



# General Assembly

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

### Summary record of the 359th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 14 March 2014, at 11 a.m.

*Chair:* Mr. Diallo . . . . . (Senegal)

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\* No summary record was issued for the 358th meeting.

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*The meeting was called to order at 11.10 a.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

1. *The agenda was adopted.*

### **Report on the Joint Meeting of the Committee and the League of Arab States to commemorate the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People 2014, held in Cairo on 10 March 2014**

2. **Mr. Percaya** (Indonesia), Vice-Chair, said that the Joint Meeting of the Committee and the League of Arab States to commemorate the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People 2014, held in Cairo on 10 March 2014, had been presided over by the Chair of the Committee and attended by 32 Committee members and observers, including 13 members of the League of Arab States. The Committee delegation had included the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine and himself.

3. On 9 March 2014, the Chair had briefed the ministers for foreign affairs attending the 141st session of the Council of the League of Arab States. The opening session of the Joint Meeting had included remarks by the Chair, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Egypt and the State of Palestine and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

4. At the main session, statements had been made by representatives of numerous Arab States, in addition to Bangladesh, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Turkey and the Assistant Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference for Palestine Affairs. Speakers had praised the Committee's efforts and expressed support for the International Year. Calls had been made for voluntary contributions to support the Year's activities and for national coordinating committees to be established to oversee those activities. Speakers had called for Palestine to be granted full membership in the United Nations and to have full diplomatic relations with all States.

5. Speakers had condemned Israel's actions, including settlement expansion and its efforts to change the status quo of Jerusalem, and called for additional assistance to be provided to the Palestinians through the League of Arab States Jerusalem Fund. Speakers had also commended the efforts of the United States Secretary of State, John Kerry, to facilitate the peace negotiations. They had endorsed the Arab Peace

Initiative and expressed their support for negotiations leading to Israel's complete withdrawal from the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital. If the ongoing negotiations failed to bear fruit, the Palestinian people should seek other legal avenues to pursue its goals, and additional political and economic steps should be taken to support its aspirations. The Meeting had concluded with the adoption of the Cairo Declaration in Solidarity with the Palestinian People and a press conference.

6. The Committee delegation had also held fruitful bilateral meetings with the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Egypt and the State of Palestine and with the League of Arab States Assistant Secretary-General for Palestine and Occupied Arab Territories, Mohamed Sobeih.

7. **Mr. Farghal** (Egypt) said that the changes taking place in Arab countries would improve the lives of their citizens. The people of the region looked forward to the full independence of Palestine, and the time had come for the international community to take decisive action towards that goal.

### **United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine and the United Nations Meeting of Civil Society in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, to be held in Quito from 25 to 27 March 2014 (working paper No. 2)**

8. **The Chair** said that, under the theme "Engaging for peace — the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People", the United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine would review the current opportunities for, and obstacles to, peace between Israelis and Palestinians. It would examine how support from Latin American and Caribbean countries could help achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine. Participants would examine the role of non-governmental actors in Latin America and the Caribbean in promoting a permanent settlement of the conflict and South-South cooperation in support of Palestinian socio-economic development. Invitations to the Meeting had been sent to internationally-renowned experts, United Nations Member States and Observers, parliamentarians and representatives of the United Nations system, other intergovernmental organizations, civil society and the media. The International Meeting would be followed by a half-day civil society meeting.

9. **Mr. Fornell** (Ecuador) said that Palestinians wishing to travel to Ecuador would no longer be required to obtain visas to enter the country.

10. **The Chair** said that he took it that the Committee wished to approve the provisional programme for the Meeting as contained in working paper No. 2.

11. *It was so decided.*

**United Nations Round Table on Legal Aspects of the Question of Palestine, to be held at the United Nations Office at Geneva on 24 and 25 April 2014** (working paper No. 3)

12. **The Chair** said that the Round Table would begin with an open session. The high-level speakers would include a representative of the Secretary-General and the Palestinian Minister of Prisoners' Affairs. Closed sessions with legal experts would discuss the legal status of Palestinian political prisoners, applicable provisions of international law and its enforcement mechanisms. The second day would focus on the legal implications stemming from the status of non-member observer State granted to Palestine by the General Assembly in resolution 67/19. The Round Table would conclude with a strategic discussion. All members and observers of the Committee were invited to attend.

13. He took it that the Committee wished to approve the provisional programme for the Round Table as contained in working paper No. 3.

14. *It was so decided.*

**Accreditation of civil society organizations to the Committee** (working paper No. 4)

15. **The Chair** drew the Committee's attention to working paper No. 4, which contained applications for accreditation that had been submitted by two non-governmental organizations. After reviewing the applications, the Working Group of the Committee had concluded that the two organizations fulfilled the criteria for accreditation and recommended that they should be accredited.

