



General Assembly

Official Records

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

374th meeting

Monday, 23 November 2015, 10 a.m.
New York

Chair: Mr. Seck (Senegal)

In the absence of the Chair, Mr. Percaya (Indonesia), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

The Acting Chair: This is a special meeting to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in accordance with the provisions of resolution 32/40 B, of 2 December 1977.

It is my honour and pleasure to welcome His Excellency Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, President of the General Assembly; His Excellency Mr. Jan Eliasson, Deputy Secretary-General and representative of the Secretary-General; His Excellency Mr. Matthew Rycroft, President of the Security Council; His Excellency Mr. Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations and representative of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas at this meeting; His Excellency Mr. Amrith Rohan Perera, Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka and Chair of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and other Arabs of the Occupied Territories; and Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

I also welcome the representatives of Member States, intergovernmental organizations and civil society organizations, and all those who have accepted

the Committee's invitation to participate in this special meeting.

Our special thanks also go to Mr. Brad Parker, International Advocacy Officer and Staff Attorney of Defence for Children International, who has kindly accepted the Committee's invitation to participate in this meeting to deliver a message on behalf of civil society organizations active on the question of Palestine.

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

As we observe in advance the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, marked on 29 November, let us remind ourselves of the meaning of the Day. The date of 29 November was chosen as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People because of its significance to the Palestinian people. On 29 November 1947, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), which came to be known as the Partition Resolution. The resolution provided for the establishment in Palestine of a Jewish State and an Arab State, with Jerusalem as a corpus separatum under a special international regime. The State of Israel came into being in the following year. The State of Palestine is now occupied and is being denied the same rights the State of Israel enjoys, including the right to self-determination and the right to national independence and sovereignty.

Today, 68 years after the adoption of resolution 181 (II), we are witnessing a serious crisis on the ground

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once again. As Deputy Secretary-General Eliasson rightly said during his latest briefing to the Security Council,

“this crisis would not have erupted if the Palestinian people had any perception of hope of a viable Palestinian State, if they had an economy that provided jobs and opportunities, or if they had more control over their security and the legal and administrative processes that define their daily existence — in short, if they did not still live under a stifling and humiliating occupation that has lasted almost half a century” (*S/PV.7540, p. 2*).

In fact, the matrix of occupation continues to grow in the Palestinian territory. Despite the repeated calls of the international community for Israel to cease to expand its illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, it continues to do so, in contravention of article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, to which both Israel and Palestine are States parties. The applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, has been repeatedly confirmed by numerous Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, as well as by the Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, the latest meeting of which was held last December. Moreover, in article 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, to which the State of Palestine acceded this year, the transfer, directly or indirectly, by the occupying Power of parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies is defined as a war crime.

Israeli-only highways cut through the occupied West Bank, separating Palestinian cities and villages from one another. Israeli civilian law is applied to settlers in the occupied West Bank, while Palestinians are subjected to Israeli military law. While Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank enjoy swimming in pools in the summer, Palestinians suffer from shortages of drinking water. In the twenty-first century, we should not be seeing a system in which one group is treated favourably over another. Frictions between illegal Israeli settlers and local Palestinian residents often lead to unnecessary violence, resulting in injuries and deaths, as we recently witnessed. Gaza is also often called an open-air prison, with access to the outside world blocked through the land, sea and air. Prison is probably not the right word, as prisons have roofs, electricity and running water and meals are provided. Most of the more than 150,000 homes

destroyed during the 2014 war have not been rebuilt, with many people remaining homeless. Electricity shortages are disrupting the daily lives of 1.8 million residents, disabling hospitals, sewage and desalination plants. Over 90 per cent of water in Gaza is unfit for human consumption. The poverty rate is a staggering 40 per cent.

That is why there needs to be a two-State solution — two peoples enjoying the same rights in their own countries — the fully independent, contiguous and prosperous State of Palestine living side-by-side in peace with the secure State of Israel. History teaches us that an unhappy neighbour makes one unsafe. Freedom for Palestinians is security for Israelis. Prospects for Palestinians mean peace of mind for Israelis. The development of the Palestinian economy is growth of the Israeli economy. A winner of the Nobel Prize in economics famously said that development was synonymous with freedom. The Palestinian people must be freed from inhumane occupation, discrimination and subjugation.

While 29 November is dubbed the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, it is in fact a symbolic day for the Israeli people too, as resolution 181 (II) led to the birth of their State. On this solemn occasion, let us all go back to the spirit of resolution 181 (II) — two States for two peoples, with arrangements for the holy sites in Jerusalem to be accessible to people of all religions.

The United Nations, which produced resolution 181 (II), has a permanent responsibility until the question of Palestine is resolved in all its aspects. Today, our Committee renews its call on all States Members of the United Nations and members of the international community to play their own part in contributing to the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

I now have the honour to give the floor to the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Mogens Lykketoft.

Mr. Lykketoft (President of the General Assembly): Let me begin by thanking the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for organizing this special meeting.

I align myself with the statement just delivered by the Acting Chair.

I commend the Committee for the activities it has led this year to raise awareness of the situation in

the occupied Palestinian territory and the conditions endured by the Palestinian people.

It has been 40 years since the General Assembly established the Committee. It did so because, by that time, no progress had been achieved towards the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights. Those rights include the right to self-determination without internal interference, the right to national independence and sovereignty and the right to return to their homes from which they were displaced. Today, as we mark the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, those rights remain unfulfilled. Key United Nations principles — the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war, equal rights and the self-determination of peoples — continue to be violated. In addition, the General Assembly has repeatedly affirmed the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. The Assembly has also repeatedly affirmed the illegality of the Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem.

I am therefore gravely concerned by the continuing expansion of settlements, the demolition of Palestinian homes, the revocation of residency rights and the eviction and displacement of numerous Palestinian families from East Jerusalem in contravention of international law. I saw and heard about all of that during my visit to the occupied Palestinian territories as Speaker of the Danish Parliament in February of last year. Such actions do not contribute to peace. Rather, they have become the major impediment and serve only to increase tension.

I am also deeply concerned by the severe humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip following the war in the summer of 2014, as was clearly described in the statement by the Acting Chair. Efforts to address that humanitarian catastrophe and rebuild the homes and lives of thousands of residents affected by the 51-day war have been very slow. The blockade and the unfulfilled pledges by donors need to be addressed with urgency.

