



General Assembly

Official Records

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

320th meeting

Monday, 30 November 2009, 10 a.m.
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 Chair (*spoke in French*): Today, the Committee is holding a special 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. Ali Abdussalam Treki, President of the General Assembly; His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations; His Excellency Mr. Thomas Mayr-Harting, President of the Security Council; His Excellency Mr. Palitha T.B. Kohona, 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. Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations and representing Palestine at this special meeting; and Mr. Haile Menkerios, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

I would particularly like to welcome the presence at our meeting of Professor Walid Khalidi, renowned Palestinian historian and General Secretary of the Institute for Palestine Studies in Washington, D.C., who will be our keynote speaker this morning.

I also wish to warmly welcome all of you — representatives of Member States, intergovernmental organizations and civil society organizations and all

those who have accepted the Committee's invitation to participate in this solemn meeting.

Allow me at this point to make a statement on behalf of the Committee.

On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I would like to express our appreciation to everyone here for attending this special meeting in observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Our appreciation and greetings also go to those joining us from all over the world through the United Nations webcast system.

When the General Assembly decided on the annual observance of this day, in 1977, it was mindful of the responsibility of the United Nations towards the Palestinian people and of the need to promote a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine. Today's gathering is a reaffirmation of the ongoing commitment of the international community to achieving that goal.

Sixty-two years ago, on 29 November 1947, the General Assembly, in its resolution 181 (II), provided for the establishment of two States in Mandate Palestine, one Jewish, one Arab. To date, only one State has come into being. The hopes and aspirations of the Palestinian people for living in their own home remain unfulfilled. Generations of Palestinians in the West Bank, in East Jerusalem and in Gaza have lived, and continue to live, under the longest military occupation in modern history. Palestinian refugees in camps in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon are still yearning

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-506. Corrections will be issued in a corrigendum.



for the end of the plight. Despite these never-ending challenges, the Palestinian people continue to hope that one day the dream of living in a State of their own will be realized.

The reality of the situation on the ground today is quite bleak. It gives us little reason to believe that the occupation will be brought to an end any time soon. The peace process is stalled. In the very land where a future Palestinian State is supposed to be established, illegal Israeli settlements continue to multiply. The refusal of the occupying Power to bring a halt to settlement expansion has become a major obstacle to the resumption of peace negotiations.

In East Jerusalem, the construction of settlements has been accompanied by the demolition of houses, evictions of Palestinian residents and other discriminatory measures. The situation around the holy sites of the city, in particular at and around Al-Haram Al-Sharif, remains tense. Any illegal or provocative action is prone to escalate into a wave of violence with far-reaching implications.

The construction of the separation wall on occupied Palestinian land continues, in spite of the ruling by the International Court of Justice. Together with more than 500 checkpoints and obstacles to movement throughout the West Bank, the wall stifles the daily life of the Palestinians.

The humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip has always been a source of special concern to our Committee. After being subjected for more than two years to an almost total economic blockade, the Palestinians of Gaza had to endure a three-week military invasion accompanied by extraordinary violence. More than 1,400 Palestinians were killed during the Israeli offensive, more than 1,100 of whom were non-combatants. Among the non-combatants killed were more than 300 children and more than 100 women. More than 5,000 Palestinians were injured; many were maimed for life. The Israeli side reported 14 deaths, including four civilians, and 182 injured. Although the ceasefire has by and large been observed since the end of the Israeli invasion, the economic blockade continues, allowing only for some basic relief in order to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe.

The Palestinian people needs and deserves our solidarity. Owing to the compelling imbalance of power between Israel and the Palestinians, that courageous people greatly needs our active solidarity.

Developments on the ground clearly demonstrate how the occupying Power has been consolidating its hold on the Palestinian land and its resources. Since 1967, Israel has gained control of all aspects of the lives of the Palestinians.

The Palestinian people deserves our solidarity because it is still denied its inalienable national rights, defined by the General Assembly as the right to self-determination without external interference, the right to national independence and sovereignty and the right of Palestine refugees to return to their homes and property, from which they had been displaced and uprooted.

The Palestinian people deserves our solidarity all the more because its leadership, under President Mahmoud Abbas, has vowed to achieve its national goals through peaceful negotiations. And the Palestinian Authority has demonstrated, through concrete steps in the territory under its jurisdiction, that it is serious in building Palestinian public institutions in accordance with widely accepted norms of transparency and good governance.

Our Committee is encouraged by the fact that international solidarity with the Palestinian people is stronger than ever. It manifests itself in a multitude of actions by Governments and intergovernmental and civil society organizations, as well as by individuals. Many Governments are actively involved in the pursuit of peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Be it through the work of the Quartet, the Security Council, the General Assembly or other bodies, they are seeking to make a positive contribution to the two-State solution.

When, in December 2008, the Israeli army invaded Gaza, the international community responded immediately by calling for calm and demanding respect for the lives of innocent civilians. The rocket attacks by Palestinian groups indiscriminately targeting Israeli civilians were also condemned. In their respective resolutions, the Security Council and the General Assembly called for a permanent and durable ceasefire. The Secretary-General intervened and personally visited Gaza.

At this point, Mr. Secretary-General, I would like to express our Committee's sincere thanks for your efforts and your commitment to peace between Israelis and Palestinians. The members of the Committee urge you to continue to see that the United Nations retains

permanent responsibility for the question of Palestine until that issue is resolved in all its aspects, in accordance with international law and international legitimacy.

The international community's solidarity with the Palestinian people was reaffirmed last March at the donor conference held at Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, where pledges of some \$4.5 billion were made for Gaza's reconstruction, although the bulk of the promised funds have still not reached the Palestinian people in Gaza. We also see a demonstration of solidarity in the work of various fact-finding missions undertaken by the United Nations and other organizations in the wake of the war in Gaza.

I would like to take advantage of this opportunity to state here, unequivocally, that our solidarity with the Palestinian people is not at Israel's expense. It is certainly not an unfriendly much less hostile act towards the Israeli people. When the Committee criticizes certain policies and practices of the Israeli Government, it does so simply because such policies and practices violate international law, international humanitarian and human rights law and do prevent progress towards a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Our solidarity with the Palestinian people also manifests itself through the daily work of the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and other international and civil society organizations carrying out vitally needed activities that sustain the lives of the Palestinians. Today, we would like to pay a very special tribute to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which, on 8 December, will celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of its establishment. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme, the World Food Programme and numerous other United Nations entities are doing everything possible to ensure basic services to the Palestinians, in particular in Gaza.

Let us turn the spirit of solidarity into a collective power that can remove the obstacles in the way of a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For our part, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People will continue to pursue the mandate given it by the General Assembly until the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are realized, the illegal occupation of Palestinian land is ended and

a two-State solution is achieved, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security.

I now have the honour to give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ali Abdussalam Treki, President of the General Assembly.

Mr. Treki (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya), President of the General Assembly (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to express our deep gratitude to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for its important work in promoting the cause of the Palestinian people.

The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people is a solemn occasion for renewing our commitment to a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, a goal that eluded us for far too long, with disastrous consequences. This day is a reminder that the question of Palestine remains the oldest unresolved issue at the United Nations. It is an occasion to reflect on the situation, a situation of continued occupation, which has dispossessed the Palestinian people and subjected them to untold suffering and tragedy over the decades. The grave situation in the occupied territories, particularly in the Gaza Strip, has confronted us with the human cost of this unresolved conflict, a cost borne by Palestinian civilians. Their ordeal will continue until the question of Palestine is resolved and the occupation is brought to an end.

The continuing Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip has forced 1.5 million Palestinian civilians into poverty and isolation. The Israeli military offensive almost a year ago further exacerbated the already desperate situation. International efforts to rebuild the Gaza Strip and to assist its civilian population are blocked by Israel. The United Nations has repeatedly called on Israel to lift this inhuman and illegal blockade, but Israel continues to impose collective punishment on Gaza's civilian population in defiance of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law and particularly in breach of its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention. Israel should heed the call of the international community to bring an immediate end to the stranglehold on the civilian population and to lift the blockade of the Gaza Strip.

Earlier this month, the General Assembly endorsed the report of the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict (A/HRC/12/48) and called on Israel and the Palestinian side to undertake

independent, credible investigations towards ensuring accountability and justice. The report calls upon us to help to bring an end to impunity in the Middle East and to ensure accountability. Without justice, there can be no progress towards peace.

The renewed engagement by President Barack Obama to promote peace in the Middle East has inspired hope. The international community is strongly committed to supporting the peace process. But on the ground there remain serious obstacles to peace, and there has been no change. The Israelis continue to refuse to implement any relevant United Nations resolutions, which now number more than 100.

The situation in occupied East Jerusalem remains of grave concern. The continued construction of the illegal separation wall in the occupied territory undermines the peace process and violates United Nations resolutions. Continued Israeli actions to change the status of Jerusalem further endanger the viability of a Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital. In addition, the excavations in the vicinity of Al-Haram Al-Sharif and the attacks against Palestinian worshippers at the holy sites of Al-Haram Al-Sharif and the Al-Aqsa mosque have provoked an already volatile situation in the occupied city. The ongoing construction of settlements in the occupied territory, especially in and around East Jerusalem, where Israel continues to demolish properties, confiscate land and evict Palestinians from their homes, must not be tolerated, as it constitutes a main impediment to the peace efforts. The recent announcement by Israel to construct 900 new settlement units in Gilo is another such step. Israel must abide by its international obligations and refrain from actions that prejudice permanent status negotiations.

The United Nations has consistently upheld the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and will continue to work for a just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine on the basis of the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, international law, the Madrid principles, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative. Those resolutions and agreements are the building blocks of a Palestinian State and must be implemented.

This afternoon, the General Assembly will consider the agenda item entitled "Question of Palestine". As President, I would like to reaffirm the

Assembly's position that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine until it is effectively resolved, in conformity with relevant United Nations resolutions.

Our collective expression of solidarity with the Palestinian people also entails action and responsibility. On this occasion, I call for renewed efforts by the parties, supported by the international community, with the aim of establishing an independent and sovereign State of Palestine.

