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

Summary record of the 251st meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 23 March 2000, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Ka (Senegal)

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

Adoption of the agenda

1. *The agenda was adopted.*

Report by the Chairman on the United Nations Asian Meeting on the Question of Palestine, held in Hanoi from 1 to 3 March 2000

2. **The Chairman** presented a report on the Asian Meeting on the Question of Palestine, held in Hanoi from 1 to 3 March 2000. The theme of the Meeting had been “Achieving the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people — A key to peace in the Middle East”. The Committee expressed its appreciation to the Government and people of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam for offering the opportunity to hold the meeting in Asia and to share the experience of Asian States in the struggle for national independence and sovereignty, and in efforts to establish economic independence, sustainable development and regional and international economic cooperation. The experience of Viet Nam and other Asian countries had provided valuable insight and been an inspiration to the Palestinian people, which had yet to fulfil its aspirations to sovereignty and independence after 33 years of occupation and deprivation.

3. The Asian Meeting had consisted of an opening session, four plenary meetings, a workshop for non-governmental organizations and a closing session. The topic of the first plenary meeting had been the peace process and Palestinian statehood; the second plenary meeting had dealt with issues related to the United Nations and the question of Palestine. At the third plenary meeting, an appeal had been made for international support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the fourth plenary meeting had highlighted the role of parliaments in achieving the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

4. The Meeting had been very successful. It had been attended by representatives of 51 governments, Palestine, 2 intergovernmental organizations, 5 United Nations bodies and specialized agencies and 9 non-governmental organizations, as well as special guests of the host country and representatives of the media, universities and the academic community, including a group of students. Presentations had been made by 20 experts from Asia and other regions and also from the Palestinian and Israeli Governments. Each plenary

meeting had included a discussion period open to all participants. He emphasized the high quality of the presentations and deliberations and the contributions by representatives of eight Governments, namely, Brazil, China, Cuba, Egypt, Indonesia, Japan, Tunisia and Turkey. The international press and Vietnamese press had given the Meeting extensive coverage. Some members of the Committee’s delegation and invited speakers had been interviewed on national television and in the Vietnamese and international press.

5. The Committee had been represented by a delegation composed of Mr. Walter Balzan (Malta), Rapporteur of the Committee, who had acted as Vice-Chairman and Rapporteur of the Meeting, Mr. Pham Binh Minh, Deputy Permanent Representative of Viet Nam to the United Nations, Mr. Nasser Al-Kidwa, Ambassador for Palestine, and himself as Chairman of the Committee and head of the delegation.

6. At the conclusion of the Meeting, the participants had adopted the Hanoi Declaration, which, inter alia, reaffirmed their broad and determined support for the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State. They had emphasized that, as a result of the breakdown in the permanent-status negotiations, the peace process was at a critical stage. The lack of progress in the full and strict implementation of the Wye River and Sharm el-Sheikh agreements, as well as the continuation of settlement activities, gave cause for grave concern and jeopardized the peace negotiations. In view of the continued settlement activities, the United Nations and the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention should take action, if necessary, to reconvene the Conference of the High Contracting Parties. Participants had also declared that the United Nations should grant full membership to Palestine in order to enable it to participate fully in the Millennium Summit to be held on 6 September 2000.

7. The Committee’s delegation, as well as all participants, had sincerely appreciated the strong support of the Vietnamese Government for the holding of the Meeting in Hanoi. He and the members of the Committee’s delegation had had the honour and privilege of being received by Mr. Phan Van Khai, Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, who had welcomed the Committee’s efforts aimed at bringing about a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine. The delegation of the Committee had paid tribute to the late President

Ho Chi Minh and laid a wreath in his honour at the Mausoleum in Hanoi. The delegation had also been received by Mr. Nguyen Dy Nien, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Viet Nam. Participants had been greatly honoured by the opening address of Mr. Chu Tuan Nha, Minister of Science, Technology and the Environment of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam. He wished to express the Committee's gratitude to the Government of Viet Nam and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for their support for the holding of the Meeting, in particular to the Ambassador, Mr. Pham Binh Minh, and his staff in the Mission, who had spared no effort to help prepare the Meeting.

8. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee decided to take note of his report.

9. *It was so decided.*

10. **Mr. Al-Kidwa** (Observer for Palestine) stressed the importance of the Declaration, since it formed the basis for the work of the General Assembly and other international forums with regard to the question of Palestine. The Declaration set forth the participants' broad and firm commitment to support the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State. In addition, the Declaration established clear positions with respect to other questions, such as the September 2000 deadline for the conclusion of a final-status agreement in accordance with the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum and the International consensus reached in May 2000. The Declaration also stated that, in view of the ongoing settlement activities, the United Nations and the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention must play an effective role with regard to the convening of the Conference of the High Contracting Parties, that the deadline for the conclusion of a final-status agreement must be observed, and that the United Nations must grant full membership to Palestine in order to enable it to participate fully in the Millennium Summit, which would provide an opportunity to reaffirm the moral commitment to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and to give fresh political impetus to international cooperation. All those provisions demonstrated the great significance of the Hanoi Declaration, which charted a course supported by the international community.

11. **Mr. Samhan** (United Arab Emirates), speaking on behalf of the Group of Arab States, thanked the

Chairman of the Committee for his contribution to peace and security in the Arab world. He also expressed his support for and commitment to the Hanoi Declaration in its entirety and, in particular, with respect to the provisions relating to the granting of full membership to Palestine in order to enable it to participate in the Millennium Summit.

Report by the Chairman on his attendance at the seventy-first session of the Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity, held in Addis Ababa from 6 to 10 March 2000

12. **The Chairman** said that the session had been devoted largely to administrative and budgetary questions of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Although the question of the Middle East and Palestine had not been included in the agenda, it had been dealt with extensively in the report of the Secretary-General of OAU.

13. The signing, on 4 September 1999, of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel had been a positive sign for the resumption of the peace process, in view of the measures adopted with regard to the withdrawal of forces, the release of prisoners and the opening of security corridors. According to the report, however, the deadline of 13 February 2000, established in the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, had not been observed, and the objectives of the Memorandum had not been attained.

14. In view of the deadlock in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, the Secretary-General had urged the parties to resume peace negotiations, end the illegal settlement policy in the Palestinian territories and lay the groundwork for the attainment of peace and the establishment of a Palestinian State in accordance with international law. The Secretary-General had appealed to the parties to work in a spirit of compromise and implement in good faith the agreements freely concluded. OAU, for its part, as it had done thus far, would continue to lend strong support to the Palestinian people in its legitimate struggle to establish an independent State. At the next OAU Summit, the question of Palestine would have a prominent place in the deliberations of the high-level African leaders.

15. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee decided to take note of his report.

16. *It was so decided.*

International Conference on Palestine Refugees, to be held in Paris at the headquarters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on 26 and 27 April 2000
(Working paper no. 2)

17. **The Chairman** said that, as Committee members were aware, the Committee had decided, in its programme of work for 2000, that the Conference would be organized in cooperation with the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States, following the success of the Conference in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, organized by the three organizations in Brussels two years earlier. The Conference had been convened in view of the seriousness of the Palestine refugee problem and the need to resolve it in accordance with international legitimacy and the relevant United Nations resolutions. The aims of the Conference would be to provide information on the current situation of the Palestine refugees, to examine the role of the United Nations in finding a just solution to the refugee issue, to provide an in-depth analysis of the Palestine refugee issue in the context of the Middle East peace process and to promote concerted political and other action in support of a lasting solution to the problem, as a prerequisite for the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. The Conference would be followed, on 28 April 2000, by a meeting of non-governmental organizations on the same theme.

18. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee wished to approve the provisional programme for the International Conference on Palestine Refugees, to be held at UNESCO Headquarters on 26 and 27 April, in cooperation with the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States, and of the meeting of non-governmental organizations, to be held on 28 April 2000.