This year's Solidarity Day, however, is taking place during a recent escalation in violence in Jerusalem and the West Bank. The wave of violence across the occupied Palestinian territory continues. I therefore call for all involved to bring an end to the violence and for strict compliance with international law. I would also like to stress the importance of upholding the

historic status quo at the holy sites, including Al-Haram Al-Sharif. I urge all Israeli and Palestinian leaders to de-escalate tensions and to refrain from provocative actions, incitements and inflammatory rhetoric.

Against that backdrop and the incredible instability right across the region, a lasting solution to this long-standing conflict must be found. The occupation of Palestinian territory must be brought to an end without further delay, thereby opening the way for the establishment of a State of Palestine living side by side with the State of Israel in peace and security and within recognized borders based on the pre-1967 lines.

On 30 September 2015, we raised the flag of the State of Palestine at the Headquarters, here in New York. It was a symbolic and timely acknowledgement of the contribution of the Palestinian people to addressing our common challenges. But it was also a reminder of the urgent need for a peaceful settlement on the ground. It is my hope, therefore, that the international community will redouble its efforts to find such a settlement and that efforts by the Security Council will bear fruit this year. Diplomatic initiatives of the Quartet, which reaffirmed its commitment to actively support a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, are welcome and should be pursued. I call on both parties to return to meaningful negotiations within a pre-established time frame.

Simply put, the Palestinian people have waited too long. On the Organization's momentous seventieth anniversary, let us recall the ideals of peace, unity and human rights at the heart of the Charter of the United Nations. And let us use those ideals to inspire new momentum to find a lasting solution to the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Acting Chair: I thank the President of the General Assembly for his important statement. The Committee is thankful for his stewardship of the Assembly in dealing with the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory and in the Middle East as a whole.

I now have the honour to give the floor to Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson.

The Deputy Secretary-General: I present this statement on behalf of the Secretary-General, who is travelling today.

“One year ago, the General Assembly commemorated the International Year of Solidarity

with the Palestinian People. The Assembly focused on the question of Palestine and on growing hopes at the time that the international community would engage in finally bringing to an end this long-standing conflict of such consequence for so many areas in the world. Yet, one year later and more than one year since the last ruinous conflict in Gaza, security and hope in Gaza and in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, remain at a very low point. We continue to witness illegal settlement activities and settler-related violence. Demolitions of Palestinian-owned structures have continued, including punitive demolitions. Such policies and actions are directly contrary to the Government of Israel's stated intention to pursue a two-State solution.

"In recent weeks, tensions and violence related to the holy sites in the Old City of Jerusalem have introduced a troubling and dangerous religious dimension to the conflict. During my visit to the region last month, I stressed the need to preserve the status quo at the Al-Haram Al-Sharif/Temple Mount, in accordance with the agreements between Israel and Jordan and with the special role as Custodian of His Majesty the King of Jordan. I welcome Prime Minister Netanyahu's repeated assurances that Israel has no intention of changing the status quo. That commitment needs to be accompanied by actions to defuse the situation and to restore confidence.

"During the current wave of violence, we have witnessed heinous attacks, stabbings, shootings and attacks causing immense suffering among Israelis and Palestinians alike. I condemn such attacks and all acts of violence. It is crucial that, at this sensitive moment, leaders on both sides play a constructive role in resolving the conflict. Both sides must reject inflammatory public statements, which only escalate the already tense and volatile situation. Recognizing the security problems that Israel faces, I nonetheless remind the Israeli authorities that the use of excessive force fuels anger and frustration. I urge the Israeli security services to exercise maximum restraint. That goes in particular for the use of lethal force.

"It is abundantly clear that Palestinians feel deep frustration over an occupation that has lasted nearly 50 years. Similarly, Israelis strongly fear for their security. The lack of a political horizon for

achieving a two-State solution seriously increases the risk of the situation spiralling out of control. The international community can and must play a greater role to break the impasse. The Middle East Quartet must continue its efforts to preserve the viability of a Palestinian State and establish conditions for a return to meaningful negotiations.

"On 29 November 2012, the State of Palestine joined the United Nations as a non-member Observer State. Today, 136 countries recognize the State of Palestine, and its flag flies at the United Nations next to those of Member States. However, those diplomatic advances are not felt by children in Gaza or by the Palestinians of Nablus and Hebron today. What they feel is a glaring lack of hope that their lives will change for the better and that they will be citizens of a State that can ensure their freedom and well-being. On this International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, let us reaffirm our commitment to bring about the just peace that the peoples of both Israel and Palestine so desperately need and deserve. That would also be a major and much-needed contribution to international peace and security."

The Acting Chair: I would like to thank the Deputy Secretary-General for taking time out of his busy schedule to participate in this special meeting of the Committee, and to ask him to convey to the Secretary-General the Committee's sincere appreciation for his important message and our support for his personal efforts to promote a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine.

I now have the honour of giving the floor to the President of the Security Council, His Excellency Mr. Matthew Rycroft.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom), 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 today's meeting in my capacity as President of the Security Council for November.

The situation in the Middle East remains a key concern for the Security Council, not least because of the lack of progress in finding a lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Council continues to actively support efforts to achieve a two-State solution and remains fully committed to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East based on the

relevant Security Council resolutions; the Madrid terms of reference, including land for peace; the road map for peace in the Middle East; and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The Council continues to receive monthly briefings from the Secretary-General's Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and from the Department of Political Affairs, and to hold open debates on the Middle East on a quarterly basis. The Council had an opportunity to hear directly from the Secretary-General at an emergency meeting on 21 October, following his visit to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. In a press statement on 17 September, the Council called for the exercise of restraint, refraining from provocative actions and rhetoric and upholding unchanged the historic status quo at Al-Haram Al-Sharif, in word and in practice. Members also reiterated the importance of the special role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, as confirmed in the 1994 peace treaty between Jordan and Israel.

Council members are concerned about the ongoing violence directed at both Israelis and Palestinians. The Council calls upon both parties to encourage calm and avoid escalating the situation through word or deed. In that regard, the Council members have expressed their deep concern about Israel's settlement activities in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Many members view those acts as illegal or illegitimate and believe that they do not help promote prospects for peace. They provide a catalyst for further tensions and jeopardize the viability of a two-State solution. The members of the Council call for full respect for international law.

Turning to Gaza, the Council met on 23 July (see S/PV.7470) to reflect one year after the hostilities of last summer. Council members are concerned about the lack of progress on the humanitarian situation. They welcome the progress of the tripartite agreement reached between the United Nations, Israel and the Palestinian Authority. There is, however, disappointment at the slow pace of reconstruction and agreement that more must be done to advance reconstruction efforts, including calling on all donors to fulfil their financial pledges to aid the reconstruction efforts in Gaza without delay. The Council continues to recognize and commend the vital role played by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), along with other United Nations and humanitarian organizations, in addressing the critical humanitarian needs in Gaza. The Security Council applauds the efforts of UNRWA to assist

Palestinian refugees in the West Bank, Gaza, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan and expresses the hope that the international community will increase its support to the Agency. Council members welcome donors' additional contributions and the steps taken by the Agency itself to reduce its general fund deficit, which have enabled it to better safeguard the delivery of its services.