Here I wish to note that the bad situation in Palestine is no better than the situation of the peoples of other occupied Arab territories, including the occupied Golan and the Lebanese territories that are still occupied by Israel. I reaffirm our support until the Palestinian people gain independence and until the Arab lands are liberated.

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

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

The Secretary-General: It is a great pleasure to join the Committee today. I commend the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for keeping the international community's focus on the question of Palestine. The question is as fundamental today as it was 62 years ago, when the General Assembly, in resolution 181 (II), put forth a vision of two States. Today, the State of Israel exists, but the State of Palestine does not.

The Palestinian people continue to struggle for their inalienable right to self-determination, a fundamental, universal human right enjoyed by so many others around the world. The international community continues to assist and protect the Palestinian people, including through the work of United Nations agencies, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East foremost among them.

However, our interventions must not be limited to managing the humanitarian dimension of this conflict. What is urgently needed is a political solution that addresses the roots of the conflict. It is vital that a sovereign State of Palestine be achieved. This should be on the basis of the 1967 lines, with agreed land

swaps, and a just and agreed solution to the refugee issue — a State that lives side by side in peace with Israel within secure and recognized borders, as envisaged in the resolutions of the Security Council.

I welcome the commitment of Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas to a two-State solution. At the same time, I am deeply concerned that talks between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization have been suspended for almost a year.

I support the clear commitment and continuing efforts of the United States to bring about a resumption of meaningful negotiations on all final status issues, including the security of Israelis and Palestinians, borders, refugees and Jerusalem. The biggest challenge to this shared agenda is to create the conditions in which the parties have the trust and confidence to return to genuine and substantive talks.

On the Palestinian side, the Palestinian Authority has made significant progress in meeting its Road Map obligations in the West Bank and in building institutions to serve the Palestinian people. I call on all Palestinians to fight violent extremism, to refrain from incitement and to continue their unyielding struggle to build their own State institutions. These efforts have resulted in economic and security improvements, which should be sustained and extended.

I welcome initial steps taken by Israel to contribute to these positive trends and call on Israeli authorities to expand these measures so that change can become truly transformative.

I am deeply concerned that, in East Jerusalem and the remainder of the West Bank, illegal settlement construction continues. I have noted Prime Minister Netanyahu's recent announcement of settlement restraint. While this is a step beyond earlier positions, it falls short of Israel's obligations under the Road Map, particularly given the exclusion of East Jerusalem. I repeat my call on Israel to meet in full its Road Map commitments to freeze all settlement activity, including "natural growth", and to dismantle outposts erected since March 2001.

In addition, the barrier continues to restrict Palestinian access to key social services, agricultural land and East Jerusalem. As participants will recall, the International Court of Justice has stated that the barrier's deviation from the 1967 line into occupied Palestinian territory is contrary to international law.

I am also concerned about the situation in Jerusalem. Actions such as the evictions of Palestinians and house demolitions, as well as the continued closure of Palestinian institutions in occupied East Jerusalem, run contrary to Israel's Road Map obligations. I call on Israel to cease such actions in East Jerusalem, which stoke tensions, cause suffering and further undermine trust, and to reopen Palestinian institutions. I reiterate my belief that Jerusalem remains a final status issue to be negotiated between the parties.

As the Quartet has previously stated, unilateral actions cannot prejudice the outcome of negotiations and will not be recognized by the international community. Jerusalem should emerge as the capital of two States, with arrangements for the holy sites acceptable to all. We should all want to see Jerusalem as a symbol of harmony, tolerance and peace.

(spoke in French)

A lasting solution to the Gaza crisis must still be found urgently. The coming winter season and its inclement weather raise serious concerns with regard to the humanitarian situation. The blockade of Gaza must be lifted, as requested by the Security Council in its resolution 1860 (2009), in order to allow for unhindered access for humanitarian aid and commercial goods and freedom of movement for people.

Consistent with this same resolution, efforts must also be made to address Israel's legitimate security concerns, in particular by creating mechanisms aimed at preventing the smuggling of weapons into Gaza and putting an end to Palestinian rocket fire at Israeli civilians.

Ten months after the end of hostilities in Gaza and in southern Israel, the issue of accountability for violations of international humanitarian and human rights law has not been adequately addressed. I call on Israel and the relevant Palestinian authorities to conduct, without delay, credible investigations into the many reported allegations of serious human rights violations connected with the Gaza conflict.

The reunification of Gaza and the West Bank is also essential. There can be no two-State solution without a unified Palestinian territory. I support Egypt's efforts in this regard.

(spoke in English)

Now more than ever, politics must be made credible. Those who try to undermine moves towards peace through violence or by changing facts on the ground must not be allowed to set the agenda. Vigorous international efforts are essential for advancing the political process, ending the occupation and achieving a solution to all permanent status issues.

The United Nations will continue to work for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East through negotiations based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008), previous agreements, the Madrid framework, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

I will continue to engage all concerned to realize our shared goal of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

The Chair *(spoke in French)*: I thank the Secretary-General for his important statement. I express to him our deep gratitude for his untiring personal efforts to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting solution of the question of Palestine.

It is now my pleasure to give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Thomas Mayr-Harting, President of the Security Council.

Mr. Mayr-Harting (Austria), President of the Security Council: I would like to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for inviting me to address this meeting in my capacity as President of the Security Council for the month of November.

We are gathering on this day to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The Security Council remains committed to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on the vision of a region where two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders.

Throughout the past year, the Council remained seized of the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, and continued to receive monthly briefings on the situation from the Secretary-General's Special Coordinator and the Department of Political Affairs and to hold open debates, including at the ministerial level. Since this event last year, the Council

has adopted two resolutions — 1850 (2008) and 1860 (2009) — and one presidential statement (S/PRST/2009/14) on the situation in the Middle East. While the situation on the ground remains of serious concern to the Council, the international community has witnessed intensified diplomatic efforts to relaunch bilateral negotiations this year. Council members have consistently welcomed and encouraged these efforts and strongly hope that they will advance the process towards the achievement of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Security Council members regularly underscore the urgency of reaching a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. In its 11 May presidential statement (S/PRST/2009/14), the Council recalled its previous resolutions on the Middle East, in particular resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003), 1850 (2008) and 1860 (2009), and the Madrid principles, and noted the importance of the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative.

As the members of the Quartet stated on 24 September (see Press Release SG/2155),

“the only viable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an agreement that ends the occupation that began in 1967; resolves all permanent status issues as previously defined by the parties; and fulfils the aspirations of both parties for independent homelands through two States for two peoples, Israel and an independent, contiguous and viable State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security”.

Today I reiterate the Council's call for renewed and urgent efforts by the parties and the international community towards the realization of that vision. We encourage the Quartet's ongoing work and regional and international efforts to support the parties in this regard.

To move towards the prompt resumption and early successful conclusion of negotiations between the parties and to improve the situation of the Palestinian people on the ground, the Security Council, in May, called upon the parties to fulfil their obligations under the performance-based Road Map, refraining from any steps that could undermine confidence or prejudice the outcome of negotiations on all core issues. Members of the Security Council continue monthly to highlight this call.

We remain deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza. Members of the Council also wish to stress the urgency of the commencement of reconstruction activities. We wish to commend the laudable efforts of the humanitarian organizations and agencies on the ground, particularly the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and its staff. We encourage all members of the international community to support the agency with financial contributions.

Transformative change on the ground is integral to peace. We welcome the Palestinian Authority's plan for constructing the institutions of the Palestinian State within 24 months as a demonstration of the Palestinian Authority's serious commitment to an independent State that provides opportunity, justice and security to the Palestinian people and is a responsible neighbour to all States in the region.

I wish to reiterate the Council's encouragement of tangible steps towards intra-Palestinian reconciliation, including in support of mediation efforts of Egypt and the League of Arab States, as expressed in the 26 November 2008 resolution and consistent with Security Council resolution 1850 (2008) and other resolutions.

The international community should provide assistance to help to rehabilitate and develop the Palestinian economy, to maximize the resources available to the Palestinian Authority and to build Palestinian institutions.

During its open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict earlier this month (see S/PV.6216), the Council adopted resolution 1894 (2009) through which it affirmed its resolve to strengthen the protection of civilians in armed conflict, advance compliance of parties to armed conflict with their obligations under international law and to prevent and deter the recurrence of serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law. I wish to reaffirm that resolve on this solemn occasion.

In conclusion, allow me to assure all present of the commitment of the Security Council to the ultimate goal of achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East and to the realization of the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for an independent and democratic State.

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I thank the President of the Security Council for his important statement.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of Palestine, 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. Mansour (Palestine): I am honoured to read out a message from His Excellency President Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian National Authority, on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The message reads as follows:

(*spoke in Arabic*)

"Allow me at the outset to convey the greetings of the Palestinian people to all present and to all our friends in countries around the world who are joining us in the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. I would like also to express our profound gratitude to the United Nations and its Secretary-General and to the Chairman and the members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their tireless efforts in raising awareness of and defending the rights of our people, rights which have been reaffirmed and enshrined in hundreds of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions beginning with the adoption of Assembly resolution 181 (II) in 1947, partitioning Palestine, and continuing through the current session of the General Assembly.

"Of all the issues and problems that have faced the international community, only the question of Palestine has not gained the implementation of the resolutions related to it, which confirms the conviction that there is indeed a double standard when it comes to United Nations resolutions, wherein any resolution regarding Israel is not implemented, allowing Israel to continue to behave as though it were above international law.

“It has been 61 years since the 1948 Nakba that befell our people, who, to this day, live either as refugees in camps in their homeland or in neighbouring countries or in the diaspora or continue to suffer under colonial occupation. They have lived under occupation since 1967, as all initiatives and negotiations undertaken with the Israeli side since the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993 have not yielded the results envisaged or hoped for by the international community, namely an end to the Israeli occupation and the establishment of an independent State of Palestine in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Throughout all of these years of the peace process negotiations, Israel has never ceased its settlement campaign, arrests, aggression and attacks against the Palestinian people, the latest of which was carried out in the Gaza Strip, during which war crimes were committed against the Palestinian people and their national institutions and infrastructure, as documented in the report of Justice Goldstone.

