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

**Special meeting on the prospects for
resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict**

Summary record of the 365th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 14 October 2014, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Seck (Senegal)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Opening remarks by the Chair

1. **The Chair** said that, as part of the activities the Committee had organized to celebrate the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, he was honoured to welcome Mr. Noam Chomsky, Professor Emeritus of Linguistics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a world-renowned figure of high moral standing, intellectual clarity and political courage. His work had revolutionized many fields, including philosophy, linguistics, the cognitive sciences and even politics. Indeed, the Committee could not have found a better person to give a presentation on the prospects for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which had lasted for far too long and threatened both regional and international peace and security.

2. The presentation would be followed by an interactive dialogue, which would be moderated by Ms. Amy Goodman, distinguished journalist and host of the news programme *Democracy Now!*

Presentation on the prospects for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

3. **Ms. Goodman** (Moderator) said that Mr. Chomsky was not only an important figure in politics and linguistics and an activist, but also a man of compassion. Loved and revered by his linguistics students, he had also been a teacher to millions around the world through the more than 100 books he had authored and his countless speaking appearances. Mr. Chomsky also travelled regularly to see with his own eyes the situation in various parts of the world. Although the Israeli authorities had prevented him from entering the Occupied Palestinian Territory, their actions had not stopped him from conveying what was happening there to an international audience.

4. In his writings, Mr. Chomsky not only presented the facts, but he also analysed how the media, particularly in the United States of America, covered the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and revealed a different reality to that which was depicted by the media. His writings brought into stark relief the human suffering caused by war, oppression and injustice. He also took seriously his responsibility as an intellectual to draw attention to the plight of oppressed peoples around the world. Mr. Chomsky never gave up on any just cause and always strived to ensure that people were informed

about the reality of what was going on around the world, including in Israel and Palestine.

5. **Mr. Chomsky** (Professor Emeritus of Linguistics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology) said that many of the world's problems were so intractable, it was hard to imagine how one could even begin to mitigate them. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, however, was not one of those problems. On the contrary, the general outlines of a diplomatic solution had been clear for at least 40 years. The obstacles to the resolution of the conflict were also quite clear.

6. The framework for a solution was set out in a draft resolution that Egypt, Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic had brought before the Security Council in January 1976. The draft, which called for a two-State settlement on the basis of the internationally recognized border, with guarantees for the right of both States to exist in peace and security within secure and recognized borders, had been vetoed by the United States. Since that time, the United States had continued to prevent the Security Council from taking action. The most recent veto had come in February 2011, when it had voted against a draft resolution calling on Israel to halt settlement building, an action that was contrary to official United States policy. In that connection, it should be noted that a veto not only prevented the adoption of resolutions, but also had the effect of deleting them from history. One had to look very hard to find the texts of vetoed drafts.

7. Although there was an overwhelming international consensus in support of the two-State solution, Israel rejected such a solution and, with the unremitting and decisive support of the United States, had devoted extensive resources to blocking its implementation. One of the primary aims of Israel's efforts had been to establish how the conflict was viewed and interpreted in the United States and within its broad sphere of influence.

8. The history of Gaza over the past decade illustrated the general character of Israel's policy in that part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In August 2014, the latest Israeli aggression against Gaza had ended when Israel and the Palestinian Authority had agreed to a ceasefire. That inevitably had led everyone to wonder what the prospects for the future were. The answer could be found in Israel's response to the succession of ceasefires that had been reached in Gaza over the past decade. As soon as a ceasefire was

reached, Israel would disregard it and continue its assault on Gaza, build more settlements and incite violence. On the other hand, Hamas would observe the ceasefire, until some Israeli escalation elicited a response, and that would lead to another exercise of “mowing the lawn”, in Israeli parlance, each episode more fierce and destructive than the last. In fact, the successive ceasefires that had been reached essentially reiterated the Agreement on Movement and Access of November 2005, which had been concluded in the aftermath of the second intifada.

9. The timing of the Agreement on Movement and Access had been significant, as November 2005 had also marked Israel’s so-called disengagement from Gaza. The removal of Israeli settlers from Gaza had been depicted as a noble effort to seek peace and promote development, but the reality was rather different. According to Dov Weisglass, the Israeli official who had been in charge of negotiating and implementing the ceasefire, the goal of the disengagement had been to freeze the peace process, so as to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian State and ensure that diplomacy was removed from the agenda indefinitely. Israel’s leading specialists on the occupation, the historian Idith Zertal and diplomatic correspondent Akiva Eldar, the co-authors of *Lords of the Land*, the standard work on the settlement project, had pointed out that, even after the disengagement, Gaza had never been released from Israel’s military grip. Israel had left behind scorched earth, devastated services and people with neither a present nor a future. The settlements had been destroyed in an ungenerous move by an unenlightened occupier, which continued to control the territory and kill and harass its inhabitants by means of its formidable military might.