16. *The requests for accreditation to the Committee received from the Asociación Comité Español de la UNRWA (Spain) and the American Friends of UNRWA (United States of America) were approved.*

**Update on developments since the previous meeting of the Committee**

17. **The Chair** said that on 20 January 2014, the Security Council had held an open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, at which he had delivered a statement on behalf of the Committee. Also on 20 January, the Bureau of the Committee had issued a statement expressing its deep concern about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Yarmouk refugee camp in the Syrian Arab Republic, where Palestine refugees had been trapped for over four months and were suffering from malnutrition and disease.

18. On 31 January 2014, the United Nations Coordinator for Humanitarian Aid and Development Activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, James Rawley, had issued a statement expressing concern over Israel's demolition of 36 Palestinian structures in the Jordan Valley community of Ein al-Hilweh, which had displaced 66 people, including 36 children. On 27 February 2014, the non-governmental organization Amnesty International had issued a report entitled "Trigger-Happy: Israel's use of excessive force in the West Bank", which stated that Israeli forces had repeatedly violated their obligations under international human rights law by using excessive force to stifle dissent and freedom of expression, resulting in a pattern of unlawful killings and injuries to civilians.

19. On 1 March 2014, Indonesia had hosted the second Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development, at which 22 countries had reiterated their support for Palestinian development. The Committee was particularly grateful to the Government of Japan, which had pledged \$200 million in aid to that end.

20. On 5 March 2014, the Bureau of the Committee had issued a statement expressing its alarm at recent developments and increased tensions in occupied East Jerusalem. The Bureau was especially concerned that incursions by Israeli extremists and political leaders into the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound were becoming more frequent.

21. Israel had continued its illegal settlement expansion, approving the construction of 381 housing units in the Givat Zeev settlement and 558 units in the East Jerusalem settlements of Har Homa, Neve Yaakov and Pisgat Ze'ev. Several European banks and pension funds had joined the campaign against Israeli

companies involved in illegal settlement activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Norway's Government Pension Fund, Denmark's largest bank, the largest bank in Scandinavia, and Luxembourg's general pension fund. Norway's YMCA/YWCA had urged support for the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement against Israel until it ended its occupation.

22. **Mr. Emvula** (Namibia) said that, although 2014 had been declared the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian people, certain countries continued to pay little heed to their plight. He urged them to show greater compassion and work sincerely to promote a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

23. **The Chair** said that Committee members must work to raise global awareness of the question of Palestine and prevail on the occupying Power to comply with international law and relevant United Nations resolutions.

24. **Mr. Eler** (Turkey) said that it seemed likely that the negotiations would conclude without significant progress. All stakeholders must therefore maximize their support for the Palestinian cause. Turkey welcomed the identical letters of 6 March 2014 from the Permanent Representative of Guinea addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council (A/68/791-S/2014/161), which set out the position of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

25. Turkey planned to host a joint meeting of the Committee and the Organization of the Islamic Conference on 12 and 13 May 2014, which would focus on Al-Quds al-Sharif. He hoped that a wide range of international actors would participate.

26. As Chair of the Working Group of the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, Turkey was concerned at the deficit in the Agency's budget and urged members of the Committee and the international community to provide the necessary financial support.

27. **The Chair** said that he looked forward to hosting the joint meeting of the Committee and the Organization of the Islamic Conference. He had raised the issue of the financing gap in the Agency's budget at the recent meeting of the League of Arab States.

### **The situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and developments in the political process**

28. **Mr. Mansour** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that Israel continued to take provocative steps in Jerusalem. Settlers and Israeli officials, including the deputy speaker of the Israeli parliament, had visited Al-Haram al-Sharif and the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Israeli parliament had attempted to extend Israel's illegal sovereignty over those holy sites. That attempt that had been strongly condemned by the Committee, the Group of Arab States, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of the Islamic Conference. He commended the Security Council and the General Assembly for rejecting those steps, which threatened to ignite a religious conflict whose repercussions would be impossible to predict. He would be meeting with the Secretary-General and would urge him to press Israel, the occupying Power, to desist from its irresponsible and potentially explosive actions.

29. Settlement activity had intensified to unprecedented levels in 2013 and continued to accelerate. Israel was also carrying out a campaign of extra-judicial executions against Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which had further exacerbated tensions, particularly in Gaza. It was unacceptable for any party to resort to violence and Palestine strongly condemned those executions.

30. In Syria, approximately 20,000 Palestine refugees remained trapped in Yarmouk camp, which was once more under siege. He appealed to the Syrian Government and the other parties to the conflict to lift that siege so that the camp residents could receive desperately-needed humanitarian assistance.