The Council welcomes efforts made by the Quartet to drive forward improvements on the ground. That is vital in the absence of peace talks and for preserving the viability of a negotiated two-State solution that resolves the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Council members also acknowledge the efforts made by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to realize the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.

In conclusion, the Security Council will continue its efforts to build an environment conducive to peace in order to achieve our common goal of a two-State solution and the peace and security that the Israeli and Palestinian people both deserve.

The Acting Chair: I thank the President of the Security Council for his important statement, which reaffirms the Council's continued full commitment to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East based on the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations, who will read out a message from His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): It gives me great pleasure to read out a statement from His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine and Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

(spoke in Arabic)

"At the outset, I would like to convey to the Committee greetings from the State of Palestine and the Palestinian people to all of our friends around the world participating in today's commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. We commemorate this occasion two months after all of us participated in the momentous ceremony that took place in the Rose Garden at the United Nations to raise the

flag of the State of Palestine. We are proud that, at United Nations Headquarters in New York and at other United Nations offices, the flag of the State of Palestine is flying alongside the flags of the countries of the world. I extend our profound appreciation to the countries that have recognized the State of Palestine and to all the countries that extend their support for the just cause of our people by voting positively at the United Nations and in international forums on the many important resolutions on the question of Palestine, including in favour of Palestine's status at the United Nations and the raising of its flag. We are also grateful for their unwavering support for the efforts to achieve a just peace in our region and in the world.

"We also renew today our gratitude to non-governmental organizations and civil society and to all our brothers, sisters, friends and all freedom and peace-loving peoples around the world who continue to steadfastly stand by our people. We are grateful for their solidarity and support of the rights and legitimate national aspirations of the Palestinian people, including for the achievement of their freedom and independence and the realization of a just and lasting peace.

"Since its inception, the United Nations has defended our cause, placing it as a priority on the agenda of the international community. The United Nations has extended a helping hand to our people and has adopted resolutions and recommendations that constitute the foundations that cannot be bypassed in the search for a just, lasting and comprehensive solution. In that regard, we reiterate the permanent responsibility of the United Nations towards the question of Palestine, which must be upheld until the question is satisfactorily resolved in all its aspects in accordance with international law and the principles of justice.

"In that connection, we express our deep appreciation for the efforts undertaken by His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the efforts made by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and its Chair, His Excellency Ambassador Fodé Seck of Senegal, as well as the Bureau and all members and observers of the Committee, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the United Nations system as a whole, in particular the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine

Refugees in the Near East and the many agencies assisting the Palestinian people and exerting significant efforts in support of their rights and a just and lasting peace.

"The General Assembly, the Security Council, the Human Rights Council and other United Nations organs and bodies, including the International Court of Justice, have adopted strong and principled resolutions in favour of our just cause. We must reiterate our deep regret about the lack of implementation of those resolutions, which has compounded the conflict over the many decades and inflicted grave hardships on the Palestinian people. The failure to uphold the law and implement the resolutions has resulted in the continued denial of the rights of the Palestinian people and has deepened convictions that there is indeed a double standard when it comes to resolutions regarding Israel that are not implemented and allow Israel to continue behaving as though it is a State above the law, with complete impunity and with grave consequences.

"The continuation of the Israeli occupation and its persistence with colonial settlement activities, cruel arrests and the detention of civilians, extrajudicial killings of our youth and children, as well as the blockade of Gaza, the home demolitions, repeated brutal attacks by Israeli terrorist settlers against our people and their property, as well as the provocations and incitement against their holy places, including the Al-Haram Al-Sharif, in occupied East Jerusalem, affirm Israel's arrogance and intransigence and its violations of international law, as well as its rejection of peace. It adheres instead to the ideology of colonial expansion and greed.

"Over the years, I have cautioned about the grave consequences of what is happening in and around Jerusalem, including severe restrictions imposed on our people; violations of their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights; and the attempts to change the identity and historical and demographic character of Jerusalem. That is in addition to the violations committed by settlers and extremists under the protection of the Israeli occupying forces against the sanctity of Christian and Muslim holy places in Jerusalem, particularly aimed at changing the historic status quo of Al-Haram Al-Sharif and the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Such acts have been taking place since before 1967 and

have continued since then. All of those actions and violations risk turning the conflict from a political and legal one into a religious conflict, which would have disastrous consequences for everyone. We will not accept that.

“All illegal Israeli colonial settlement activities must be stopped. All illegal Israeli actions and measures aimed at Judaizing East Jerusalem and altering or eliminating the Palestinian Christian and Muslim presence in the Holy City must be halted. That includes all Israeli attempts to establish temporal and spatial presence at the Al-Aqsa Mosque and at Al-Haram al-Sharif. All acts of violence and terrorism perpetrated by Israeli settlers against the Palestinian civilian population must also be stopped.

“I reiterate once again that the events taking place in our country are the result of diminishing hopes, the continued situation of siege and pressure and the lack of a sense of security and safety by our people. All of those factors generate tremendous frustration. The angry uprising of our people and the successive events of the recent period are an inevitable result of what we have cautioned against. As we have stated before, they also emanate from Israel’s incessant violations and crimes against the Palestinian people, their rights and their land, as well as violations and crimes that continue as the international community fails to rectify the injustice that has befallen our people, especially our youth, whose hopes and beliefs in the future are diminishing.

“We once again reiterate the urgent need for efforts to expand and intensify international engagement to achieve peace. That includes the adoption of a draft resolution by the Security Council that includes clear parameters to achieve peace on the basis of the two-State solution and the pre-1967 borders, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative, and that would set a time frame for ending the Israeli occupation. It is illogical to waste time in negotiations for the sake of negotiating. It is urgent to act now to salvage the prospects for peace. Members are well aware that peace is our desired goal, and that is what we are seeking to achieve with full determination, resolve and sincere will. We continue to give one opportunity after another to achieve that goal.