“Furthermore, the current Israeli Government has taken a position in complete denial of and retreat from all of the commitments and agreements that we had reached with previous Israeli Governments. There is also a serious acceleration of the settlement policies and attempts to Judaize Jerusalem through the eviction and suffocation of its indigenous population, encircling their neighbourhoods with settlements in a flagrant threat to the Arab identity of the city and its Christian and Muslim sites. It has also gone as far as endangering Al-Aqsa mosque by the excavations being undertaken beneath it and around it and allowing the extremist Jews to invade its compound and surroundings, which threaten to expand the conflict to a dangerous religious dimension.

“The concept of negotiations for the current Israeli Government is that they can do whatever they wish on the ground and that we can talk about whatever we want at the negotiating table. This is something that we cannot accept.

“Yet, despite all of this, we assure you again, as we have always done, of our full commitment to a just peace as a strategic choice, and that we have never been an obstacle to the

desired peace based on the resolutions of international legitimacy, the signed agreements, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative, which was adopted by the Arab and Islamic countries, and the Road Map, which was endorsed by the Security Council in its resolution 1515 (2003).

“We hope that everyone is aware of this and will support this responsible Palestinian position in order to achieve peace in the region and will work together to push Israel in this same direction, because its daily practices on the ground confirm that it does not want any step towards a comprehensive settlement of the conflict, as it continues its settlement campaign in the West Bank and East Jerusalem in grave violation of international law and resolutions of international legitimacy and turns its back on a resumption of negotiations to reach a just solution that guarantees an end to the conflict and the attainment of peace, security and stability for all of the peoples of the region.

“It is time, after all of these years of negotiations that have not yielded results, for the international community, in particular the Security Council, to shoulder its responsibilities and to take immediate and decisive action that reflects the positions of the countries of the world, which have repeatedly called for the two-State solution and an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967, in order to bring an end to this conflict and give credibility to the Charter and resolutions of the United Nations.

“On behalf of the Palestinian people and their leadership and on my personal account, I reiterate our profound gratitude for your support and appreciation for your solidarity over all these years, as well as to all friends and free, peace-loving peoples in the world, who stand by our people in their endeavour to achieve just peace. We assure you that we have faith that a just peace will be realized in our region and that right must prevail.”

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I thank the Permanent Observer of Palestine for having read out that important message from President Mahmoud Abbas. I ask him to convey our respectful greetings to the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the

Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority as well as our sincere thanks for this highly politically important message.

On behalf of all of us, I convey to the President of the Palestinian Authority our feelings of solidarity with and unwavering support for the aspirations of the Palestinian people in their quest for a prosperous future in a secure, enduring and internationally recognized State of their own.

I should also like to assure President Abbas and, through him, the whole of the Palestinian people of the firm determination of the Committee to continue its efforts, as mandated by the General Assembly, aimed at promoting a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement to the question of Palestine.

I shall now suspend the meeting for a few minutes to allow some of our guests of honour to leave the Chamber. On behalf of the Committee, I should like once again to thank the President of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General, the President of the Security and the Permanent Observer of Palestine for having graced this commemorative event with their presence and for the important messages they communicated to us.

The meeting was suspended at 11.40 a.m. and resumed at 11.45 a.m.

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I would now like to give the floor to Professor Walid Khalidi, a renowned Palestinian historian and General Secretary of the Institute for Palestine Studies in Washington, D.C. He will give the keynote presentation on the question of Jerusalem.

Born in Jerusalem in Palestine, Professor Walid Khalidi studied at the University of London and Oxford University. His first teaching position was at Oxford University. He voluntarily resigned in 1956 in protest against the British invasion of Egypt during the Suez crisis. From 1957 to 1976, he was Professor of Political Science at the American University of Beirut. From 1976 to 1996, he was at Harvard University, conducting research at the Harvard Center for International Affairs, and was a Visiting Professor of Political Science and senior research fellow at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies.

He is a founder and a member of the Institute for Palestine Studies and a member of the Royal Scientific Society of Amman and the Palestinian Welfare

Association, as well as the Friends of Khalidi Library in Jerusalem.

Since 1963, he has been the General Secretary of the Institute for Palestine Studies. He was an adviser to the Iraqi delegation to the United Nations in 1967, a member of the delegation of the Arab Summit to the British Government in 1983, special adviser to the Secretary General of the League of Arab States in 1984 and principal adviser to the Jordanian-Palestinian delegation at the peace talks in Madrid and Washington in 1991 and 1992.

Professor Khalidi has written extensively and given many presentations in English and in Arabic on the Palestinian issue and on the politics of the Middle East. Among his books, let us mention "From Haven to Conquest: Readings in Zionism and the Palestine Problem Until 1948" of 1971, "Before Their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians, 1876-1948" of 1984 and "All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948" of 1992. He has published articles in *The New York Times*, *Foreign Affairs* and *Al-Hayat*.

Professor Khalidi is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He became an American citizen in 1991. He lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

It is my great pleasure to give the floor to Professor Khalidi.

Mr. Khalidi: I thank you very much, Ambassador Badji, for your very kind and generous words of introduction.

Control of Jerusalem has been a source of conflict between the West and Islam ever since A.D. 638, when Muslim Arabs captured Jerusalem from Byzantine Christianity. Except for the 100-year Crusader interlude in the twelfth century, and until its capture by Britain from the Ottomans in 1917, Jerusalem remained under Muslim sovereign rule for some 1,200 years. That is longer than Britain has been Norman and more than twice the length of time since Columbus discovered America. It is longer than Jerusalem was under Jewish sovereign rule in biblical times.

Historically, there never was a conflict between Islam and Judaism over Jerusalem. On the contrary, under the protection of Islam, Jews returned to Jerusalem after having been expelled from it, first by

the Byzantine Christians and later by the Latin Crusaders. The Byzantine Christians had turned the Herodian Jewish Temple into a garbage dump.

A conflict between Judaism and Islam over Jerusalem developed with the advent of political Zionism. This was a mostly Russian Jewish nationalist movement which, towards the end of the nineteenth century, long before the Holocaust, aimed at the establishment, through massive immigration and colonization, of a Jewish State in a country, Palestine, 95 per cent of whose population was then Arab, both Muslim and Christian.

With massive British help after the First World War, and even more massive and continuing American help since the Second World War, Israel is what it is today. Because of this Western sponsorship, Israel's drive for exclusive control and super-privileged status in both West and East Jerusalem and its determination since its crushing military victory in 1967 to turn the two halves of the city into what it calls its "united, reunited and eternal" Jewish capital, is seen by Islam as the latest phase in a historical conflict and as a latter-day Western crusade by proxy.

Such perceptions were exacerbated by the resurgence of irredentist religious passions among Jews and evangelical Christians triggered by the Israeli conquest in 1967 of the Muslim holy places in East Jerusalem. For the first time since the Roman Emperor Hadrian destroyed the Herodian Temple in A.D. 137, Israeli soldiers swaggered on what they believed to be the Temple Mount. That activated the deep messianism embedded in Zionism behind a façade of secular socialism, stirring the hopes of Christian millenarians while confirming the worst fears of Muslims. It is approaching midnight in Jerusalem. Some believe it is past the hour. What should be manifest are the extreme urgency and volatility of the situation in that intoxicating city.

A prevailing Western notion — the crux of the theory of the clash of civilizations — is that Islam lies outside the Judeo-Christian tradition. That is nonsense because Islam's major premise is that it is integral to and, indeed, the culmination of the Judeo-Christian scriptural tradition. Central to Islam's concept of God's purposes is that He has revealed Himself to humankind since creation through a succession of prophets and scriptures. Foremost among those scriptures are the Hebrew Torah and the Christian Gospels.

Eighteen Hebrew patriarchs and kings are reverentially mentioned in the Koran. Islam gives David and Solomon higher status than Judaism does. According to Judaism, they are sinful monarchs; according to Islam, they are sinless prophets. According to the Koran, Abraham is a Muslim, the builder of the Kaaba, Islam's most sacred shrine in Mecca.

Islam believes that because of God's love for Christ, He raised him to heaven just before the crucifixion. Christ is thus alive today in heaven, according to Islam, and will return to Earth to usher in the millennium. According to Islam, Christ was born of Mary, a virgin, by the direct creative act of God. According to the Koran, Jesus spoke in his cradle, healed the sick and raised the dead — miracles that the Koran does not accord to Muhammad. Mary is mentioned reverentially in the Koran more often than in the New Testament.

Neither Judaism nor Christianity looks at Islam in the same way. Judaism does not share Islam's reverence for Jesus and Mary. One might want to ask one's scholarly colleagues how Judaism looks upon Jesus and Mary and where it considers Jesus to be today. Indeed, of the three faiths, Islam is the most ecumenical in its stance towards the other two.

Because of Islam's perception of its kinship with Judaism and Christianity, much that is holy to Judaism and Christianity is holy to Islam, and much of that is centred in Jerusalem. Thus, for Islam, Jerusalem is thrice holy because of its Judaic, Christian and Muslim dimensions.

For Muslims, Jerusalem was the first direction of prayer — *kiblah* — before Mecca became their *kiblah*. Its holiness was further consecrated in a Koranic verse that describes a miraculous nocturnal journey — *isra* — by the Prophet from Mecca to Jerusalem. According to tradition, it was from Jerusalem that Muhammad ascended to heaven, to within two bow lengths of the presence of God. That ascension is known as the *mi'raj*.

The Prophet's *isra* to and *mi'raj* from Jerusalem became the source of inspiration of a vast corpus of devotional literature concerning life beyond the grave. That literature is in circulation to this day in the languages of more than 1 billion Muslims: Arabic, Turkic, Farsi, Urdu, Hindi, Malay and Javanese. A very special link exists between Jerusalem and one of the

five pillars of Islam — the five daily prayers, *salat*. According to tradition, it was during the Prophet's *mi'raj* that, after conversations in heaven with Moses, the five daily prayers became canonical.