19. *It was so decided.*

20. **The Chairman** thanked the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States for their active participation in the Conference preparations and the Permanent Observers for the two organizations and the staff of their respective Missions in New York. The Committee's delegation to the Conference would be composed of Mr. Bruno Rodríguez Parrilla (Cuba) and Mr. Ravan Farhâdi

(Afghanistan), Vice-Chairmen of the Committee; Mr. Walter Balzan (Malta), Rapporteur; Mr. Nasser Al-Kidwa (Palestine); and himself as Chairman of the Committee.

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21. **Mr. Al-Kidwa** (Observer for Palestine) stressed, at the outset, that the International Conference on Palestine Refugees was the most important event to be organized by the Committee in 2000 and expressed his appreciation to the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States for their hard work in cooperation with the Committee in order to ensure the success of the event.

22. With respect to developments in the Middle East peace process, the most important event had taken place the day before, with the visit of Pope John Paul II to Palestine. His Holiness John Paul II had visited Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus Christ, the Dheisheh Palestinian refugee camp and Al-Maghtas, a place located on the western bank of the Jordan River where Jesus Christ was supposed to have been baptized. The visit in itself had been an historic event, as had been the important statements delivered by His Holiness, in which he had indicated the following: "The Holy See has always recognized that the Palestinian people have the natural right to a homeland and the right to be able to live in peace and tranquility with the other people of this area. My predecessors and I have repeatedly proclaimed in international forums that there would be no end to the sad conflict in the Holy Land without stable guarantees for the rights of all peoples involved, on the basis of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions and declarations". That had not been an implicit statement but rather an explicit declaration with respect to the type of agreement that must be concluded and the rights which the Palestinian people should be able to exercise.

23. The Pope had also referred to an activity in which the Committee had played a vital role. In that connection, he had said: "I was particularly pleased at the unanimous acceptance by the United Nations of the resolution on Bethlehem 2000, which commits the international community to help in developing this area and in improving conditions of peace and reconciliation in one of the most cherished and significant places on earth". That had been the precise

wording of the resolution submitted by the current Chairman of the Committee during the previous session of the General Assembly. In that connection, it should be noted that cooperation between the Committee and the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations had contributed to that major achievement with respect to "Bethlehem 2000".

24. With regard to the general status of the negotiations between Palestine and Israel within the framework of the Middle East peace process, he said that, after a prolonged and regrettable interruption in the negotiations, the two parties had reached an agreement on the application of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum. Negotiations had been interrupted following Israel's efforts to shirk its obligations under the Memorandum and other existing agreements, for example, by attempting to renege on the third phase of the withdrawal from the West Bank.

25. The recent agreement had been concluded following two meetings between President Arafat and Prime Minister Barak, with the participation, at the second, of Dennis Ross, United States special envoy for the peace process. Subsequently, Mr. Arafat and Mr. Barak had met in Sharm el-Sheikh with President Mubarak, in recognition of the role which Egypt had played, in cooperation with the United States, in order to break the deadlock in the negotiations and reach an agreement. At that meeting, the two parties had resolved the problem of the third-phase withdrawal and agreed to implement it in June 2000. They had also agreed to resume negotiations with the help of the United States. In fact, those two events had taken place on Tuesday, 21 March. The Israeli army had withdrawn from 6.1 per cent of the West Bank territory, and the two parties had resumed scheduled negotiations with the participation of representatives of the United States. Those negotiations had been aimed at establishing a framework agreement before May, taking into account that a final settlement must be concluded before September 2000. The agreement also covered such vital issues as the release of prisoners, the opening of a corridor in the north and Israel's release of Palestinian money collected in taxes and other payments. While that was all positive, previous experience had taught the Palestinians to be cautiously optimistic. The past had witnessed the conclusion of a number of agreements which had subsequently not been applied. It was necessary to proceed with caution and, at the same time, display willingness to promote

the full implementation of those agreements. It was hoped that that marked the beginning of genuine progress for the Palestinians.

26. The meeting between President Clinton and President Assad of the Syrian Arab Republic next Sunday would be a major event, since it would lay the groundwork for the resumption of negotiations between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic, which, it was hoped, would lead to the conclusion of a peaceful and final settlement between those parties, a vital element in the overall Middle East peace process.

The meeting rose at 11.25 a.m.