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

Summary record of the 256th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 1 March 2001, at 10.30 a.m.

Temporary Chairman: Mr. Annan

(Secretary-General of the United Nations)

Chairman: Mr. Ka (Senegal)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.45 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

1. *The agenda was adopted.*

Election of officers

2. **The Temporary Chairman** invited the Committee to consider nominations for the posts of Chairman, Vice-Chairmen and Rapporteur of the Committee.

3. **Mr. Ben Mustapha** (Tunisia), supported by **Mr. Krokmal** (Ukraine), proposed that Mr. Ka (Senegal), Mr. Rodriguez Parrilla (Cuba), Mr. Farhâdi (Afghanistan) and Mr. Balzan (Malta) should be re-elected as Chairman, Vice-Chairmen and Rapporteur, respectively.

4. *It was so decided.*

5. *Mr. Ka (Senegal) took the Chair.*

6. **The Secretary-General** congratulated the Chairman on his unanimous re-election to the leadership of the Committee. The renewal of his mandate reflected the Committee's continuing appreciation of his dedication and that of his country, Senegal, to the quest for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East and for the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights. He also congratulated the other members of the Bureau, whose steadfast efforts to promote the objectives of the Committee had again been recognized.

7. At its fifty-fifth session, the General Assembly had reaffirmed the mandates of the Committee and of the Secretariat units that supported its work: the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information. The Assembly's debate on the question of Palestine had underscored the importance that Member States attached to those mandates and to the role of the United Nations in the search for peace.

8. The Committee was meeting at a particularly sensitive moment. Following the events in East Jerusalem in September 2000, the situation on the ground had deteriorated badly, with hundreds dead and thousands injured, the great majority of them Palestinians. Equally worrying had been the unravelling of the progress that had been made between Israelis and Palestinians in overcoming the mistrust and suspicion that had plagued their relationship for

decades and in moving forward towards a comprehensive, just and lasting peace. In the past few months, the international community had made sustained efforts to persuade the two sides to bring about an end to violence, to protect civilians and to resume their negotiations. The broad understandings reached at Sharm el-Sheikh had marked an important step in that direction. Progress had also been achieved at Taba, where gaps appeared to have been narrowed on core issues such as refugees, Jerusalem, borders and security. He was convinced that the hard work done there would be of lasting value in the ongoing search for a settlement.

9. There was now a new Israeli Government. Whatever its policies, it would face the daunting task of doing its part to restore and foster a climate in which real progress could be achieved. The deepening crisis was at once a human tragedy and a source of grave concern for the future. In fact, the parties faced several crises at once: first, a security crisis, with a litany of violence, destruction and death; second, an economic and social crisis, with growing unemployment and poverty, border closures, restrictions and measures which deprived the Palestinian Authority of necessary financial resources; and third, a crisis of confidence, with rising fear, despair and anger on the streets, and plummeting faith in the peace process. Those crises were linked and must be addressed simultaneously; the parties must exercise maximum caution and restraint to prevent a further escalation of violence, which could have very serious consequences for the entire region. It was a time for statesmanship and vision.

10. Since 1991, Israelis and Palestinians had been engaged in a truly historic effort. The 1993 Oslo accords and subsequent understandings and agreements had been milestones. Those gains must not be allowed to ebb away. He called on the parties to preserve them and to move ahead towards a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the region based on Security Council resolutions 242 and 338.

11. For the peace process to bear fruit, it must be accompanied by a vigorous and well-coordinated international effort aimed at turning around the dire socio-economic situation faced by millions of Palestinians and their families. The United Nations system continued to provide emergency humanitarian assistance and to help the Palestinians to develop essential infrastructures, strengthen their institutions and improve their day-to-day living conditions. The

recent crisis had had a catastrophic effect on the Palestinian economy, reversing the achievements of several years of recovery and progress. The international community should step in and address that situation as a matter of urgency. In particular, he called on contributors to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to help the Agency continue its vital work. Months of violence had complicated the provision of basic services, materials, food and medicine. Donor assistance was absolutely critical and should be made available without further delay.