Many rounds of negotiations have been wasted by successive Israeli Governments, which rendered negotiations useless just to gain more time to build more colonial settlements, to build its apartheid annexation wall on our land, to steal our natural resources and to impose a new status quo on the ground. Those elements have only further entrenched the occupation and undermined the achievement of the two-State solution. In that context, we question the intended meaning of Israel, the occupying Power, in dispatching 600,000 settlers, confiscating the land of the occupied State of Palestine and settling them there, knowing that that action in itself is a war crime according to the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. Such actions are totally contradictory to the two-State solution. In the light of Israel’s destruction of the foundations upon which the political, economic and security agreements with us were signed, we reiterate that we cannot continue to be the only party bound by these agreements.

“The State of Palestine continues to act with the utmost responsibility to serve our people and to uphold its obligations and commitments. It has consistently acted in good faith for the sake of peace. In that regard, we will continue our accession to international conventions and membership of international organizations in order to safeguard our rights, and we will move forward in the defence of our people through all the legal and peaceful means available to us. Ending the injustice inflicted on our people is a moral and humanitarian responsibility. We call today more than ever before on the international community and influential Powers to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to abide by international law, including humanitarian law and human rights law, as well as the relevant United Nations resolutions, and to put an end to its violations and illegal, aggressive and destructive policies and practices.

“How long will Israel be allowed to act as if it were a State above law? How long will the Palestinian people have to suffer the wrath of Israel’s occupying force and police, who protect the terrorist groups of settlers while turning a blind eye on the need to punish them and hold them accountable for their crimes? Today, more than ever, we call upon the international community to provide international protection for the Palestinian people as long as

this illegal occupation continues. We call for more efforts to finally enable the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination along with their other inalienable rights. That includes their right to achieve the independence and sovereignty of their State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the pre-1967 borders, living side by side with a State of Israel in peace and security, with respect for the Charter of the United Nations and in accordance with resolutions of international legitimacy. Those include a just solution to the plight of Palestinian refugees, in accordance with resolution 194 (III), the Arab Peace Initiative, as well as the release of all Palestinian prisoners and detainees in Israeli prisons and detention centres.

“We want a complete end to the Israeli occupation of our land. We want to achieve the independence of the sovereign, contiguous State of Palestine on its national territory. We do not aspire to delegitimize anyone, as some claim, but we look forward to a free and democratic State of Palestine based on the foundations of accountability, transparency and the rule of law. We look forward to the protection and promotion of women’s rights, equality among all segments of our people without ethnic or religious discrimination, as well as the spread of the culture of peace, tolerance and dialogue with others. The Palestinian people will continue to resist the occupation by peaceful means. We will continue in our efforts and our work, with the support of our brothers, sisters and friends, to make our State a reality cherished by our people.

“We are also determined to preserve the unity of our land and our people. We are working to lift the unjust, inhumane Israeli blockade imposed on our people in the Gaza strip and to advance the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip. We affirm that we will not accept temporary or partial solutions. And we are seriously seeking to form a Government of national unity that functions in accordance with a programme of the Palestine Liberation Organization, leading to presidential and legislative elections.

“Our hand is still outstretched for a just peace based on rightness and in accordance with international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions, the signed agreements and the Arab Peace Initiative. The status quo under occupation and the Israeli iron fist are unsustainable, as they

keep our region in a constant spiral of violence, bloodshed and conflict. The application of justice is the only solution, and it must be applied in its entirety. It is time for some international Powers to stop selective and biased policies in the application of justice. It is time for them to stop equating the victim with the executioner. The word freedom has only one meaning. The policy of double standards will only prolong the conflict, spreading despair and frustration and fuelling hatred.

“The Palestinian people have the right to enjoy freedom, dignity, sovereignty and independence in their Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. That is imperative for our region to enjoy security, safety and stability. Peace is our ultimate goal. It is in the interests of Palestinians, Arabs and the international community. It is within our reach if there is political will, and if there are sincere intentions to achieve peace for a better future for all our people and for our children.”

The Acting Chair: I would like to ask Ambassador Mansour to convey our sincere thanks and greetings to President Mahmoud Abbas for his very important message. I would also like to assure President Abbas and, through him, the Palestinian people, of our Committee’s firm commitment to continue its efforts, as mandated by the General Assembly, with a view to promoting a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to once again thank the President of the General Assembly, the Deputy Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council for their presence and contribution to this important meeting. A similar expression of appreciation also goes to Mr. Jeffrey Feltman.

I now have the pleasure of giving the floor to His Excellency Mr. Gholamali Khoshroo, Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran, who will read out a message from His Excellency Mr. Hassan Rouhani, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Mr. Khoshroo (Islamic Republic of Iran): I have the honour to address this important meeting on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) on the occasion of the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

“I express my deep appreciation 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, as well as to the Division for Palestinian Rights of the United Nations Secretariat. NAM also reaffirms its appreciation to the Commissioner-General and the entire staff of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for all their valuable efforts in helping to alleviate the suffering and in addressing the plight and needs of the Palestine refugees, as well as to all of the United Nations agencies with special programmes providing assistance and support to the Palestinian people, in line with the permanent responsibility of the United Nations towards the question of Palestine until it is resolved justly in all of its aspects, in accordance with international law.

“The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is a solemn occasion for renewing our shared commitment to a just and lasting solution and a durable peace in the Middle East. NAM fully supports the observance of this day, as it provides an opportunity to reflect on the decades of denial of the rights of the Palestinian people and nearly a half century of a foreign occupation that has subjected them to gross and systematic human rights violations and to the untold pain and suffering that lie at the heart of the Palestinian question and of so many other issues in the Middle East.

“The question of Palestine has been on the United Nations agenda for nearly seven decades now. It is as old as the United Nations itself, and yet the Palestinian people have no glimmer of hope for realizing their inalienable rights, including their right to self-determination and freedom. Despite decades of their participation in peace efforts in good faith, their commitment to a peaceful solution and to international law and the painful compromises made, the plight of the Palestinians has worsened on all fronts due to Israel’s persistent illegal policies and practices. Those are the same illegal policies and practices that have obstructed justice and undermined all peace efforts over many years.

“Today, as we witness the appalling escalation of violence and violations by Israel, the occupying Power, and its extremist settlers against the

Palestinian people and against their land and holy sites, including Al-Haram Al-Sharif, we also recall the devastation inflicted by the Israeli occupying forces last year on the Palestinian civilian population in the Gaza Strip in the most cruel and brutal manner and in the holy month of Ramadan. As a result of that brutal military aggression, more than 2,200 Palestinians, including more than 550 children and 299 women, were killed; more than 11,000 people were injured; nearly half a million people were displaced; and thousands of Palestinian homes and properties, and even United Nations premises, including UNRWA schools used as safe havens by the defenceless and unprotected Palestinian people, were attacked and destroyed.