To commemorate the *isra* and the *mi'raj*, the Umayyad dynasty, based in Damascus, graced Jerusalem towards the end of the seventh century with two architectural gems: the mosque of the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa mosque, which form the Noble Sanctuary, Al-Haram al-Sharif, with their compounds and walls. The Dome is the earliest surviving Muslim building, while the inscriptions inside it are our earliest dated fragments of the Koran.

Through the centuries, succeeding dynasties ruling from Baghdad, Cairo and Constantinople embellished Jerusalem with mosques, theological colleges, Sufi convents, abodes for holy men, orphanages, souks, hospitals, hospices, fountains, baths, inns, soup kitchens, places for ritual ablution, mausoleums and shrines. Those buildings were maintained through a system of endowments. The revenues of entire villages in Palestine, Syria and Egypt were dedicated to those endowments. The donors were caliphs, sultans, military commanders, scholars, merchants and ladies of rank.

In 1947, the General Assembly resolved to partition Palestine into a Jewish State and an Arab State, with a *corpus separatum* for Jerusalem under United Nations trusteeship. The Arabs rejected the United Nations partition resolution in 1947. Why? Because it dismembered Palestine and gave the 30-per-cent Jewish minority 57 per cent of the country when that minority owned less than 7 per cent of the land.

The Zionist leadership accepted partition, but that acceptance was only verbal. At the same time, it prepared a master plan, called Plan Dalet, for the military conquest of the country, including the *corpus separatum* of Jerusalem. It is because Israel's control of West Jerusalem is based on the military conquest of 1947-1948, in defiance of the United Nations partition resolution, that the international community has not accorded formal recognition of Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem to this day.

Within less than a week of the conquest of East Jerusalem in 1967, the Mughrabi Quarter adjacent to the Wailing Wall had vanished, together with the Abu Midyan mosque. The quarter had been consecrated as a

Muslim trust by Al-Afdal, son of Saladin, for the benefit of pilgrims from North Africa. The Wailing Wall is known in Islam as Al-Buraq after the wondrous mount that carried Muhammad there on the night of the *isra*. In a predawn raid, Israeli bulldozers surrounded the Quarter and gave its inhabitants three hours to vacate their homes. That is how the plaza fronting Al-Buraq was created.

The regime governing the Christian, Muslim and Jewish holy places in Jerusalem had been traditionally known as the status quo. This was the accumulation of practices, privileges and constraints arrived at consensually over time. Unilateral action backed by military might to change the religious status quo in Jerusalem not only lacks sensitivity and prudence, but is courting disaster.

Before the end of June 1967, the borders of municipal East Jerusalem were unilaterally extended from six square kilometres to 73 square kilometres of occupied West Bank territory. This annexation was in deliberate and calculated violation of the Geneva Convention. On 29 June 1967, the elected mayor of East Jerusalem and his councillors were read an order of dismissal in Hebrew by an army officer. Since then, under the rubrics of the unification and reunification of Jewish Jerusalem, the Palestinian inhabitants of East Jerusalem have been subjected to a menu of siege, harassment, intimidation, isolation, discrimination, displacement, infiltration, fragmentation, expropriation, demolition, de-Arabization and Judaization designed to demoralize and overwhelm them and, hopefully, induce their departure, fulfilling a long-cherished Zionist dream of an Arab-free Jerusalem.

All of this has been meticulously and commendably documented by your Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People under the able leadership of Ambassador Badji, as well as by the European Union.

Annexed East Jerusalem mushroomed into annexed greater Jerusalem, which mushroomed into metropolitan Jerusalem. Metropolitan Jerusalem now includes 634 square kilometres, or more than 10 per cent of the West Bank. In 1967, the Jewish population of East Jerusalem was zero. Today, there are about 300,000 Jews on West Bank soil in metropolitan Jerusalem. If this is natural growth, Israeli geneticists have discovered a remarkable drug. Meanwhile, even as we meet this morning, the separation wall is

relentlessly snaking into, around and between the Palestinian neighbourhoods of East Jerusalem, mercilessly separating thousands of Palestinian residents from their homes, schools, hospitals, relatives, playgrounds, gardens, shopping centres and offices.

Manifestly, the target here is the heartland of Palestine and its future Palestinian capital, East Jerusalem. Israeli colonization in and around East Jerusalem aims at establishing geostrategic control, demographic domination, psychological browbeating, economic and social disruption, doctrinal affirmation, religious fulfilment and territorial expansion. Above all, it aims at the pre-emption of a viable two-State solution and the crippling of any newborn Palestinian baby.

Meanwhile, Jewish fundamentalists, abetted mostly by American evangelists, not only dream of rebuilding the biblical Jewish Temple on Al-Haram Al-Sharif, but have also been plotting to do so. Plot after plot to blow up the mosque of the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa mosque have been uncovered by the Israeli authorities.

The most infamous of these plots caused the roof of the Al-Aqsa mosque to collapse in 1969 as a result of arson. This atrocity triggered the establishment of the Islamic Summit Conference, which today includes 57 countries, many of whose representatives honour us today with their presence in this room. At least 20 per cent of Israel's Jewish population favours destroying the Muslim shrines and rebuilding the Jewish Temple in their place.

To their credit, the United Nations and the international community in general never bought Israel's unification and reunification ploy. A continual stream of United Nations resolutions calls upon Israel to cease and desist and to comply with and abide by international law, the Geneva Convention and the wishes of the international community. We applaud Member States' persistent efforts in this regard. But Israel pays no attention. Why? Because the only country Israel takes notice of is the United States.

From my perspective as an observer over the decades, three deeply disturbing phenomena stand out in American decision-making on the Middle East. First is the increasingly influential role of Congress in the actual formulation of Middle East policy and the continuing acquiescence of the executive branch to this

process. Legislatures are too attuned to parochial priorities to conduct the foreign policies of global Powers. Second has been the steady retreat of successive United States administrations from earlier principled positions on Jerusalem and on the applicability of international law and the Geneva Convention to Israel as the occupying Power of the West Bank and the Golan. Third is the continuing disconnect between developments on the ground in the Middle East and the diagnosis of cause and effect by the American foreign policy elite, both in and out of office.

Perhaps the most outrageous initiative of the United States Congress on Jerusalem was its endorsement in 1995 of the transfer of the United States embassy from Tel Aviv to a specifically united and reunited, exclusively Jewish capital of Israel. This endorsement is already public law in the United States, thanks to the failure of former President Clinton to veto it.

Triumphalist Zionism has been increasingly in the ascendant in Israel and the Jewish diaspora since the crushing military victories of 1948 and 1967. That triumphalism is anchored in Israel's nuclear monopoly and in the American guarantee of Israel's military superiority against any combination of neighbouring States. Israel has received a tremendous infusion of human reinforcement from the recent United States-sponsored mass immigration of a million ex-Soviet Jews. Thanks to that infusion, Israel can send colonists in the thousands into East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Golan.

Israel derives vitality from the unstinting support of right-wing American evangelism. Its self-confidence is fed by automatic United States congressional circumvention of any undesirable initiative of the United States Administration and by the automatic veto by that Administration of any undesirable resolution of the Security Council.

The American Jewish community, though not monolithic on the peace process in general, is virtually unanimously hard-line on Jerusalem. Inside Israel, the principal leaders are engaged in a continuous outbidding competition with one another. Too often the arena for that competition is Al-Haram Al-Sharif.

Bibi's disastrous authorization of excavations beneath the Western Wall of Al-Haram Al-Sharif in 1996 was an exercise in outbidding Peres and Barak on

the left and Sharon on the right. Sharon's catastrophic invasion of Al-Haram Al-Sharif in the year 2000, which triggered the second intifada, was an exercise in outbidding Barak on the left and Bibi on the right.

The asymmetry in the overall balance of power between Israel and the Arab world is compounded by intra-Palestinian disarray and the absence of an Arab centre of gravity. Soaring expectations were raised in the Arab and Muslim worlds by the new American Administration. Presidents whose middle name is Hussein do not grow in plenty in American orchards, but the swift transition by Secretary Clinton from her categorical "no" to settlements and to natural growth to her gushing depiction of Bibi's moratorium, which excludes East Jerusalem, as unprecedented is not only a farce but an unpromising augur of the future.

With regard to Israel, the United States is not an umpire or a referee. It is not a broker or a passive observer. Jewish settlement in Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Golan is financed by unaudited official United States capital and tax-exempt private donations. It is defended by arms supplied by the United States, sustained by the United States mass media, shielded by United States diplomacy and often manned by armed United States-born colonists. The United States is a major part of the problem and the major actor in the solution.

Time is the crucial commodity here. The Israeli exploitation of time is stunning, as any visitor to the occupied territories can verify. Bibi knows America as well as he knows his face. A 10-month moratorium will take him to the doorstep of the next American elections. Mitchell is a superb diplomat, but the Irish conundrum is not analogous. It is not analogous. Why not? Because neither side in Ireland exploits negotiation time to revolutionize the demographic and physical landscape of the other.

Robust, sustained and strong-willed presidential intervention in the peace process is not an act of charity to Palestinians. It is in the supreme national interest of the United States and a giant contribution to global concord. Clearly, the current incumbent of the Oval Office does not lack good intentions, but does he have the time amidst his other momentous priorities, and does he really have the leverage over a Congress that is *plus royaliste que le roi*?

Is an honourable and peaceful solution for Jerusalem conceivable? Yes, it is. It must rest on the

following four pillars: first, the demystification and deconstruction of the Israeli and American concepts of the unification and reunification of Jewish Jerusalem; secondly, no monopoly of sovereignty over both halves of the city either by Palestine or by Israel; thirdly, no aristocracy of religious rights, conferring pre-eminent status on any one of the three Abrahamic faiths; and fourthly, acknowledgement of the equality of the religious and non-religious dimensions of Jerusalem both for the Israelis, on the one hand, and for Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims, on the other.