12. The United Nations was also supporting the peace process through the efforts of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, one of whose key responsibilities was to coordinate United Nations assistance to the Palestinian people. The Special Coordinator also headed a newly established Humanitarian Task Force for Emergency Needs to coordinate international assistance. He had asked the Special Coordinator to undertake wide-ranging and urgent consultations with a view to preventing further deterioration in the economic and social conditions in the Occupied Territories.

13. The United Nations remained fully committed to supporting the parties through the current difficult and traumatic period and would remain closely engaged in efforts to bring about a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. In conclusion, he expressed his appreciation for the work of the Committee and his support for its important mandate.

14. **The Chairman**, speaking as the representative of Senegal, thanked the members of the Committee for the renewed trust they had placed in him. His Government and his delegation would spare no effort to be worthy of that trust, which reflected the determination of the members of the Committee to protect and promote the cause of the Palestinian people. He also thanked the Secretary-General for his presence and for the constant support he provided to the Committee in carrying out its mandate and his personal commitment to ensuring that the United Nations played its part fully in the Middle East peace process.

15. The Committee had successfully built up relationships of trust and productive cooperation with Governments, intergovernmental organizations and United Nations bodies. Within its mandate and the universal principles upon which the Organization was built, the Committee had also built up over the years its collaboration with non-governmental organizations concerned by the question of Palestine. The Committee would spare no effort to contribute to the peace process and help to create a climate of trust between the parties to the conflict in the interests of peace, friendship and cooperation among the nations of the Middle East.

16. In recent weeks, the eyes of the world had been turned towards that region owing to the regrettable events that had been taking place. Everything must be done to ensure that the achievements of recent years, should not be further endangered. He counted on the sense of responsibility of the Palestinian leaders and the new Israeli Government. The current tensions must give way to peaceful coexistence with respect for the sovereignty and security of each State. Israel and the future Palestinian State both had the right to exist and develop peacefully. It was on the basis of that principle that the peace process must continue and be successfully concluded. The agreements already in existence had been freely entered into by the parties and must be implemented fairly. Outstanding issues should be discussed in good faith, without excessive delay and with serenity.

17. The Committee would continue to study and recommend to the General Assembly any relevant and constructive programme of action which would help to promote the historic and sacred rights of the Palestinian people. The Committee was not against any Member State; it existed to serve a cause and a legitimate mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly. He hoped that the year 2001 would see the peace process make significant progress in the interests of the peoples of the Middle East and the just cause of the Palestinian people.

18. **Mr. Al-Kidwa** (Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations) expressed appreciation for the ongoing efforts of the Bureau and the Committee to draw attention to the question of Palestine at the United Nations, to realize the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and to establish peace in the Middle East. He also thanked the Secretary-General for giving serious attention to the needs of the Palestinian people and to the Middle East peace process, including

through attempts to bring a halt to the tragic events of the previous few months.

19. The critical deterioration of the situation on the ground and of the peace process had dashed hopes for a real breakthrough in Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. The Palestinian people had reacted angrily to Mr. Ariel Sharon's visit to the Muslim Holy Sanctuary of the Haram Al-Sharif in September 2000, viewing it as an act of aggression which had only deepened their anger at the ongoing Israeli occupation and the failure of peace promises to materialize.

20. Since then, Israel had waged a terrible and bloody military campaign against the Palestinian people, using heavy weaponry and imposing severe restrictions on the movement of persons and goods for the purpose of destroying the Palestinian economy. Economic facilities and agricultural lands had been destroyed and Palestinian money withheld, while 363 Palestinians had died and a further 12,000 had been injured, many of them severely. There had been a sharp decline in the living conditions of the Palestinian people, who were facing increasing hardship in all areas of life.

21. By closing off the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Occupying Power had prevented some panellists from participating in the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, held in Vienna in February 2001. His delegation condemned Israel's policy of closure in the strongest terms and called upon all parties to follow suit.