31. Israel was attempting to convince the world that it alone had a right to the holy land and that the Palestinians were merely foreigners there. By continuing its settlement-building campaign, maintaining its military presence in the Jordan Valley and insisting that the Palestinians, unlike all other States, must accept Israel as a Jewish State, Israel revealed its refusal to negotiate in good faith. Unless it adopted a more constructive approach, it would prove impossible to reach a final status agreement with Palestine that addressed all core issues.

32. There was a clear global consensus on the parameters and desired outcomes of peace negotiations

between Palestine and Israel: negotiations must take place on the basis of the borders of 4 June 1967, Jerusalem must be the capital of the future Palestinian State, all Israeli soldiers must withdraw from Palestine, and there must be a just and mutually-agreed solution to the refugee question on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions. Palestine could not recognize Israel as a Jewish State.

33. If Israel continued to sabotage all efforts to resolve the conflict and defy the will of the international community, it would be responsible for the consequences. If the negotiations failed, the global community must be ready to adopt a new approach to ensure that Israel would be held accountable for its illegal actions against the Palestinian people. The Palestinians would not merely disappear. Instead, they would step up their efforts to end the occupation. All parties supporting the Palestinians in their struggle, including governmental and civil society actors, must take action to strengthen global solidarity with the Palestinian people.

34. **Mr. Wright** (Director, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees Representative Office, New York) said that UNRWA would face a deficit of \$71 million in 2014, which was equivalent to 12 per cent of the Agency's total expenses. That was the biggest deficit UNRWA had ever faced, and it came at a time when the Agency was under tremendous pressure, particularly in the Syrian Arab Republic. At a time of tremendous turbulence in the Middle East, it was critical that donors maintained or even increased their contributions to the Agency so that it would not be obliged to cut the essential services to which Palestine refugees were entitled.

35. In the Syrian Arab Republic, 270,000 Palestine refugees had been displaced. Many had been killed, including 12 UNRWA staff members, and 23 staff members remained unaccounted for. UNRWA infrastructure, including schools and health centres, had sustained massive damage and conditions in the country remained extremely difficult. However, the Agency continued to do all it could to provide services to Palestine refugees, who were living in increasingly precarious and dangerous conditions. On 18 February 2014 an explosive had struck a UNRWA school in Muzayrib, killing five Palestine refugee children and one UNRWA staff member. Twenty others had been injured, including eight children, two of whom had lost limbs.

36. On 17 days in early 2014, UNRWA had been able to deliver approximately 7,800 desperately needed food parcels to the Yarmouk refugee camp, providing approximately 50 per cent of the total nutritional needs of the Palestine refugees trapped there. The Agency had also managed to distribute vitamins and carry out some polio immunizations. Regrettably, the fragile truce that had enabled the Agency to reach the camp had broken down at the beginning of March 2014 and UNRWA could no longer deliver humanitarian assistance. It was critical that the Government and the factions in Yarmouk camp came to an arrangement that allowed the Agency to resume its provision of aid.

37. The Agency planned to conduct a publicity campaign entitled "Let us through" to draw world attention to that issue. To implement its 2014 Syria Regional Crisis Response, the Agency required almost \$420 million, 15 times as much as had been required in 2012.

38. There had also been a sharp deterioration in the living conditions of Palestine refugees in Gaza, where 800,000 people, two thirds of population, required food assistance. That figure was expected to increase by 10 to 20 per cent in 2014. Gaza's gross domestic product was 15 percent below 1999 levels, and 56 per cent of young people and 88 per cent of young refugee women were unemployed. Those figures continued underestimated the extent of the problem, as not all unemployed people registered with the authorities. There was almost a total ban on travel into and out of Gaza, and Egypt had closed tunnels under its border with the Strip. There were virtually no exports from Gaza, and imports of building materials, including for use by the Agency, had almost ceased. In 2000, 10 per cent of the population had been dependant on food assistance. In 2014, however, that figure stood at 70 per cent.

39. The crisis in Gaza was man-made and was exacerbated by an illegal blockade that constituted an act of collective punishment. The vast majority of people were being pushed into food insecurity and had no alternative but to rely on food assistance from the international community. Despite that dire situation, the occupation authorities had made it increasingly difficult for the Agency to operate, including by requiring UNRWA projects to be recertified. No new building projects had been approved since March 2013. Furthermore, as a result of restrictions placed on the Agency, including in relation to packaging and

monitoring, more than \$5.8 million, equivalent to 1 per cent of the Agency's General Fund, was being wasted. Administrative costs would increase further in 2014 as a result of new restrictions on the use of cement.

40. Although UNRWA would prefer to focus on human development, it had no choice but to address the plight of the poorest refugees. The Agency's Gaza Emergency Appeal was facing a shortfall of \$30 million. Unless that deficit was addressed, certain programmes, including school food programmes and rations, would have to be cut. UNRWA appealed to all donors to ensure that that did not happen.

*The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.*