacon of hope and strength for many of us when we were suffering under the pain and the injustices of apartheid. We appreciate how ordinary people in the anti-apartheid movement placed pressure on their Governments to act against the apartheid regime.

It is important that we underline, as civil society organizations, the inextricable link that we see between our work and that of democratic Governments. We will encourage Governments to seek ways in which we can further cooperate with each other in our common search for peace and justice wherever such qualities may be absent in the world, and we hope that they will do so. In our struggle in South Africa, we have learned the importance of caring for others as an element of affirming our common humanity. When we talk about *ubuntu*, we are saying that we recognize that we can be persons only because of the way we treat other people.

Unfortunately, we see a glaring lack of such compassion in the situation of the Palestinian people. The international movement responded to the call from oppressed South Africa for boycotts, divestment and sanctions. Churches, trade unions and arts and culture movements protested apartheid policies and actions. Corporations broke ties with apartheid capital. The focus of many on the support provided to our own

Government was what resulted in an end to the system. The South African apartheid system did not give up on its own. It was because of international pressure and divestment that the system became bankrupt both politically and economically.

We want to believe that the United Nations played a very important role in our liberation in South Africa. We urge the United Nations to do the same as apartheid, as practiced by the authorities in Israel, is being experienced at this time in human history. The United Nations adopted the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid in 1973. Having growing up under apartheid myself, I believe that the same Convention applies to the apartheid now being practiced by the Israeli Government.

As I indicated earlier, the similarities between apartheid in Israel and South Africa were spelled out by Hendrik Verwoerd when he said that Israel, like South Africa, is an apartheid State. The apartheid State of South Africa and the United States Government have collaborated with and defended Israel. We in civil society are worried about the more than \$3 billion donated to the Israeli Government, which frees up money for the Israeli Government to continue its war against the innocent people in Gaza and the West Bank.

I had the opportunity to visit the occupied territories as an election observer of the South African Government during the 2005 election, and I also visited the area in November 2006. I observed indescribable human rights violations, worse than what we experienced in apartheid South Africa. I witnessed how settler communities are being set up and how the Palestinian people are gradually being alienated from their land. I learned of house demolitions in Nablus, Hebron, Tulkarem and many other communities, and from reports that we receive through the work that we are doing with the World Council of Churches in that area it is apparent that such violations continue to happen as we speak.

There are great parallels between apartheid in South Africa and what we are seeing in the occupied territories of the West Bank, although they may not be identical. The most painful part for me, as a person of faith, was when I saw how Palestinians are being denied access to their holy sites by the apartheid wall and the roadblocks, which are not only preventing Palestinians from visiting relatives and friends, but

also denying children free access to education by forcing them to go through checkpoints in order to get to school.

I also noted how multinational companies, such as Caterpillar, are using their armour-plated vehicles in the house demolitions. Therefore, the Campaign to End the Occupation is calling for divestment from those companies that are supporting the injustices perpetrated against the people of Palestine. In addition, we have noted that equipment from Motorola is being used by the Israeli Defense Forces for observation and communication. The main purpose is to separate the Israeli people from the Palestinian people and the Palestinian people from one another.

There is a need for international and United Nations engagement. We believe that something must be done about the wall; about the 1967 borders, which are closing in; about the increase in the number of political prisoners; about the fact that many Palestinians do not have freedom of movement; and about the fact that children are being subjected to terror by the Israeli security forces when they fly over areas such as Gaza, breaking the sound barrier and causing fear that is traumatizing many children in a situation that is desperate, as preceding speakers have said.

We want to encourage the United Nations to look at how international law can continue to be applied so that, one day, the people of the occupied territories of the West Bank can also celebrate freedom and be recognized in the communities of the world, as happened with us, the peoples of South Africa. We are grateful for that and, as civil organizations, recommit ourselves to a just peace and an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza. As I speak, our movement is growing, and we thank the members of the Committee for giving us the opportunity to tell them about our activities.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Makue for his statement. Through him, I should also like to thank all those civil society organizations that are working tirelessly throughout the world to find a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian question for their valuable contributions to the work of our Committee. Indeed, the Committee maintains very strong relations of partnership that greatly enrich its discussions and activities aimed at promoting a settlement of the Palestinian question.

It is now my honour to announce that the Committee has received messages of support and solidarity from many heads of State and Government, as well as from ministers for foreign affairs, Governments and international organizations. I would like to recall that those messages will be published in a special bulletin by the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat. However, I should like to read out the list of officials who sent those messages, in the order in which they were received by the Secretariat.