“NAM reiterates its condemnation of Israeli military aggressions against the Palestinian people throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and urgently calls for accountability for all of those breaches of international law, including humanitarian and human rights laws and United Nations resolutions.

“It is disturbing that Israel, the occupying Power, continues to pursue such illegal practices with blatant impunity despite the prohibitions of such actions under international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, relevant United Nations resolutions and the 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. The impact of those illegal measures on the Palestinian civilian population, including women and children and the most vulnerable, such as Palestine refugees, must be seriously considered and measures must be taken in accordance with international law to remedy that injustice, including through the provision of protection to the Palestinian people for as long as the occupation continues.

“The ongoing illegal Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, also continue to be a matter of grave concern. NAM condemns the illegal and destructive activities and calls for urgent action and practical measures by the international community, in particular the Security Council, to compel the occupying Power to cease completely its settlement campaign in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and to abide by all of its obligations under international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, United

Nations resolutions, the advisory opinion and the road map, in that regard.

“NAM reiterates its grave condemnation of all illegal Israeli practices aimed at altering the demographic composition, legal status, character and demographic nature of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, so as to facilitate the de facto annexation of more Palestinian land. Provocations by Israeli settlers and extremists, including vis-à-vis sensitive religious sites, particularly Al-Aqsa Mosque, in the recent period have worsened the situation on the ground, deepening already grave doubts regarding Israel’s claimed commitment to the two-State solution and peace, and require the attention of the international community.

“The Movement expresses deep concern over the lack of progress in the Middle East peace process, despite decades of negotiations, and calls for immediate and practical efforts to advance a fair and credible peace process based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and other major initiatives undertaken in the past decades. NAM stresses that the peace process must ensure an end to the occupation of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem and the other Arab territories occupied in 1967.

“In conclusion, the Movement reaffirms its unwavering commitment to a just and comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, with the question of Palestine at its core, and to the immediate restoration of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to self-determination and to their independent and viable State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and a just solution for the plight of the Palestine refugees on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III). It is only such a just solution that will guarantee the peace the international community has long sought and to which it has committed itself.”

The Acting Chair: I thank Mr. Khoshroo and request that he confer to His Excellency Mr. Hassan Rouhani, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the sincere thanks of the Committee for his very important statement in his capacity as Chair of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

I now give the floor to Mr. Amrith Rohan Perera, Chair of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.

Mr. Perera (Sri Lanka), Chair of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories: I am honoured to speak today in my capacity as Chair of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.

The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is marked on 29 November, the day that the General Assembly, in 1947, adopted resolution 181 (II), on the establishment of the States of Palestine and Israel. Therefore, this day is a reminder to the United Nations and the international community of a goal that is yet to be achieved and of our continuing responsibility to find a peaceful and just solution to what is being referred to as the “Palestinian question” — in essence, the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. On this day, we stand in solidarity with the people of Palestine who, despite great challenges and suffering for more than five decades, have not given up the hope to attain their legitimate rights. The aspirations of the international community are sustained and renewed by the determination and resilience of the Palestinian people.

Last week, I presented to the Fourth Committee the forty-seventh report of the Special Committee (see A/70/406) — comprising Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Senegal — examining the human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and the occupied Syrian Golan. During our mission to Amman in August, the Committee was seriously disturbed by the situation of human rights in the occupied territories, as evidenced by the testimonies we heard from civil society representatives, victims and witnesses of Israeli violations, as well as Palestinian and United Nations officials.

Some of the key concerns brought to the attention of the Committee during its mission include continuing settlement activity; settler violence in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem; excessive use of force by Israeli security forces; tensions surrounding the Al-Aqsa Mosque; the situation of Palestinian detainees in Israeli custody; corporate involvement

in the settlements and the occupied territories, in particular the exploitation of natural resources in those territories, in violation of international humanitarian law and the human rights situation in Gaza.

It was evident from the testimonies heard by the Committee in August that the continuing policy of settlement expansion and the climate of impunity relating to the activities of the settlers contribute to the escalating violence. The Committee heard that settlement activity was continuing in both the occupied Palestinian territories and the occupied Syrian Golan. In the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the Committee was informed that settlement expansion was aided and abetted by restrictive planning policies for Palestinians, demolition orders on so-called illegal Palestinian homes, and settler violence, as well as through legislation used to confiscate private Palestinian property.

The Committee's report refers to disturbing testimony concerning numerous incidents involving the excessive use of force by Israeli security forces in the occupied Palestinian territories. In that regard, the Committee called on Israel to take immediate steps to ensure compliance with international standards for law enforcement and to ensure accountability for excessive use of force.

The rising tension surrounding the Al-Aqsa Mosque, which has escalated in recent months, was also brought to the attention of the Committee. The Committee's report called on Israel to remove all movement restrictions within East Jerusalem and to immediately cease all excavation works below or near the Al-Aqsa compound, which may potentially cause harm to the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

The situation of Palestinian detainees, including women and children, remains a matter of serious concern of the Special Committee. Statistics received by the Special Committee in August indicated that there were an estimated 5,000 Palestinian detainees, including 160 children under 18 years of age, held in Israeli custody. Administrative detention is only exceptionally permitted for short periods of time under international law, but regrettably, in the occupied Palestinian territories it remains the norm.

The Committee also reported on information received in relation to the role of companies that do business with and profit from the maintenance or construction of settlements, or exploit natural resources

in the occupied West Bank or the occupied Syrian Golan. The Special Committee hopes to maintain the increasing international attention and growing awareness among companies of the potential financial, legal and reputational risks of doing business in occupied territories.

The blockade of Gaza remains a key obstacle to the Palestinian people's enjoyment of their economic, social and cultural rights. A year after the deadly escalation of hostilities in Gaza, reconstruction lags far behind, due in part to a lack of funds, but also as a result of the continuing Israeli blockade of Gaza. As of August, only one-third of the \$4 billion pledged by the international community in Cairo in October 2014 had been disbursed. Non-governmental organizations have noted that up to 100,000 Palestinians remain displaced, living in precarious conditions and struggling with access to basic services such as electricity, water, sanitation and medical services. It is therefore imperative that the international community use its influence to end the blockade of Gaza and for donor countries to honour the pledges made in Cairo and urgently disburse those funds to facilitate the ongoing reconstruction efforts.