10. The Oslo Accords had established that Gaza and the West Bank constituted an indivisible territorial unit. For the past 20 years, the United States and Israel had sought to separate Gaza from the West Bank, in violation of the Accords that they had accepted. The major geostrategic aim behind those efforts was to deny Palestine access to the outside world. If Gaza were separated from the West Bank, whatever autonomous entity might emerge in the latter territory would be imprisoned by Israel on one side and a hostile Jordan, ally of Israel, on the other. In addition, Israel’s slow and gradual usurpation of the Jordan Valley, which made up approximately one third of the West Bank and contained much of its arable land,

would imprison what remained of the territory even more tightly.

11. In January 2006, the first free election in the Arab world had been held in Palestine. At the conclusion of the carefully monitored elections, Hamas had won the control of the Parliament. Instantly, the United States, along with Israel, had decided to punish the Palestinians for the “crime” that they had committed. A harsh siege had been put into effect and acts of violence had increased. In another familiar practice, the United States had also begun to organize a coup to overthrow the unacceptable Government. The European Union, to its shame and discredit, had gone along with those actions.

12. A year later, Hamas had committed an even greater crime when it had pre-empted the planned military coup and taken control of Gaza. In the majority of the West, including the United States, that action had been decried as the takeover of Gaza by force. Although that statement was not false, it was also not completely accurate. Hamas had used force to prevent the violent overthrow of the elected Government. After the Hamas takeover, the attacks on Gaza had increased substantially, until another ceasefire had been reached in January 2008. Once again, the terms of that ceasefire had been essentially the same as those of previous ceasefire agreements, with Hamas observing the ceasefire and Israel constantly breaking it. That pattern had continued until 4 November 2008, when Israeli forces had launched Operation Cast Lead. Hamas had responded by firing rockets at Israel, an action that had been met with a huge reprisal in which many Palestinians had been killed. By the end of December 2008, Hamas had offered to renew the ceasefire, but the Israeli Government had rejected the offer. It should be recalled that Cast Lead had been such a horrible operation that it had provoked a substantial international response and had led the United Nations and non-governmental organizations to establish commissions of inquiry and launch investigations.

13. In January 2009, the Security Council had adopted resolution 1860 (2009) calling for an immediate ceasefire with the usual terms. However, the ceasefire had broken down completely in November 2012 with the next major episode of “lawn mowing”, which, of course, had ended with another ceasefire that included the usual terms. Once again, according to Nathan Thrall, a leading Middle East analyst with the

International Crisis Group, Israel had recognized that Hamas had been observing the terms of the ceasefire, and it therefore had little incentive to do the same. Instead, the military attacks on Gaza had increased and more stringent restrictions on imports had been imposed. That state of affairs had continued until April 2014, when Hamas and the Palestinian Authority had signed a unity agreement that had been supported by most of the international community. Israel had been infuriated because unity between the two movements would threaten its long-standing policy of separating Gaza and the West Bank. The prospect of a unified Government also had threatened to undermine Israel's claim that it was not possible to negotiate seriously with an entity that was internally divided. Israel had responded by launching major assaults on the West Bank, primarily targeting Hamas, in which hundreds had been killed.

14. The Israeli authorities, of course, had offered a pretext for their actions in the West Bank. They had claimed that the assaults had been launched to rescue three Israeli teenagers who had been abducted from a settlement. The truth was that the Israeli authorities had known immediately that the teenagers had been killed. They had also known from the outset that it was unlikely Hamas had been involved, yet they had claimed that they were certain that Hamas had been responsible. The Israeli assaults in the West Bank had ultimately elicited a response from Hamas, and that, in turn, had led to the recently completed Israeli assault, which had been designated Operation Protective Edge.

15. A ceasefire had been reached on 26 August 2014, only to be followed immediately by Israel's greatest land grab in 30 years. The Israeli authorities had seized almost a thousand acres in the Gush Etzion area, which was near what Israel called Greater Jerusalem. The United States Government had informed Israeli officials that their actions in Gush Etzion had undermined United States efforts to protect Israel at the United Nations. In fact, the United States had delivered that same warning in September 1967, when Israel had first established the illegal colony of Gush Etzion. Little had changed since that time, apart from the scale of the crimes, which had continued with the unremitting support of the United States.