22. The deterioration of the peace process had been precipitated by the failure of the previous Israeli Government to abide fully by the basis for a final settlement agreed between the two sides at Camp David. During the ensuing military campaign, grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention had been perpetrated in clear violation of international law and Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

23. The election of Mr. Ariel Sharon to the Israeli Premiership was a further blow. Mr. Sharon's public position that he would be willing to negotiate only a partial agreement, characterized by numerous conditions, negated existing agreements and effectively destroyed the peace process itself. The existing agreements mandated the conclusion of a final settlement agreement, but did not allow for a perpetual transitional period or for continuous partial agreements. The crux of the process had always been mutual recognition and the implementation of

resolution 242 (1967) at the end of a five-year transitional period. Any attempt to bypass resolution 242 (1967) and the principle of land for peace could only be construed as a withdrawal from the peace process, which would severely undermine progress achieved and could signal a return to conflict.

24. The United Nations had an abiding responsibility towards the question of Palestine. It needed to do more to help find a solution that would restore the situation on the ground to that which had prevailed prior to September 2000. An observer mission made up of United Nations military and police personnel should be dispatched for that purpose, as mandated by a relevant Security Council resolution.

25. A conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to enforce the Convention in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, was greatly needed and would help to address the situation on the ground. However, the international community should make it clear to the Occupying Power that the crux of the problem was the ongoing occupation and that ending the occupation was an appropriate short-term goal.

26. Attempts to appease the Israeli Government or to be artificially neutral by speaking about violations in general terms were not only unfair to the Palestinian people, they also harmed prospects for a better future for both sides. The Palestinian people increasingly needed assistance to enhance their living conditions and meet the basic operating costs of the Palestinian National Authority. In that regard, his delegation was grateful to donors who had responded to urgent appeals, notably the European Union, certain fraternal Arab States, and the United Nations system.

27. Politically, there should be an absolute affirmation of the need to abide by the agreed basis of the Middle East peace process and the existing agreements with a view to reaching a final settlement on all issues, including Jerusalem and the refugees. The parties should not be allowed to retreat to positions that denied the progress already achieved. The only way to save the peace process and to push for a real and comprehensive peace in the region was by ensuring that no one shirked their responsibilities, particularly those who had formulated the existing agreements and designed the peace process. Serious efforts were needed, particularly from the co-sponsors and the new United States Administration.

28. Everyone should work together to overcome the current difficulties and to ensure a real commitment to peace. While the task was difficult, it was not impossible, and his delegation was ready to do its part on the basis of the existing agreements.

The meeting was suspended at 11.26 a.m. and resumed at 11.28 a.m.

29. **The Chairman** drew the Committee's attention to the fact that since the previous meeting, the General Assembly had adopted by majority vote resolutions 55/52, 55/53, 55/54 and 55/55 concerning the question of Palestine, the drafts of which had been submitted to it by the Committee. The size of the majority votes underscored the importance which States attached to a just, comprehensive, lasting and peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, based on the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. It also reaffirmed the continued responsibility of the United Nations towards the question of Palestine, until the question had been settled in all its aspects.

30. The Bureau had held consultations with the European Union Troika in February 2001 on the Committee's recent and future activities. It had recalled the various initiatives undertaken by the European Union to promote peace in the Middle East, particularly its active part in the Sharm el-Sheikh and Taba peace negotiations and in defusing the violence of recent months. The Bureau had expressed the hope that the European Union would at the upcoming session of the General Assembly be able to change its position on resolutions mandating the work of the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights. The two sides had agreed to continue their fruitful exchanges.

31. He took it that the Committee wished to take note of the information just provided.

32. *It was so decided.*

Draft programme of work of the Committee (A/AC.183/2001/CRP.1)

33. **The Chairman**, introducing the draft programme of work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for the year 2001, as contained in document A/AC.183/2001/CRP.1, said that the programme, which had been discussed by the Bureau, reflected the ongoing concerns and objectives of the Committee in the light of the evolving situation.

34. He highlighted section II (paras. 5 to 10), which reaffirmed the Committee's view that its programme of activities played a useful and positive role in heightening international awareness of the question of Palestine and in sensitizing public opinion with respect to the relevant issues. The Committee would continue to pursue its activities in the most effective way possible in order to respond adequately and in a timely manner to the evolving situation. The Committee would also continue to support the peace process and to address critical aspects of a Palestinian transition to statehood, including efforts at nation-building, institutional capacity-building, international assistance in support of those efforts, as well as the economic and social development of the Palestinian people. The Committee was committed to promoting the Bethlehem 2000 Project of the Palestinian Authority.