The Committee also called on the donor countries to generate an unimpeded flow of funds to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to effectively discharge its mandate in the occupied territories. Sustainable peace and security for both Israelis and Palestinians alike can be achieved only by ensuring real accountability and addressing the root causes of the conflict. The international community must not lose sight of the overarching goal of the two-State solution, namely, two States living side by side in peace and security with the human rights of their peoples at the core.

The Acting Chair: I thank Mr. Perera for his important statement. The Committee is very appreciative of the continuing contribution of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories to our meeting and of Sri Lanka's participation in the Committee's activities as an active observer.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Fathalla, Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States to the United Nations, who will read out a message from His Excellency Mr. Nabil Elaraby, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Fathalla (League of Arab States) (*spoke in Arabic*):

“Each year, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People recalls the long-standing struggle of the Palestinian people. It embodies their untold suffering for over half a century due to oppression, coercion, occupation and injustice. The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, launched by General Assembly resolution 32/40 B, reminds us of the historic injustice visited on the Palestinian people on this same day in 1947, by way of the unjust decision to partition the Palestinian land against the will of its people. The Day of Solidarity reaffirms the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including self-determination, national independence and a sovereign State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

“Today’s celebration takes place amid political and diplomatic activities launched by President Abbas on the periphery of previous sessions and the current session of the General Assembly. President Abbas submitted the application for Palestine’s full membership of the United Nations and achieved a historic victory when Palestine was granted status as a non-member State to participate as observer in the sessions and the work of the General Assembly. Recently, through General Assembly resolution 69/320, the Palestinian flag was raised alongside the other flags at the United Nations.

“Those significant steps form part of a political and diplomatic campaign supported by the Arab nations, which is aimed at achieving full recognition of the State of Palestine and end the Israeli occupation and the threat posed to the two-State solution by the ongoing violations of the rights of the Palestinian people, as well as Israel’s flagrant disregard of international and international humanitarian law, in view of its violations and blatant practices in contravention of the legitimacy of international resolutions.

“Arab and international calls to launch the peace process between the two sides have been met by the settlement construction policy in violation of international law. Israel has ignored calls to return to the negotiation table as a way to achieve the desired peace and despite the consensus on the part of the international community to achieve the two-State solution and establish a contiguous,

independent, sovereign State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital.

“While the world seeks to achieve a just peace, the occupied Palestinian territory has been shaken by unrest since early October. The Israeli occupation practices represent oppression of the Palestinian people in its worst form, which has led to the killing of many Palestinians, the majority of them women and children. Israel’s right-wing extremist Government has made racist decisions to allow extremist settlers and its military forces to kill Palestinians, use live ammunition against them and carry out field executions of Palestinian civilians. Such actions have exacerbated the terrorism practiced by the Israeli occupation and the extremist settlers.

“In view of those tragedies and in the absence of a just political solution, protection for the Palestinian people is imperative in the light of the threats faced by the Palestinian people as the result of occupation and military operations. The continuing Israeli occupation of Arab and Palestinian territory is the main challenge facing the international community in achieving peace and stability in the region and in the world.

“The occupation represents a main cause of the spread of terrorism and extremist ideology in the region. It has also resulted in the failure to reach a just solution in line with the principles of international legitimacy and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, international resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

“The practices of the Israeli occupation in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are null and void and run counter to the provisions of international law. The international community, in particular the Security Council and the major world Powers — especially the United States of America — should assume their responsibility to put an end to the prevarication and procrastination on the part of the right-wing extremist Israeli Government, including its ongoing unilateral, illegal practices to Judaize Jerusalem and erase its demographic character by changing street names and threatening the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Israel is also determined to change the historical nature of the holy sites.

“The international community must shift its stance from merely condemning, protesting and overlooking Israeli violations to exerting real pressure and to take practical and serious positions to oppose Israeli policies that disregard international resolutions. The occupation is accelerating the imposition of a de facto situation that will alter the evidence and realities on the ground and undermine the potential for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State.

“Notwithstanding all that, the Palestinians have made efforts, supported by the Arab side, for over 20 years to break that impasse. However, all avenues remain closed. That requires the international community to confront Israeli positions that undermine the launching of a credible and meaningful negotiation track. Israel pursues its settlement policy, detaining thousands of Palestinians and besieging the Gaza Strip. That reflects the absence of a real political will on the part of the right-wing extremist Israeli Government led by Benjamin Netanyahu, who has rejected the two-State solution and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State. He has confirmed that he has rejected the Arab Peace Initiative, which enjoys the consensus and support of the international community. That dispels any hope for serious and sincere negotiations to address all final status issues, based on international terms of reference, within a time-bound framework, and excluding provisional solutions. The international community must therefore assume its responsibility to achieve peace and implement international resolutions.

“It is no longer acceptable that the Palestinian question — regarding which the international community hopes to achieve a lasting peace by establishing a viable Palestinian State — should remain contingent on Israeli apartheid practices. It is high time for the Palestinian people to regain their stolen rights, start building their country, enjoy peace and security on a par with the nations of the world, and live freely in their homeland.

“On this international occasion that marking the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, we reiterate our solidarity with their just struggle. We support their march to regain their rights to freedom and independence. We call on all responsible parties of freedom and justice to

intensify their efforts to support that struggle and attain victory.”

The Acting Chair: I thank Mr. Fathalla for his statement and ask him to convey to Mr. Nabil Elaraby, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, the sincere appreciation of the Committee for his very important message and its strong support of our Committee’s activities.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Ufuk Gokcen, Permanent Observer of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to the United Nations, who will read a message from His Excellency Mr. Iyad Amin Madani, Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Mr. Gokcen (Organization of Islamic Cooperation): I have the honour to read out the message of Mr. Iyad Amin Madani, Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

“Our meeting today to celebrate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is being held in accordance with General Assembly resolution 32/40 B of 1977, as an expression of the will of the countries and peoples of the world to do justice to the Palestinian people and support their just struggle to attain their inalienable rights. I should like on this occasion to express, on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, thanks and appreciation to the United Nations Committee for the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for its active efforts to promote the Palestinian cause and strengthen international support of and solidarity with the rights of the Palestinian people.

“We gather here today to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People at a time when the defenceless, unarmed Palestinian people are suffering under extremely harsh conditions due to the continuation of the Israeli occupation. Palestinian lands are still subject to confiscation for building and expanding illegal Israeli settlements throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. The racist separation wall continues to consume more Palestinian lands, thereby exacerbating the already difficult living conditions of Palestinians, whose national resources are also being plundered. The inhumane Israeli blockade of Gaza continues to deepen the misery of Palestinians. Much worse,

East Jerusalem is being subjected to harsh Israeli measures of Judaization and ethnic cleansing, with the aim of altering its geographic and demographic composition, obliterating its Arab Islamic identity, destroying its houses, driving out its indigenous Palestinian citizens, and cutting the city off from its Palestinian environs. At the same time, Israel continues to deliberately and systematically violate the Palestinians' freedom of worship, in addition to desecrating Christian and Islamic holy sites.