We have received messages from the following heads of State: His Excellency the President of the Republic of Guinea, His Excellency the President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, His Excellency the President of the Federative Republic of Brazil, His Excellency the President of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, His Highness the Amir of the State of Qatar, His Majesty the King of Morocco, His Majesty the King of Bahrain, His Excellency the President of the High Council of State and Head of State of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Tunisia, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Senegal, His Excellency the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Namibia, His Excellency the President of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, His Excellency the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, His Excellency the President of the Republic of the Philippines, His Excellency the President of Turkey, His Excellency the President of the Democratic People's Republic of Algeria, His Excellency the President of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, His Excellency the President of the Republic of South Africa, His Excellency the President of Nicaragua, His Excellency the President of the United Arab Emirates, His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Indonesia, His Excellency the President of Lebanon, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Yemen, His Excellency the President of Burkina Faso and His Majesty the King of Jordan.

We have received messages from the following heads of Government: His Excellency the Prime Minister of Thailand, His Excellency the Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria, His Excellency the Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, His Excellency the Prime Minister

of India, His Excellency the Chief Adviser of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and His Excellency the Prime Minister of the Republic of Mali.

The Committee has also received messages from the following Ministers for Foreign Affairs: His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic, His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, His Excellency the Secretary of the General People's Committee for Foreign Liaison and International Cooperation of the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Botswana and His Excellency the Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs of Colombia.

The Committee has also received messages from the following intergovernmental organizations: the European Union and the Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Of course, the Committee is continuing to receive messages. As I said earlier, those messages will be included in a special bulletin of the Division for Palestinian Rights.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to express our sincere appreciation to the heads of State or Government, Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Governments and international organizations that I have just mentioned, as well as to those who will address messages to us in the future and to all participants in this meeting, for their persistent efforts aimed at achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine and for the support they have always given to the mandated activities of this Committee.

The statements that we have heard today and the messages of solidarity that we have received demonstrate once again the unwavering support of the international community for the establishment of peace in the Middle East and the realization by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights, on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and international law. I can assure all participants that the members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People will spare no effort to achieve those objectives.

I should now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Riyad Mansour, Ambassador and Permanent Observer for Palestine to the United Nations.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): Allow me, on behalf of the Palestinian people and their leadership, to thank you, Sir, and, through you, the members of the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for organizing the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people, as it has in previous years. I would also like to extend our gratitude to the Division for Palestinian Rights for all the things it does to make this commemoration the successful event that we all know.

Allow me also to express our thanks to all those who have attended this commemoration, spoke on this occasion and sent messages, statements and letters — of which there are about 50 so far, if my count is accurate — including heads of State or Government, foreign ministers and international, regional and civil society organizations. We thank all of them.

We believe that the content of those messages, as well as this commemoration itself, give our people strength to continue with our struggle with more determination to put an end to Israel's occupation of all the land that it occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem; to establish our own Palestinian State on that land, with East Jerusalem as its capital; and to find a just and agreed upon solution to the refugee question on the basis of resolution 194 (III).

We thank the Committee again, and we welcome this massive international support and the words that came from the minds and the hearts of everyone here, especially people such as the President of the General Assembly. These kind words resonate with us, the Palestinian people. With all this support, we hope that maybe next year or even sooner we will be celebrating the birth of the Palestinian State. I thank everyone very much.

I am sure that we have additional things to do this afternoon. We will begin the debate on the question of Palestine, and this evening we have, I believe, an exhibit that we will all, hopefully, attend. It includes

pictures of Palestine and, if I am not mistaken, there will also be a reception. We hope that all of our friends who are here and not here will be with us during the course of this debate and all of the activities today and tomorrow. Above all, we hope that they will show the resolve of the international community through massive support for our draft resolutions and continue to preserve the near-consensus that we enjoy in the support for those draft resolutions.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank the representative of Palestine for his words, which resonate in our hearts and minds. We thank him for all the work he carries out and his immeasurable contribution to the work of this Committee.

Before adjourning this solemn meeting, I would like to thank all of those who have contributed to the success of this event. I would, in particular, like to thank the officials of the Division for Palestinian Rights, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the Department of Public Information, the Office of Central Support Services and all those working quietly and efficiently in the wings, not least among whom are the interpreters. The translators and the conference room officers also have our deep gratitude.

I would like to remind members that a Palestinian cultural exhibit, jointly organized by the Committee and the Observer Mission of Palestine, will be opened this evening at 6 p.m., as Ambassador Mansour just mentioned. It will be in the lobby of the General Assembly building, by the visitors' entrance. This year's exhibit is entitled "The Palestinians: 60 years of struggle and enduring hope". Everyone is invited to attend this event, which will be followed, of course, by a reception hosted by the Committee on this occasion.

At the end of this meeting, at 1 p.m., in the auditorium of Dag Hammarskjöld Library, everyone is invited to a film screening. The film is entitled "The Earth Speaks Arabic". I have seen this movie, and I recommend that no one pass up the opportunity to see this story told, as it will undoubtedly be an enjoyable experience.

I would like to close this meeting by thanking everyone for their active participation.

The meeting rose at 12.55 p.m.