35. As indicated in section III of the draft programme (paras. 11 to 31), the Committee intended to pursue consultations with countries interested in the programme of work and to invite Palestinian officials and personalities to meetings with members and observers of the Committee and Secretariat, as required. It would endeavour to make its programme of meetings and conferences more reflective of the evolving situation and more forward-looking, and would continue to review its effectiveness. In that regard, the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People had been held at Vienna in February 2001, before the Committee's first meeting, because the Palestinian people were facing great difficulties and the meeting could not have been delayed.

36. As described in section III.C of the draft programme of work (paras. 18 to 23), the Committee enjoyed good relations with civil society organizations which played an important role in the peace process by mobilizing resources for emergency relief and providing assistance to the Palestinian people in the areas of nation-building and social and economic development. Non-governmental organizations should continue in 2001 to focus their efforts on those areas. The Committee would continue to invite representatives from non-governmental organizations to relevant meetings and conferences to discuss their campaigns and initiatives on behalf of the Palestinian people.

37. The Bureau had given a great deal of consideration to the Committee's programme of work

for 2001 and would continue to review and assess it, making adjustments as necessary.

38. *The Committee approved the programme of work for 2001 as contained in document A/AC.183/2001/CRP.1.*

Report by the Chairman on the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, United Nations Office at Vienna, 20 and 21 February 2001

39. **The Chairman**, presenting his report on the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, held at the United Nations Office at Vienna on 20 and 21 February 2001, said that the purpose of the Seminar had been to review the state of the Palestinian economy and to examine efforts by Governments, intergovernmental and civil society organizations to alleviate the current humanitarian emergency in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The Seminar had also aimed at mobilizing greater support for the realization of the legitimate economic rights of the Palestinian people as a means of contributing to peace in the region.

40. Following its arrival in Vienna, the Committee had learned that officials and non-governmental organizations from the Occupied Palestinian Territory would not be able to attend because of the general blockade by Israel. Among those affected was keynote speaker Mr. Maher Masri, Minister of Economy and Commerce of the Palestinian Authority. The Committee delegation had noted with utmost concern that the participants had been denied the opportunity to profit from the direct experience of high-ranking officials and to hear their assessment of the economic situation. It had issued a statement condemning the illegal actions of the Occupying Power. The Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations at Vienna had represented Palestine at the Seminar, which had been well attended. Fourteen speakers had made presentations in four different panel discussions.

41. Following the Seminar, the Committee delegation had held consultations with non-governmental organizations concerning the Committee's programme of cooperation with civil society. Since several Palestinian non-governmental organizations had been unable to attend, the participating non-governmental organizations had adopted a statement condemning Israel for the blockade. The discussions had been very

useful and interesting. In view of the developments on the ground, it had been agreed to focus work in the immediate future on mobilizing Governments to honour their obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention, and to support international measures to protect the Palestinian people.

42. The report on the Seminar would be presented at the upcoming session of the Economic and Social Council and the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly.

43. The Committee was grateful to the United Nations Office at Vienna and to the Government and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Austria for their help in organizing the Seminar and for their hospitality.

44. **Mr. Al-Kidwa** (Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations), expressing his appreciation to the hosts and organizers of the Seminar, proposed that the Committee should send letters addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council expressing concern over the rapidly deteriorating economic and humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The letters should focus primarily on the problem of the blockade and on the fact that Palestinian representatives had been prevented from attending the Seminar, and should condemn Israeli policies in that regard, expressing serious concern in terms of the implementation of the Committee's programme of work.

45. **The Chairman** said that the Committee had taken note of the proposal and would take action accordingly. He took it that the Committee wished to adopt the report on the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian people.

46. *It was so decided.*

Developments in the Middle East peace process and the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem

47. **Mr. Al-Kidwa** (Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations) said that one of the most important aspects of the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory was the ongoing campaign of terror being waged by Israeli forces. Over 360 Palestinians had lost their lives, the most recent victim having been struck by a shell while he was in his home.

48. The political stance of the incoming Israeli Government and its allies did not augur well for the

future. The visit by the United States Secretary of State to the region had borne no fruit and had failed to clarify the policy of the new United States Administration. The Administration should endeavour to ensure the implementation of the agreements sponsored by the United States of America.