16. The overwhelming international consensus was that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would end either with implementation of the two-State solution or the annexation by Israel of the entire West Bank. In fact,

some Palestinians favoured the latter, as they believed that it would enable them to struggle for their civil rights in a single State, just as South Africans had struggled against apartheid. On the other hand, Israelis criticized the single-State solution because non-Jews would quickly become the majority in what was a Jewish State. However, the scenario of a single State was illusory. Although the two-State option was still a feasible solution, the more realistic scenario was that Israel would continue its current policies, with the overt support of the United States, until it had turned the West Bank into a patchwork of illegal settlements and isolated Palestinians cantons. Looking at a map, the casual observer might be led to believe that much of the West Bank was unoccupied. That was not the case, however, as the majority of the unoccupied territory was uninhabitable desert.

17. While it was not an official policy of Israel to take over the West Bank, it was doing precisely that and in the very same way that had been done for a century, in small steps, so that no one noticed, or so that people could at least pretend not to notice. Using a wide variety of techniques to dispossess Palestinians in the West Bank, Israel had managed to reduce the Arab population of that territory from approximately 300,000 in 1967 to roughly 60,000 today. The Palestinians who remained were virtually imprisoned in their isolated patches of territory, and Israel had no intention of annexing those areas. The analogies that were often made to South Africa were misleading. The South Africa of apartheid had been forced to sustain its black inhabitants because they had been the country's workforce. It had even tried to gain international support for its bantustans. Eventually, the settlements would be absorbed into Israel, thereby increasing the Jewish population of Israel, because there were very few Palestinians left in those areas.

18. That was the reality that was taking shape before the very eyes of the international community. It was the realistic alternative to a settlement based on the two-State solution, and there was every reason to expect that things would continue as they were, as long as the United States continued its support.

Interactive dialogue

19. **Ms. Goodman** (Moderator) asked what was the most important action that the United Nations could take to solve the crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

20. **Mr. Chomsky** (Professor Emeritus of Linguistics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology) said that the United Nations could act only as much as it was allowed to by the United States and its close allies, the United Kingdom and France. Although those Powers set strict limits, the United Nations could still take action within the restrictions imposed on it. For example, recognizing the State of Palestine would be a step forward. Nearly 130 Member States had already done that. Just recently, there had been significant developments in that regard in Europe. Sweden had announced that it would recognize the State of Palestine and the House of Commons of the United Kingdom had endorsed a motion calling on the United Kingdom Government to do the same. France had also indicated that it might recognize Palestine. The European Union, in an important move, had recently issued a directive calling on its member States to avoid any dealings with Israeli institutions that were involved with the occupation. Several major church groups in the United States had taken similar positions against multinational corporations that were involved in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In short, the most important thing that Member States could do was not to be complicit in criminal acts.

21. **Ms. Goodman** (Moderator) asked what was the most important action that the United States could take to help resolve the question of Palestine.

22. **Mr. Chomsky** (Professor Emeritus of Linguistics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology) said that the United States Government should, first and foremost, comply with United States legislation. The so-called Leahy Law, for example, prohibited the United States from providing weapons to any foreign military units that consistently committed human rights violations. The Israeli Army was committing massive human rights violations and, consequently, the provision of arms to Israel by the United States violated United States law. The United States should also revoke the tax-exempt status of United States-based organizations, including the Jewish National Fund, that were directly involved in the Israeli occupation and significant attacks on human and civil rights within Israel itself. Furthermore, domestic and international pressure should be brought to bear on the United States Government so that it no longer blocked efforts to achieve a political settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

23. **Ms. Goodman** (Moderator) wondered whether there had been a change in the way the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict was portrayed in the United States media, and whether America public opinion on that issue was shifting.

24. **Mr. Chomsky** (Professor Emeritus of Linguistics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology) said that United States media coverage was shifting away slightly from virtually uniform support for Israeli actions. Overall, however, the media continued to depict Israel merely as the victim and stress its right to self-defence. Although the right of self-defence was universal, neither States nor individuals could resort to violence in exercise of that right, unless they had exhausted all peaceful means to achieve a settlement. Israel continued to thwart all efforts to resolve its conflict with the Palestinians peacefully, and thus had no right to defend itself by violence. Although Israeli towns had been targeted, Israel could stop the rocket attacks launched against it merely by respecting the ceasefire to which it had agreed.

25. The United States was not an honest broker in the conflict. Indeed, even some United States negotiators had admitted that their country acted as if it were Israel's lawyer. The mainstream media continued to overlook that fundamental truth. Serious negotiations must bring together Israel and the United States on one side and the Palestinians on the other, and should be brokered by a neutral third party, such as Brazil.

26. Although opinion in United States regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was not shifting as fast as in Europe, there was a substantial shift among young people. He no longer needed police protection when speaking at universities in the United States, and his lectures were no longer broken up by those who objected to his views. Instead, students across that country were increasingly interested in the topics about which he spoke and Palestinian solidarity had become one of the biggest issues on university campuses.