That concept of Jerusalem is based on inclusion, not exclusion; on sharing, not monopoly; on parity, not hegemony; on balance, not the usurpation of rights; and on separate but joint governance. The unity that currently exists in Jerusalem is the unity of an *Anschluss*. If partition applies to the whole country, a fortiori it applies to its metropolis. The Israeli and United States congressional concept of Jerusalem is a guaranteed recipe for indefinite conflict not only in Palestine but far beyond.

Our concept for Jerusalem could well become a paradigm for a historic reconciliation between Israel and its Western sponsors, on the one hand, and the universe of Islam, on the other.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank Professor Khalidi for the very comprehensive, informative, captivating, passionate and, at times, quite moving presentation he delivered as a real man of science and true academician. His speech was made with great detachment. In any case, I should like to thank him for all he said about Jerusalem, his birthplace. Jerusalem has also been declared the Arab Cultural Capital for 2009.

The Committee wholeheartedly shares Mr. Khalidi's analysis that a just settlement of the question of Jerusalem is fundamental to reaching a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I would add that the Committee has repeatedly condemned the actions of the Israeli Government in East Jerusalem, in particular its construction of settlements, demolition of housing and expulsion of Palestinian residents. The Committee also shares his serious concern about recent developments in the city, and encourages the General Assembly to adopt a resolution reaffirming, inter alia, that the illegal Israeli actions are null and void and that a just solution of the question must include internationally guaranteed provisions to ensure

freedom of religion and permanent and unhindered access to the holy places by people of all faiths and nationalities. I thank Mr. Khalidi once again for his presentation, which will become part of the history of this Committee and this house.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Palitha Kohona, 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. Kohona (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: Building peace and ensuring security are fundamental to international diplomacy and has, over the past six decades, been an essential concern in discussions at the United Nations.

While the world has avoided a global conflict, many unresolved disputes and conflicts remain around us, challenging the values and aspirations of humanity. The issue of Palestine, which, in our view, is at the core of Middle East instability, has undoubtedly been one of the key items of concern in contemporary international politics. However, the full implementation of Security Council and General Assembly resolutions on the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people remains far from realization and is a matter of utmost disappointment for us.

This year's International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People comes at a crucial time, when the hopes for a viable peace in the Middle East and a lasting solution to the issue of Palestine seem somewhat bleak. The extensive harm caused to civilian lives and property during the Gaza war early this year has shaken the confidence and trust between the parties to the conflict, hindering the commencement of any meaningful negotiations in the near future.

The deteriorating humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and the continued Israeli siege have only added to the misery of the civilian population and stalled the momentum achieved during recent peace initiatives. However, with the continuing efforts at different levels to revive the dialogue between the parties to the conflict, hope is engendered and the stage for peace can be set again. We truly should join our hands in support of an

independent and viable Palestinian State that coexists with the State of Israel in peace and security.

During this year alone, several United Nations-mandated bodies presented reports following investigations on different aspects of the situation in the occupied territories, including the forty-first report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories (A/64/517), which I presented to the Special Political and Decolonization Committee two weeks ago. Each of these reports corroborates the findings of the others on the dire humanitarian situation in the occupied territories. The extensive discussions held in different United Nations forums following the presentation of these reports echoed in no uncertain terms the need for an expeditious resolution of the Palestinian question.

Among other things, the Special Committee was particularly concerned over the continued violations of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories. Israel's Operation Cast Lead reportedly killed over 1,200 Palestinian civilians in Gaza, many of whom were women and children. The sanctions and blockade imposed by Israel preclude rebuilding the lost livelihoods of the Palestinians. Prospects for economic development and trade remain grim, perpetuating the dependency that afflicts the local society. Continued reliance on humanitarian assistance will therefore be inevitable.

Stringent restrictions on the flow of humanitarian assistance and other daily supplies into the Gaza strip have contributed to a worsening of the poverty and living conditions of the Palestinian population. Their rights to a decent living and the full enjoyment of other basic rights, such as access to health, education and shelter, are at stake.

The Special Committee observed that the human rights situation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem remains precarious. Numerous roadblocks, checkpoints and permission systems have to a great extent constrained the freedom of movement of ordinary people. Illegal Israeli settlement activities, settler violence and the construction of the separation wall, in contravention of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, are a serious threat to the viability of a future Palestinian State.

Israeli security measures are often in excess of legitimate security concerns. The arbitrary imposition of administrative, legal and judicial measures, in defiance of international law, the Fourth Geneva Convention and international humanitarian law have brought undue suffering to the Palestinian population in the occupied territories.

No solution for peace will be viable or bound to last unless it is couched in a process that seeks to redress injustice and afford equal protection and rights to all the people. On this solemn occasion, the international community ought to renew its commitment, within the mandates and capacities of our respective Governments and organizations, to ensure that the Palestinian people are accorded their inalienable rights as citizens of a sovereign State Member of the United Nations.

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I thank Ambassador Palitha Kohona, Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, for his important statement.

It is now my pleasure to give the floor to Mr. Maged Abdelaziz, Permanent Representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the United Nations, who will read out a message from the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, His Excellency Mr. Hosni Mubarak, in his capacity as current President of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the honour to read out the text of a message from His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Hosni Mubarak, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt.

“On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I have the pleasure to write on behalf of the people and Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt, reiterating our full support for the brotherly Palestinian people and for their legitimate quest to regain and exercise all their inalienable rights, primary among which is their legitimate right to establish an independent and sovereign State of their own, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on the basis of the two-State solution and all relevant terms of reference, including relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, the

Madrid terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative.

“As we seek to achieve the goal of establishing an independent Palestinian State, we highly appreciate the efforts of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the role it plays in reflecting the firm commitment of the international community to support all endeavours in achieving that noble goal, to fully restore all of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and to achieve a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine. Such a solution must be an integral part of a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict and is one of the requirements for achieving stability in the Middle East region.

“In this regard, it is important to stress that efforts to resolve the question of Palestine must be undertaken through the intensification of the efforts by the entire international community to ensure the resumption of the negotiating process according to clear terms of reference and within a definitive time frame. Prompt agreement must be reached on the final status issues in a manner that is conducive to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State and that opens the door towards achieving comprehensive peace in the region through the withdrawal of Israel from all Arab territories occupied since 1967.

“Egypt reiterates its call for the Committee to continue its work aimed at putting an end to the illegal Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and to Israeli practices and violations of Palestinians’ human rights, especially the unjust and illegal siege of the Gaza Strip and Israel’s continued targeting of Palestinian civilians. An end must be put to all attempts by Israel to change the geographic and demographic features of the occupied Palestinian territories, including its intensification of settlement activities, confiscation of land and attempts to change the character of East Jerusalem. An end must also be put to the aggression against the sanctity of Islamic holy places and visitors to them, especially Al-Aqsa mosque, the continued building of the separation wall and other activities and practices that violate the norms of international law and international humanitarian

law and that constitute unacceptable violations of human rights.

“In this context, we were very pleased to host the special meeting convened by the Committee in Cairo in March 2009 to provide assistance to the Palestinian people, under the theme ‘International response to the humanitarian and economic needs of the Gaza Strip’, in support of the international community’s efforts and the important role played by the Committee.

“I reaffirm Egypt’s steadfast commitment to continue to work to achieve Palestinian national reconciliation and to reach a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, in accordance with the rules of international legitimacy and the principle of land for peace.

“I would also like to reaffirm our steady support for the activities of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and for the personal endeavours of its Chairman, as well as those of the other members of the Committee, aimed at mobilizing international support for the restoration of the rights of the Palestinians and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.”

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I thank His Excellency Maged Abdelaziz for the important message from His Excellency Mr. Hosni Mubarak, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt and current Chair of the Non-Aligned Movement. I request Ambassador Abdelaziz to kindly convey to President Mubarak the sincere thanks of the Committee for his very important message.

I now have the pleasure of giving the floor to His Excellency Mr. Bashar Ja’afari, Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations, who will read out a statement from His Excellency Mr. Walid Al-Moualem, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic, in his capacity as Chairman of the thirty-sixth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers.

Mr. Ja’afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for having organized this meeting on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. I would also like to thank all who have helped

to ensure the success of this occasion for their important statements, which highlight the importance of the right of the Palestinian people to a national homeland of their own.

I would also like to thank you, Sir, for having invited Professor Walid Khalidi to join us today. The historical overview he has shared with us highlighted many important points and enabled us to better understand what has happened in the past and what is happening today in the occupied Palestinian territories, especially in occupied Jerusalem. Mr. Khalidi’s statement was truly what I would call intellectual medicine: there are many people at the United Nations who hesitate to support the cause of Palestine. Those people in particular would benefit from a consultation and a dose of this intellectual medicine. Perhaps then they would realize that the question of the Palestinian people is an issue of justice par excellence. Everything that Israel, the occupying Power, has done to Palestinians and other Arabs of the occupied territories is illegal and contravenes the Charter of the United Nations. These are acts for which Israel is fully responsible.

It is my honour now to read out a statement by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic in his capacity as Chairman of the thirty-sixth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers.

“It is our pleasure, Mr. Chairman, at this special meeting of the Committee on the occasion of the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, to express our great appreciation to you and to your Committee for the role you play every year in organizing this important international meeting. This meeting is an opportunity to remind the world of the tragedy of a people who have been suffering for 61 years. We highly appreciate the Committee’s sincere efforts, its solidarity with the Palestinian people and its support for their just struggle to recover their usurped legitimate national rights, in particular the right to self-determination and to the creation of their own independent and fully sovereign State on their national soil, with Jerusalem as its capital, and the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their land, based on the relevant decisions of the United Nations.

“As we commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, we would like to draw attention to the actions of the Israeli occupying Power, the daily acts of aggression and barbarous practices against an unarmed people. These acts include the profanation of religious sites, the methodical demolition of houses, the confiscation of land, the destruction of crops and the arrest of thousands of innocent citizens, in particular elderly people, children and women.

“Under these tragic circumstances, which are aggravated by the inhumane practices of the Israeli occupying Power, it is deplorable that the Security Council has been unable to take firm decisions to put an end to these practices, in particular the building of settlements on occupied Palestinian territory, especially Jerusalem, despite repeated demands by the majority of Member States and international public opinion.