49. The Palestinian Authority spared no effort to maintain good relations with its brothers and neighbours. The Arab Summit, scheduled to take place in Jordan on 26 March 2001, could offer a further opportunity to express the support of Arab States for the Palestinian people and the peace process, as well as for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as its capital. The Authority was in continuous contact with the Presidency of the Non-Aligned Movement, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and others. It hoped that those contacts would contribute positively to the overall work being done at the United Nations on the question of Palestine, especially the establishment of a United Nations observer mission and the holding of the conference of the High Contracting Parties on the Fourth Geneva Convention.

50. The fact that as many as 75 Parties had already responded positively to the proposal for the conference suggested that there was majority support for the initiative. His delegation had been shocked, however, by Canada's refusal to support the idea, since that State had a good track record of supporting international law and assisting civil populations in times of war. It was incumbent upon the depositary to take steps to convene the conference at the earliest opportunity.

51. The failure of the European Union to respond positively to the proposal was disappointing. The European Union had stated that it was not convinced by the timing and that it would consult its legal representatives. The Committee should endeavour to convince the European Union to abide by the decision of the first conference to resume the meeting, also in the light of the situation on the ground.

52. By persuading the parties in the peace process to abide by the existing agreements and to implement resolutions in conformity with international law, the Committee could help resolve the deteriorating situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory with a view to reaching a final settlement.

53. **Mr. Zackheos** (Cyprus) reiterated his country's strong support for the Secretary-General's efforts in the

Middle East. The dire situation of the economy in the Occupied Territories and the grim budgetary situation of the Palestinian Authority must be addressed. In that regard, his Government had decided to increase its contribution to UNRWA by 50 per cent from the current year. He reiterated his country's unwavering support of the pursuit of peace in the region, and its concern over the unacceptable loss of life and property, the perpetuation of the economic misery and the violation of human rights affecting the daily lives of millions of innocent people. The tragic consequences of the continuation of the present state of affairs were very clear to all. If it were not contained and terminated, the conflict could engulf the entire region with unimaginable consequences. That was why reconciliation must be put at the top of the Committee's agenda.

54. The most important consideration of policy makers should be the achievement of security and prosperity for all. There could be no winner or loser. Efforts towards the achievement of a just and viable settlement based on United Nations resolutions would lead to a "win-win" situation for all concerned, and to regional peace, stability, security and cooperation. However, peace could not be achieved unless all parties tackled the core issues, particularly the central Palestinian issue, with courage, determination and the necessary political will. The forces of moderation should redouble their efforts, isolate the extremists and work diligently to reinforce hope and hold on to the vision of a new Middle East where coexistence was the only acceptable way.

55. **Mr. Samhan** (Observer for the United Arab Emirates), speaking as Chairman of the Arab Group, said that the situation in Palestine was at a critical phase, particularly because of the continuation by the Israeli Government of its crimes in the region, in violation of all humanitarian laws. He therefore called upon the Security Council to fully shoulder its responsibilities, since its resolutions, especially resolutions 242 and 338, had not been implemented. A just, lasting and complete peace required political and juridical commitments by all the States concerned, especially Israel. The Security Council should dispatch international observers to protect the Palestinian people. He also called for the convening of a conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. Time was of the utmost importance to the Palestinian people. The Arab

Group had placed the highest hopes in the Committee with regard to achieving the legitimate and inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. The initial steps towards the achievement of those rights must involve the end to Israeli occupation, the dismantling of illegal Israeli settlements and an end to Israel's occupation of the Syrian Golan and of Lebanese territory.

56. **The Chairman**, noting that all the measures identified by the representative of the United Arab Emirates were in line with the upholding of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, said that the Committee would redouble its efforts to draw the international community's attention to the current plight of the Palestinian people and do its utmost to ensure that the occupation ended.

57. **Mr. Lamani** (Observer for the Organization of the Islamic Conference), noting that the entire peace process had been suspended owing to the irresponsible actions of the Israeli Government, reaffirmed his organization's unwavering commitment to the Committee's work, despite the fact that the current situation in the region gave grounds for pessimism.

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.