27. Substantial efforts at the domestic level, possibly with support from international institutions, to compel the United States to respect its own laws could spur further positive changes. If they were made aware of their Government's actions, many Americans might question why they were funding military units that committed massive human rights violations and why they were compelled to pay taxes to subsidize organizations that violated fundamental human rights abroad.

28. **Ms. Goodman** (Moderator) asked Mr. Chomsky what advice he would give if he were writing a reader's guide about how *The New York Times* covered Israel and Palestine, and wondered what he thought of the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement.

29. **Mr. Chomsky** (Professor Emeritus of Linguistics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology) said that, in a reader's guide, he would advise people to watch the news programme *Democracy Now!* The boycott, sanctions and divestment movement followed a set of tactics that should be employed when it was likely they would achieve results. However, tactics were not principles and should be adopted by activists only when they were likely to benefit victims. Many important stakeholders had adopted the tactics of the boycott, sanctions and divestment movement to bring pressure to bear on Israel. However, those tactics should not be confused with the movement itself, which had failed to ask questions that were crucial to activists, namely, what actions could help and what actions could harm the victims of Israel. Although the movement had successfully raised awareness of the consequences of the Israeli occupation and strengthened support in the West for efforts to end the occupation, its call for action to continue until Israel allowed the Palestine refugees to exercise their right of return had led to a backlash and had been interpreted by the general public as simply a call for the destruction of the State of Israel. Stakeholders must not take actions that they believed were principled when, in reality, they harmed victims.

30. **Mr. Mansour** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that there was overwhelming support among the international community for the Palestinian cause. He agreed that Israel and the United States had had a profound impact on the Palestinian people, but emphasized that the Palestinians themselves remained key players in the equation and were steadfast in their determination to shape their own destiny and win their freedom. The Palestinian struggle had much in common with the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. Palestinians would never agree to live in bantustans or accept life under a never-ending occupation, but would continue their struggle for independence. Efforts by the United Nations, civil society organizations and other stakeholders in support of the Palestinians' quest for justice were deeply appreciated. Despite ongoing efforts by Israel and its supports to undermine Palestinian unity and thwart the

achievement of the two-State solution, Palestinians had recently formed a national consensus Government, thereby ending the split between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Israeli attempts to derail Palestinian reconciliation would not succeed.

31. **Mr. Chomsky** (Professor Emeritus of Linguistics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology) said that it was both moving and inspiring to see a people striving to achieve their rights. He believed that the Palestinians would eventually succeed in their quest for justice.

32. **Ms. Jebreal** (Journalist and author) asked Mr. Chomsky what action he would take if he were President of the Palestinian Authority.

33. **Mr. Chomsky** said that it was very important to end the division between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and combat efforts to undermine the Palestinian national unity Government. Every effort must be made to resist the further fragmentation and cantonization of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The independence struggles of Palestine and Western Sahara, the world's last remaining colonies, merited the support of the international community and must be led by the people of those countries themselves. It was therefore appropriate that the Palestinian Authority had taken the lead in the Palestinian people's struggle. It was also vital to raise international awareness of the question of Palestine.

34. **Mr. Mashabane** (South Africa) asked what progressive forces should do in support of the Palestinians' aspirations when Israel's ongoing land confiscations were seriously threatening the viability of the two-State solution. He also wondered whether Sweden's recent recognition of the State of Palestine and the endorsement by the House of Commons of the United Kingdom of a motion in favour of recognition had the potential to change the balance of forces in the international community, including in the Security Council.

35. **Mr. Chomsky** (Professor Emeritus of Linguistics, Massachusetts Institute of Technology) said he believed that the two-State solution was still possible. If sufficient domestic and international pressure were brought to bear on the United States, it could compel Israel to terminate the occupation. Progressive forces could do many things to help achieve a two-State settlement, which was the best short-term solution to the conflict. If the violence could be reduced, cultural, commercial and other connections would begin to

develop, leading to further integration that would benefit both Israelis and Palestinians. There was also no reason why the borders that had been imposed on the region by the United Kingdom and France should be regarded as inviolable; indeed, artificial borders in other parts of the world were weakening and that could happen in Palestine. Such a development could also prove beneficial in the quest for a solution to the very pressing and significant refugee problem.

36. Over 130 countries had already recognized the State of Palestine. The recent moves by certain European States in favour of recognition had finally broken the unanimity of the West on the Palestinian issue, reflecting a shift in European attitudes towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The moves by Sweden and the United Kingdom could stimulate further positive moves and could help gather further momentum for a viable two-State solution, as a first step towards a more appropriate long-term settlement

The meeting rose at 5.05 p.m.