“Israel continues to arrogantly ignore the more than 600 resolutions and decisions adopted by the United Nations and its agencies and bodies, which call for the withdrawal of Israel from occupied Arab territories in order to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting solution in the region. Israel continues the construction of the apartheid wall and to chip away at Palestinian territory in an attempt to impose a status quo. The West Bank and Gaza are in effect two enormous prison camps, where the most elementary human rights and standards of human dignity are non-existent.

“At the end of 2008, Israel launched a war of aggression against Gaza. It used lethal weapons in that war, leaving thousands of dead and injured behind them, including women, children and elderly people. All of this was carried out in complete disregard for humanitarian and other international agreements and conventions. This is borne out by the conclusions of the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict, established by the Human Rights Council and chaired by Justice Richard Goldstone. These conclusions are contained in its September 2009 report (A/HRC/12/48), which details the serious violations of human rights, international law and international humanitarian law and acts that could

constitute war crimes and even crimes against humanity.

“Last year, Israel redoubled its inhumane practices and its acts of aggression in occupied Jerusalem, in particular its aggression against Al-Aqsa mosque.

“The Syrian Arab Republic, which hosts almost half a million Palestinian refugees on its territory, has long believed and continues to believe that a just, comprehensive and lasting peace can indeed be reached. This can be done by simple and straightforward means: by fully implementing the relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1972), and 479 (1980) on the occupied Syrian Golan, and by revitalizing the peace process that began in Madrid in 1991, the Arab Peace Initiative endorsed at the Beirut summit in 2003 and supported by the States members of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers in their successive meetings. The most recent of these was the meeting of Ministers for Foreign Affairs held in Damascus in May 2009.

“Once again, I appeal to the international community to shoulder its responsibility towards the Palestinian people and to work seriously to put an end to the Israeli machinery of repression, destruction and terrorism, which contravenes all international norms and instruments. We greatly appreciate the Committee’s dedicated efforts, and we call on it to continue its support for the Palestinian people in their just struggle for the liberation of their stolen land, until they can once again enjoy their legitimate rights, in particular their right of return. I assure the Committee that the Syrian Arab Republic will provide all the support it needs to fulfil its noble task.”

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I thank Ambassador Ja’afari for his statement and for conveying the important message of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic and Chairman of the thirty-sixth Islamic Conference of Foreign Minister. I ask him to kindly convey to the Minister the sincere thanks of the Committee for his very important statement.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Abdurrahman Mohamed Shalgham, Permanent

Representative of the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to the United Nations and representative of the Chairman of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union.

Mr. Shalgham (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to convey to you, Mr. Chairman, the greetings of President Muammar Al-Qadhafi, Leader of the Revolution, Chairman of the Arab Maghreb Union's Presidency Council and current Chairman of the African Union. I congratulate you on having organized this meeting to reaffirm our solidarity with the Palestinian people. The international community's annual observance of this occasion calls attention to the daily suffering of that people and its subjection to oppression and occupation.

We express our solidarity with those who, suffering from kidney disease, cannot get dialysis, and with those thousands of children who cannot find a roof to shelter them from the rain and cold and the thousands for whom there are no schools. We express our solidarity with the oppressed and the suppressed and with the 11,000 prisoners in Israeli jails, among them representatives of the Palestinian people. We express our solidarity with those whose houses are being demolished every day in the West Bank and with those who are killed so that their organs can be sold, as confirmed by a Swedish journalist who wrote that such practices are taking place.

Several weeks ago, two Israeli rabbis published a book stating the opinion that Israel has the right to kill anybody who poses a threat to Israel, including children. This is no secret: the book was published in Israel. We are not aware of any reactions against this racist point of view.

We express our solidarity with a people whose places of worship are violated every day and who have no defence other than their devotion to freedom and to their identity.

Today, we salute all honourable people in the world who are providing assistance to people in Gaza, whether they be from America, Europe, Asia or anywhere else. Assistance is coming to the Palestinian people in the name of the solidarity of all peoples with Palestine.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for organizing this meeting, and I hope that this time next year the

situation of the Palestinian people will be vastly improved and their rights fully realized.

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I thank the representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya for his important statement on behalf of Chairman of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Yahya Mahmassani, Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States to the United Nations.

Mr. Mahmassani (League of Arab States) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to convey the greetings of Mr. Amre Moussa, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, and to pay tribute to the Committee for the important role it plays in support of the rights of the Palestinian people, including its right to self-determination and to the creation of an independent, sovereign State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

This year, the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People takes place against the backdrop of that people's suffering, the denial of its basic rights and the continued Israeli occupation of its territory, along with the aftermath of the aggression against Gaza and the deterioration of the economic and social situation in the occupied Palestinian territories.

The war crimes against Palestinian civilians of which Israel is guilty must not go unpunished; they are flagrant violations of international law, conventions and agreements. The United Nations and its specialized bodies must urgently shoulder their legal responsibility with respect to these crimes, especially in the light of the findings of international commissions of inquiry and human rights organizations, including the Human Rights Council's Goldstone mission and the Independent Fact-Finding Committee on Gaza established by the League of Arab States and chaired by John Dugard, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories, who recently briefed the General Assembly in that regard. All these reports faithfully record the acts of the Israeli occupiers, including war crimes, and bear witness to deliberate attacks on civilians, the use of Palestinian civilians as human shields, the use of internationally banned weapons and violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention committed by the Israeli army by deliberately targeting civilians

and destroying of civilian facilities, religious sites, hospitals and schools.

There is international unanimity on the Arab Peace Initiative and in support of international efforts towards a two-State solution and a just and comprehensive solution to the Israeli-Arab conflict on the basis of international resolutions and the agreed terms of reference. But the Arab position continues to face opposition in the Israeli Government's attempts to sidestep those agreements while insisting on continued settler activity in the West Bank and East Jerusalem in order to create a new status quo that would change the demographic and physical nature of the occupied Palestinian territories and make it impossible for a Palestinian State to emerge.

I wish to stress the Arab position, which is to continue to support the proposals of United States President Barack Obama made in the framework of his commitment to a just and comprehensive peace in the region, on the basis of a two-State solution, and to endorse the United States position which calls for an end to the Israeli settlement policy throughout the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem. We thus express concern at the United States backing away from its position relating to Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, which constitute a very serious impediment to peace in the region.

Israeli authorities continue to completely ignore all rules, agreements and human rights charters, thanks to the protection and immunity that Israeli State policies enjoy. That is because Security Council is unable to respond to the situation in the occupied territories. It is unacceptable that this situation should continue, because it reflects an impermissibly flagrant imbalance in international relations. We can no longer accept Israeli coercion. We can no longer continue to pursue the mirage of peace on Israel's terms and undertake negotiations that are not serious and are a waste of time and effort, leading to no outcome whatsoever.

Israel's position places upon us all the humanitarian, legal and political responsibility to take the steps that need to be taken if the next negotiations are to be serious ones leading to true commitments. Israel must not continue its policy of stalling, which enables it to continue with impunity to change the status quo in the Palestinian territories, thus making the creation of a Palestinian State impossible. The end of

settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, the end of the unjust blockade, the reopening of border crossings, permission for the entry of basic goods to rebuild Gaza: all of this is necessary if a solution to the situation is to be reached.

Given the gravity of the situation, the League of Arab States reiterates the need to uphold international standards and the principles that have been endorsed by the international community, including the Charter of the United Nations and resolutions on the Palestinian situation and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Far from having a double standard, we aspire to genuine peace and the return of land to its real owners, thereby ushering in a new era in the Middle East.

The Chair (*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.

I would like to inform members 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 of Member States and international organizations. I recall that those messages will be published in a special bulletin by the Division for Palestinian Rights. However, I should now 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 Indonesia, His Excellency the President of the Democratic People's Republic of Algeria, His Excellency the President of Turkey, His Excellency the President of the Republic of the Philippines, His Excellency the President of the Federative Republic of Brazil, 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 Socialist Democratic Republic of Sri Lanka, 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 Socialist Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Nicaragua, His Highness the Amir of the State of Qatar, His Majesty the King of Bahrain, His Excellency the President of Burkina Faso, His Majesty the King of

Jordan, 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 Tunisia, His Excellency the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, His Excellency the Acting President South Africa and His Majesty the King of Morocco.

We have received messages from the following heads of Government: His Excellency the Prime Minister of Thailand, the Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, His Excellency the Prime Minister of Malaysia, His Excellency the Prime Minister of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, His Excellency the Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Madagascar and His Excellency the Prime Minister of India.

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 and Migrants of the Republic of Lebanon, His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Cuba, His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan and His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Mali.

The Committee has also received messages from the following Governments: the Government of the Sultanate of Oman, the Government of the Republic of Guyana and the Government of Argentina.

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

The Committee has also received messages from the following civil society organizations: the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization, Caritas Jerusalem and Caritas Internationalis.

Those are the messages that have been received by the Secretariat.

Before giving the floor to the Director of the New York Liaison Office of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, who will read out a message from the Commissioner-General of the Agency, and to Mr. Bill Fletcher, who will speak on behalf of the US Campaign to End the

Israeli Occupation, I should like to make some announcements before the interpreters leave us.

Our meeting today will be followed by a showing, here in the Trusteeship Council Chamber at 1 p.m., of the film entitled "Jerusalem — The East Side Story". I should like to invite participants to attend that screening.

I would also like to remind participants that an exhibition of photographs entitled "The United Nations and the Palestinian Refugees, 60 Years Later", which is being presented under the auspices of the Committee by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, will open at 6 p.m. tonight in the north-east corner of the Public Lobby of the General Assembly Building. Everyone is invited to attend the opening.

Also tonight, at 7 p.m. in the Economic and Social Council Chamber, the Committee will host a concert by Maqamat, an orchestra of the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music. Again, everyone is invited to attend. I am told that historic concert is not to be missed.

I now give the floor to Mr. Andrew Whitley, Director of the New York Liaison Office of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, who will read out a statement on behalf of Ms. Karen AbuZayd on the occasion of this special meeting.