"The escalation of Israeli crimes in the occupied land of the State of Palestine, especially the shoot-to-kill policy carried out by the Israeli occupation forces and extremist Israeli settlers against defenceless Palestinian civilians, will only further deepen the conflict, exacerbate the suffering of the Palestinian people, worsen the already unstable situation and make peace difficult to achieve in the Middle East.

"The Organization of Islamic Cooperation reaffirms that the dangerous developments currently taking place in Palestine cannot be decontextualized from the continuing Israel aggressions against the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque. We have repeatedly warned against those aggressions and condemned them as an unprecedented assault against the inalienable religious rights of Muslims all over the world. If they do not cease, they will further feed extremism and violence and contribute to igniting religious strife that will endanger the prospects for peace and stability in the region. Once again, we caution that the continuation of Israeli aggressions against Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem could spark a religious war, of which Israel alone would bear the responsibility for its consequences. The international community cannot ignore those dire warnings.

"We also reiterate that failure to find a just solution to the Palestinian cause as the core issue in the Middle East has started fuelling conflicts in the region, threatening to affect international peace and security. Therefore, we call once again upon the international community, particularly the Security Council, to intervene earnestly and immediately to provide international protection for the Palestinian people and to take a decision to establish a political path to preserve the two-State solution, based on relevant United Nations resolutions, and to set a well-defined time frame for ending the Israeli

occupation, with international guarantees and binding implementation mechanisms.

"Finding a solution to the current crisis requires political will, particularly that of the Security Council, to apply pressure on Israel to cease its continuing aggression against the Palestinian people. The United Nations must assume its responsibility of ensuring that humanitarian law and other relevant international commitments for the protection of civilians in situations of armed conflicts be fully upheld in Palestine.

"In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate OIC support for the Palestinian people in their endeavour to regain their inalienable national rights, including the rights of return, self-determination and the establishment of an independent State on the lands occupied since 1967 with East Jerusalem as its capital, and to find a just solution to the question of the Palestinian refugees, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions."

The Acting Chair: I thank Ambassador Gokcen for his statement on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which is an active partner of the Committee.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Tété António, Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations, who will read out a message from Her Excellency Ms. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission.

Mr. António (African Union): Let me start by conveying greetings on behalf of Ms. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission. She has also requested me to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for organizing this very important meeting.

"Today's event is again an opportunity to continue to raise awareness among the international community on the unresolved question of Palestine and to reiterate our solidarity with the Palestinian people. I therefore congratulate the Chair of the Committee — the Permanent Representative of Senegal — and the members of the Bureau for their leadership. I also commend the Committee for its work in general.

“Today’s gathering reflects the desire of the international community to see the conclusion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with a final peace agreement. Sadly, all regional and international efforts to reinvigorate the peace process have not yet succeeded in bringing the progress we are all looking for. The failure of the peace talks has led to an intensification of violence in East Jerusalem and in the West Bank. The continuing conflict in the occupied territories has resulted in the deaths and injury of thousands of Palestinian civilians, including children, women, the elderly and humanitarian workers.

“The conditions on the ground remain volatile. The situation in East Jerusalem and in the West Bank remains a source of serious concern. In the light of the recent violent incidents that led to civilian deaths and injuries, we strongly condemn all acts of violence against civilians and religious sites. We call upon all parties to observe calm and restraint and to refrain from provocative actions and incitement. In addition, the humanitarian situation in Gaza remains critical, with high rates of poverty and unemployment. The long-standing restrictions on the movement of people and goods continue to undermine the living conditions of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in Gaza. Therefore the blockade and siege must be lifted.

“The African Union reaffirms the sanctity of Islamic and Christian shrines in Jerusalem and warns against the serious consequences of Israeli measures in occupied East Jerusalem, such as the Judaization of that Arab city and the obliteration of its Islamic and Christian identity, as well as denying Muslims and Christians access to their holy places of worship through repeated attempts to divide the Al-Aqsa Mosque by way of legislation passed by the Israeli Knesset in contravention of all relevant international norms and resolutions.

“Regrettably, as we meet today the path towards durable peace remains uncertain. The peace process now hangs by a thread and the process of rapprochement seems to be slipping away. The lack of progress and renewed tension require sustained attention. The international community should continue to support the parties in overcoming their differences and returning to the peace talks within a clear time frame, based on internationally recognized parameters.

“The African Union reiterates its continued support for the Palestinian effort to raise the position of the State of Palestine to that of full-fledged Member of the United Nations. In that regard, we renew our call on those countries of the world that have not yet recognized the State of Palestine to do so. In that context, we welcome the adoption of resolution 69/320, on raising the flags of non-member observer States at the United Nations, following the flags of the States Members of the Organization.

“As we commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People we call on the international community and all stakeholders to strengthen their support and assistance to the Palestinian people to ensure the realization of their inalienable rights, the establishment of their own viable State and the achievement of durable peace in the region.”

The Acting Chair: I thank Ambassador António for conveying the message of the African Union, which is a valuable partner of our Committee.

I now give the floor to Mr. Brad Parker, International Advocacy Officer and Attorney with Defence for Children International in the nation of Palestine, who will deliver a statement on behalf of civil society organizations active on the question of Palestine.

Mr. Parker (Defence for Children International): On this International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, Defence for Children International — Palestine, an independent, local Palestinian child rights organization dedicated to defending and promoting the rights of children living in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, reaffirms its commitment to securing a just and viable future for Palestinian children living in the occupied Palestinian territory. For nearly 25 years, we have investigated, documented and pursued accountability for grave human rights violations against children; held Israeli and Palestinian authorities accountable to universal human rights principles; and advocated at the international and national levels to advance access to justice and protection for children.

Today, children represent nearly 50 per cent of Palestinians living in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. Instability and violence define much of their lives. Amid escalating violence and an increasingly militarized environment in

which Israeli forces and settlers operate with complete impunity, Israeli forces increasingly employ excessive force and target children with live ammunition to quash protests.

Recent legislation passed by the Government of Israel, combined with systemic impunity, is amplifying an already dire situation for Palestinian children. In the past months, Israeli officials have relaxed the standard for the use of lethal force against the Palestinian population and approved harsher punitive measures against Palestinians, particularly children, accused of stone throwing or criminal conduct against Israeli Jewish citizens. In another troubling development we have also seen the renewed use of administrative detention for children.

Since 2000, Israeli forces and extremists have killed more than 2,000 Palestinian children. Repeated military offensives and an eight-year long blockade continue to devastate lives in Gaza. In 2014, Defense for Children International — Palestine verified that 535 children died — nearly 68 per cent of them age 12 and below — as a direct result of Israeli attacks during Israel's summer military assault on Gaza. For many children older than eight years, this was the sixth time they endured an Israeli military operation in Gaza.

Displacement, access to education and health care, and psychological trauma remain significant areas of concern particularly in the wake of Israel's military assault last summer. Most families with destroyed or partially damaged homes have been unable to rebuild because they lack funds and Israel's siege of Gaza restricts the necessary materials.

With massive destruction to civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals, many children in Gaza continue to face limits on access to education and health care. Palestinian children in the occupied West Bank face arrest, prosecution and detention under an Israeli military court system that denies basic human rights and is notorious for the widespread, systematic and institutionalized ill-treatment and torture of Palestinian children.

Since 1967, Israeli authorities have operated two separate legal systems in the same territory. The sole factor in determining which laws apply to a person is his or her nationality and ethnicity. Israeli military law, which fails to ensure and denies basic and fundamental rights, is applied to the whole Palestinian population. Israeli settlers and citizens living in the West Bank are

subject to the Israeli civilian and criminal legal system. No Israeli child comes into contact with the military court system. Each year, around 700 Palestinian children living in the West Bank are arrested by Israeli forces and prosecuted in the Israeli military detention system. The majority of Palestinian child detainees are charged with throwing stones, and three out of four experience physical violence during arrest, transfer or interrogation.

Children report that Israeli interrogators use position abuse, threats and solitary confinement to coerce confessions, and in the overwhelming majority of cases Israeli authorities deprive children of legal counsel and improperly informed them of their rights during interrogation. Israeli military detention exposes Palestinian children to physical and psychological violence and prevents them from enjoying their rights as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child by interrupting education, contributing to mental health issues and placing large numbers of families under stress.

For Palestinian children in East Jerusalem, in theory, the Israeli Youth Law provides special safeguards and protections to children in conflict with the law during arrest, transfer, interrogation and court appearances. However, discriminatory implementation of the law deprives Palestinian children in East Jerusalem of their rights during the arrest and interrogation process. For Palestinian children in East Jerusalem, exceptions have become the rule. International juvenile justice standards, which Israel has obliged itself to implement by signing the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991, require that children be deprived of their liberty only as a measure of last resort and include universal prohibitions against physical violence and torture, among other protections. Despite these obligations, Israeli authorities persistently disregard and fail to comply with international law.

A growing number of Palestinian children and their families live in villages and towns, hemmed in by expanding and often violent Israeli settler communities. Stationed throughout the West Bank, Israeli soldiers, police and private security firms protect settler populations at the expense of Palestinian civilians. In this hyper-militarized environment, Palestinian children face disproportionate physical violence, restricted access to education and psychological trauma.

The international community often fails to take concrete action that would challenge the impunity enjoyed by the Israeli military and police for violence against Palestinian children. This provides tacit approval for Israeli forces to continue carrying out grave violations against children with impunity. Instead of growing up with a law-based, negotiated settlement founded on universal human rights principles, justice and respect for human dignity, young Palestinians have had their futures stifled and suppressed by systemic discrimination, constant settlement expansion and prolonged military occupation. The failure to address impunity or demand a vision for the future that incorporates a rights-based framework recognizing universal human rights principles, the principles of non-discrimination and equality, and respect for human dignity will ensure that an incredibly youthful population becomes increasingly vulnerable.

As tensions increase amid escalating violence, it is clear that the status quo is not sustainable. The need for justice and accountability is urgent. On this International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I implore the Committee to strengthen efforts to advance solidarity and challenge it to take concrete actions in response to Palestinian civil society's calls to challenge systemic impunity and end Israel's prolonged military occupation of the Palestinian people.

The Acting Chair: I thank Mr. Parker for his insightful statement.

Allow me to take this opportunity 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 thank you again, Mr. Parker, for your participation and very important remarks.

It is now my honour now to announce that our Committee has received messages of support and solidarity from many Heads of State and Government, from Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Governments and organizations. In that regard, I would like to read out the list of officials who sent them, in the order they were received.

We have received messages from the following Heads of State: the President of the Republic of Indonesia, the President of the People's Republic of China, the President of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the President of the Socialist Democratic Republic of Sri Lanka, the President of the Socialist

Republic of Viet Nam, the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, the President of the Republic of Senegal, the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the President of Nicaragua, His Highness the President of the United Arab Emirates, the President of the Republic of Argentina, His Majesty the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam, the President of the Republic of Turkey, the President of the Russian Federation, the President of the Republic of Maldives, the President of the Republic of Madagascar, His Majesty the King of the Kingdom of Morocco and His Majesty the King of the Kingdom of Bahrain.

We have received messages from the following Heads of Government: the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand, the Prime Minister of India, the Prime Minister of Malaysia and the Prime Minister of Lebanon.

The Committee has also received messages from the following Ministers for Foreign Affairs: the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

We have received messages from the following Governments: the Government of Tunisia, the Government of Oman, the Government of the Republic of Ghana and the Government of the Federative Republic of Brazil.

Lastly, the Committee has also received messages from the intergovernmental organization of the European Union and from the civil society organization of the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America.

All the messages of solidarity received will be posted on the website on the question of Palestine, maintained by the Division for Palestinian Rights.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Heads of State and Government, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs, the Governments, the organizations that I have just mentioned and all participants for their persistent efforts aimed at achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine and for the support they have always given to the mandated activities of this Committee.

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, the interpreters and everyone who worked behind the scenes.

At 3 p.m. the General Assembly will begin its debate on the question of Palestine, during which I will introduce draft resolutions A/70/L.10, A/70/L.11, A/70/L.12 and A/70/L.13 under that agenda item, and the Committee's Rapporteur, Ambassador Grima, will

introduce the report of the Committee (A/70/35). We strongly encourage delegations to attend and support the adoption of the draft resolutions.

I would also like to invite representatives this evening to the inauguration of a photo exhibit entitled "Palestinian Children: Overcoming Tragedies with Hope, Dreams, Resilience and Dignity". It will be held at 6 p.m. in the Public Lobby of the General Assembly building by the curved wall area, and will be followed by a reception. I am looking forward to seeing everyone this evening.

The meeting rose at noon.