Mr. Whitley (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East): I have the honour to read out this message on behalf of Ms. Karen Koning AbuZayd.

"I regret that I cannot be with you on this important occasion. After nine years of service to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the Palestinian refugees, I shall be retiring from my office at the end of the year. Unfortunately, the reason that I cannot join you today is that I am currently on mission in Spain.

"This moment — one when hopes of an early breakthrough in the peace process have once again dimmed, the national polity remains deeply split, the blockade of Gaza has persisted with cruel rigour for 28 months and the inhabitants of Nahr el-Bared camp, along with many other refugees, remain homeless — is an

appropriate juncture to reflect on the importance of maintaining solidarity with the Palestinian people.

“For the most part scattered from their homeland in the refugee camps, villages and cities of the surrounding region, as well as further afield in all corners of the globe, over the past 62 years Palestinians have shown extraordinary resilience. In the face of considerable adversity, they have educated their children and made them vital citizens of the world, without ever losing touch with their collective identity and burning desire for their own national State.

“The Palestinians’ understandable and fully justified search for justice has, however, been matched with pragmatism. Contrary to an often repeated myth, the refugees have not been a passive, aid-dependant group. Rather, given half an opportunity, they have seized it, in the process contributing amply to the societies in which they live.

“As the fateful story of the partition of Palestine, and the subsequent flight or expulsion of much of the indigenous population, began here in New York with the United Nations on this day in 1947, let us not forget how much the Palestinian people look to this body to live up to its convictions and the many resolutions that it has adopted in their favour. Hopes of a just and lasting solution may have been dashed many times, but the refugees have not given up hope that, one day, their time will come.

“What keeps spirits alive in low moments such as those they have experienced lately is the realization that the vast majority of Member States in this global body share the Palestinians’ belief in the urgency of the need to bring an end to occupation and to exercise their right to self-determination.

“The concept of the two-State solution may be looking a little ragged these days, but the alternative — a unitary State in which Palestinians would struggle for equal civil and political rights — is anathema to Israelis and a distant second-best goal for the vast majority of Palestinians, wherever they may live. Thus, we must continue to press ahead with efforts to achieve a viable Palestinian State, while

remaining vigilant to those unilateral measures that might ultimately render the goal unachievable.

“Attention has lately been focused on a series of steps taken by the occupying Power in East Jerusalem and in Area C of the West Bank, which remains under full Israeli control, that have made daily life increasingly difficult for Palestinians — among them, the most vulnerable, such as Bedouin nomads — and call into question the likelihood of being able to bring about a meaningful State, including East Jerusalem. The refugees, who make up about 40 per cent of the population of the occupied Palestinian territory, have suffered in equal measure with their non-refugee counterparts from such negative developments.

“Despite improved security coordination between the Palestinian Authority and the Government of Israel, incidents of humanitarian access in the West Bank are still running at the unacceptably high level of almost two a day. In the words of the World Bank, the West Bank remains a “shattered economic space”, in which its integrity as a viable socio-economic and political unit has been severely compromised.

“In Gaza, meanwhile, we meet at a time when hopes are rising that Staff Sergeant Shalit will finally be released as part of a larger prisoner swap, which will remove yet another pretext for the maintenance of the blockade. Speaking as someone who has lived in Gaza throughout my term with UNRWA and who has known first hand the best of its people on so many occasions, the longer the blockade is maintained, the harsher the suffering of its people will be, the deeper their grievances will be and the more radicalized some will become. Surely that is not an outcome anyone would wish?

“Solidarity with a suffering and wronged people can take many forms. It is expressed through lofty speeches on commemorative days such as this. It is seen through the many idealistic volunteers who travel to the West Bank and Gaza to work alongside Palestinians, to bear witness and to offer moral and practical support, much as young Westerners used to flock to the kibbutzim of Israel before and soon after the June 1967 war.

“Solidarity is also shown through the financial support that donor Governments and private individuals give generously to voluntarily funded organizations, such as UNRWA, that serve the Palestinian people in many concrete ways to try and provide them with the services, opportunities and decent living conditions that are theirs by right. On Wednesday this week, we shall have our annual pledging conference in the General Assembly. It would be timely and extremely welcome if UNRWA were to receive new pledges of support from unexpected quarters, or the announcement of an increase in funding from those that have historically underperformed in that respect. The refugees and our 30,000-strong Palestinian staff, who live in great anxiety these days about the prospect of further reductions in their modest living standards, would be enormously relieved.

“In closing, allow me to express my fervent conviction that, through collective efforts and shared recognition of the justice of the Palestinian case for their own homeland, that noble goal will be achieved one day soon.”

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Whitley very much for that message on behalf of Ms. Karen AbuZayd, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). I ask him to be good enough to convey to the Commissioner-General the Committee’s sincere thanks for that important message and for the vital work undertaken by UNRWA staff in often difficult and sometimes dangerous circumstances.

I would like to thank the interpreters, who have been with us until now but now must leave, for having stayed with us over their time.

I also express our sincere thanks to the heads of State and Government, Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Governments and organizations that I mentioned earlier that have sent us messages, as well as all present for their participation in this meeting, their tireless efforts to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question, and their unwavering support for the Committee in fulfilling its mandate.

The statements that we have heard today and the messages of solidarity that we have received

demonstrate once again the unfailing support of the international community for the establishment of peace in the Middle East and for the attainment by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights, on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and international law. I can assure 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 goals.

I now give the floor to Mr. Bill Fletcher, member of the Steering Committee of the US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation.

Mr. Fletcher (US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation): I want to thank the Committee for permitting me to address it this afternoon.

My name is Bill Fletcher, Jr. I am the Executive Editor of the online magazine BlackCommentator.com and a member of the leadership committee of the coalition known as the US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation. I am the immediate past President of the advocacy group TransAfrica Forum, which was the leading voice within the United States of America against South African apartheid and white minority rule in Africa. I am also a long-time trade union activist.

I am here today to discuss the contemporary apartheid practiced by the State of Israel against the Palestinian people.

As an African-American in and from the United States, I am keenly aware of the similarities among the systems of Israeli apartheid, South African apartheid and the home-grown apartheid in the United States of America once known as Jim Crow segregation. Despite every effort of the Israeli State to wrap its actions in religious garments and to claim a God-given Judaic exclusive right for its actions, the description of the racial or national-ethnic differential that exists between the officially sanctioned Jewish citizens of Israel and the Palestinians within Israel — those in exile and those in the occupied territories — sounds all too familiar. It is also far from holy.

Notwithstanding the efforts of heroic individuals such as William Patterson, Paul Robeson and Malcolm X to bring the case of African Americans before the United Nations, the international ramifications of the oppression suffered here were often and conveniently ignored by the great powers of

the global North. The South African apartheid system was, to a great extent, modelled on the Jim Crow system in the United States, a fact noted by many people in South Africa and in the global South. The United Nations failed to take up the challenge to racism in my own country a generation ago; it must not fail to take up the struggle against Israeli apartheid today.

The realities of the Israeli apartheid system, in contrast to that of South Africa, were often hidden from view, at least outside of Israel and, later, the occupied territories. It was, however, the close collaboration — including military and nuclear collaboration — between the Israeli regime and the South African apartheid regime at a point when the South African apartheid regime had become an international pariah State that raised more than a few eyebrows and encouraged many people to more closely examine the theories and workings of the two States.

The parallel between the Israeli apartheid system and the Jim Crow system under which African Americans suffered and died here in the United States also helps to explain a phenomenon that seems to puzzle many mainstream commentators. How is it that there exists such a relatively large reservoir of sympathy among African Americans in the United States for the cause of the Palestinians? It is a vicious slander to assert that such sympathy is based on anti-Jewish sentiment, though I would be naive to ignore that such sentiment does exist in some isolated quarters. Rather, for African Americans, we can, at one and the same time, stand with the Jewish victims of the Nazi Holocaust and reject the Israeli apartheid system and its victimization of the Palestinian people. The horrors of the Holocaust, as the great Martiniquan writer Aimé Césaire pointed out, were not unprecedented, but found their basis in the brutal holocausts committed against the peoples of the global South by the colonial Powers and the settler States. It was based on that shared history that African Americans viscerally understood and, therefore, placed ourselves in opposition to the racist motivations that lay behind the actions of the Nazis and later the Italian Fascists in their persecution and then attempts at annihilation of the Jewish people.

Yet none of this — that is, none of the reality of the Holocaust suffered by European Jews — excuses what has happened to the Palestinian people since the Second World War, and especially since May 1948.

And it is this that many people, in what is colloquially known as black America, understand so well. The Israeli apartheid system that expropriates land from the Palestinians, restricts mixed marriages, condemns Palestinians to separate and inferior education and repudiates their internationally recognized right to return to their land and their homes simply carries with it the same stench of the decadent and oppressive system that we came to know as Jim Crow oppression and segregation.

The work of this Committee and the attention that it devotes to the situation facing the Palestinian people receive insufficient notice in the mainstream media. As a result, the actual conditions of the Palestinian people are not fully understood in many quarters, most especially in the United States.

This year's gathering comes at a critical moment. The release of the Goldstone report (A/HRC/12/48), the international attention it has received and its adoption by the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly are representative of a shifting discourse on the conditions of the Palestinian people and their struggle for self-determination and full human rights.

The challenge of the Goldstone report, however, is to move beyond discourse to a shift in actual policy to make real the report's commitment to accountability. That is a challenge for all of us, but most especially for the United Nations. Because so far, despite clear evidence of the flouting of international law by the Israeli Government, through the violation of the Hague Conventions or the Geneva Conventions, when it comes to the occupation, few actual sanctions have been taken in defence of the Palestinian people or to punish the occupiers for their transgressions.

As a citizen of the United States of America I am reminded of this on a daily basis. As the Committee is aware, the Congress of the United States voted to condemn the Goldstone report. Distorting the findings of the report and declaring it to be biased, with no concrete evidence to support such allegations, not only disrespected Justice Goldstone, the report, the Human Rights Council and indeed the United Nations as a whole, as well as the Palestinian people, but also disrespected the intelligence of the people of the United States.

We in the United States and global civil society, however, have no intention of allowing the effort to bury the Goldstone report to succeed. It is, therefore,

my hope that the planned Gaza Freedom March, scheduled for 1 January 2010, will be another opportunity to call attention to the Goldstone report, but also, and more critically, again bring to the world's attention the continuing violation of the human rights of the Palestinian people of Gaza at the hands of the forces of the Israeli State.

Important as the Goldstone report is, the analysis of atrocities committed at the time of the Israeli aggression against Gaza represents only part of the overall picture. The Goldstone report opens the door to a broader discussion of the Israeli occupation and the question of the suppression of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination, including the rights of the Palestinian refugees, and, equally important, the denial of full equality to the Palestinian minority who are citizens of the State of Israel.

The Israeli occupation has come to be broadly understood as an apartheid arrangement. Civil society around the world, including the United Nations-accredited International Coordinating Network on Palestine, has been working for years to build and broaden public understanding of that concept. Within the United States, the United States Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation has made the issue of apartheid a major part of our work. The courageous stand taken by former United States President Carter in his book, *Palestine: Peace not Apartheid*, has dramatically helped to increase awareness of the dramatic similarities in the situation faced by Palestinians in the occupied territories and those faced by non-whites in apartheid-era South Africa. Whether one is discussing the illegal seizure of Palestinian land and its being granted to Israeli settlers, roads that are restricted to Israelis alone, the creation of an internationally condemned separation wall or the ethnic cleansing of occupied East Jerusalem, again and again the situation and circumstances conform to the norms that the United Nations established more than 35 years ago in defining apartheid as a crime.

What was particularly noteworthy, I might add, regarding the steps taken by the United Nations in the 1973 International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid was that the Convention defined apartheid not as a crime limited to the South African context; as stated at the time, the crime of apartheid "shall include similar policies and practices of racial segregation and discrimination as

practised in southern Africa" (*General Assembly resolution 3068 (XXVIII), annex, article II*).

The plight of the Palestinian people is not limited to the actions taken in the occupied territories by the Israel Defense Forces and other Israeli Government agencies. While there are important distinctions to be made, the Palestinian citizens of Israel cannot be understood to be free and equal citizens of a country that denies them so many basic rights of citizenship. Rather, Palestinian citizens of Israel find themselves in a second-class status by comparison with those citizens officially recognized as being of Jewish background.

In the realm of education, for instance, Israel has operated what is, in effect, a racially segregated State school system since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. A recent and outrageous example demonstrates the logical conclusion of such a system. Writer Jonathan Cook reported that an Arab couple suffered the humiliation of the expulsion of their one year-old daughter from an Israeli day-care centre because six other Israeli parents — six parents of State-recognized Jewish background — complained that an Arab child was in the centre. The course of action available to this couple is very limited due to the nature of Israeli law. Cook went on to point out that Israel spends approximately \$1,100 on the education of each Israeli student who can demonstrate the requisite religious/ethnic credentials to the Israeli State, compared with \$190 for each Israeli student marked as Palestinian.

With regard to land ownership, it was reported in *The New York Times* on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of Israel's independence — or for the Palestinians and much of the rest of the world, the Nakba — that Arabs occupy a tiny percentage of Israeli land, less than 7 per cent, despite the fact that they make up 20 per cent of the population.

In every major category, whether land or education, health or employment, a racial or national/ethnic differential exists between the officially recognized Jewish citizens vis-à-vis the Arab citizens of Israel. In fact, according to that same *New York Times* article, Arab families, whether Christian, Muslim or secular, are three times more likely to be below the poverty line than are officially recognized Jewish families.

The Israeli system of apartheid also includes the disparity regarding the rights of people to enter Israel.

The Israeli law of return allows any officially recognized Jewish person from anywhere in the world, regardless of whether that person has any actual tie to the State of Israel, to arrive in the country and receive immediate citizenship, with all the rights and privileges that follow. Palestinians, who themselves were forcibly expelled from what is now Israel during the 1947-1948 war or later, are prohibited from returning to their homes; even if they still hold the key to their houses, despite specific requirements of international law, including General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

It is important to acknowledge the situation in both Israel the occupied territories in order to emphasize that the Israeli apartheid system is not limited to the occupied zones. The system of racial oppression or national/ethnic oppression that is so evident in the occupied territories is directly related to the manner in which Palestinian citizens of Israel are both viewed and treated. On this International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, this cannot be forgotten or glossed over. While the experience in Israel for the refugees and that within the occupied territories for Palestinians are not identical, the situation reflects the fundamental thinking of a racial-settler State of Israel that Palestinians, much like African Americans in the United States of America as described in an infamous court decision from the nineteenth century, do not have rights that Jewish Israelis are bound to respect.

I was recently sent a copy of a letter that was written in April 1948 in direct response to the news of the massacre of the Arab residents of Deir Yassin by Jewish terrorists. The letter, written by a naturalized American citizen of Jewish background and sent to the executive director of an organization known as the American Friends of the Fighters for the Freedom of Israel, read in part:

“When a real and final catastrophe should befall us in Palestine, the first responsible for it would be the British and the second responsible for it the terrorist organizations built up from our own ranks. I am not willing to see anybody associated with those misled and criminal people.”

Members will have to forgive the poor grammar. The author was not known to be a fluid writer. His greatness lay elsewhere. His name was Albert Einstein. It is worth quoting Einstein and calling attention to his

letter on this Day, for several reasons: first, to remind us that terrorists condemned by Einstein later gained international legitimacy when the Israeli State was recognized and that many of those same terrorists achieved positions in the military and in government.

Secondly, we should recall that Einstein, someone who had fled the persecution of the Nazis and who understood the full horror and implications of the Holocaust, was not prepared to use that historical reality to countenance the ethnic cleansing that was taking place in Palestine at the hands of individuals who claimed that they did not want the world to forget what had happened to the Jews.

Thirdly, Einstein recognized that there could be, what he called a “real and final catastrophe” in Palestine. Though that catastrophe happened to the Palestinians in 1948 and not to the Zionist colonizers, the failure of the Israeli State to repudiate its apartheid system and recognize the human rights of Palestinian people has set in motion events that could lead to a massive catastrophe for the people of the Middle East. With an Israel armed with 100 to 200 nuclear weapons and an escalating arms race throughout the region, a catastrophe could be beyond what even Einstein could have contemplated in 1948.

Einstein set an example, an example that many members of the Congress of the United States and alleged supporters of Israel would benefit from both remembering and understanding. Common sense says that oppression, discrimination and, indeed, genocide committed against one group never explains away or justifies crimes committed by that same group against another. The flouting of international law through an occupation lasting more than 40, years accompanied by clearly illegal colonial settlements, along with the institutionalization of a system of racial or national ethnic apartheid in order to guarantee that the subordinate group never exercises their human rights and instead disintegrates as a people into the dust of the Middle East, simply cannot be tolerated. Not only are the Governments represented in these halls called upon to take action against such criminality, but people of conscience around the world, including within Israel, must take and are taking a stand. Whether through public statements in the mainstream media, petitions or resolutions, or through boycotts, divestments and sanctions to bring non-violent pressure on the occupying Power, the international desire for peace, equality and justice for the Jewish

Israelis and for the Palestinians, including Palestinians who are Israeli citizens, refugees and those under occupation, must move beyond conferences and fine words and materialize ultimately as actions that those who have perpetrated this oppression and who profit from the suppression of the Palestinian people will not only hear, but clearly understand.

I, again, am honoured to have been offered these moments to address this Committee, and I thank the Committee for recognizing that there is a civil society voice on the matter of justice for the Palestinian people, a voice that must be heard.

The Chair: I thank Mr. Bill Fletcher for his statement. Through you, Mr. Fletcher, I would also like to thank all civil society organizations active on the question of Palestine, throughout the world, for their work in support of and in solidarity with the Palestinian people.

I now have the pleasure of giving the floor once again to Ambassador Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): I just want to say that Palestine is very grateful to all those who have expressed their solidarity with the Palestinian people today, to those representing Governments who are present here and to those who sent messages to express solidarity. We are grateful also to the civil society organizations and to the people in the gallery who are with us today to demonstrate their solidarity. This strong message of solidarity gives our people strength to continue the struggle to put an end to occupation and to have freedom and independence in our own independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

We are also very grateful to Professor Walid Khalidi for being with us and for making a brilliant presentation about Jerusalem. It is most befitting, given the occasion, that this year Jerusalem has been declared by the Arab nations as the Capital of Arab Culture. I believe that Professor Khalidi's presentation constitutes an outstanding contribution to the efforts of all those who are celebrating the International Day of

Solidarity with the Palestinian People and to all those who are celebrating Jerusalem as the Capital of Arab Culture.

I want to say also that this afternoon we will move into the General Assembly to begin the debate on the question of Palestine, and later on to adopt a group of draft resolutions. Relevant draft resolutions have been adopted in the Second, Third and Fourth Committees by overwhelming majorities, sometimes reaching close to 180 votes in favour. We expect a similar demonstration of solidarity when these draft resolutions are put to the vote, either tomorrow or the day after.

I invite all present and all their friends to be with us this evening to do two things: first, to enjoy an exhibition of photographs, set up in collaboration with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, about the Palestinian people before 1948 and after 1948; and, at 7 p.m., to move into the Economic and Social Council Chamber to enjoy together another demonstration of the resiliency of the Palestinian people through music: a concert by an institution named after a well-known Palestinian intellectual, Edward Said. I hope everyone will be with us also to commemorate the struggle of the Palestinian people and to celebrate Jerusalem as the Capital of Arab Culture.

The Chair: Before adjourning this special meeting, I wish to thank everyone who has made this meeting possible, in particular the staff members 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 everyone who works behind the scenes.

As I mentioned earlier, this meeting will be followed by the screening of a film entitled "Jerusalem — The East Side Story". Everyone is invited to attend this screening. I thank everyone for their participation.

The meeting rose at 1.40 p.m.