

ISRAEL

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Statement by:

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Agenda Item 32: Report of the Special Committee to
Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights
of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the
Occupied Territories

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Mr. Chairman,

This year, the so called Special Committee has been busy again with resolutions, reports, statements and documents on the situation in the Middle East, which are then discussed at great length by the 4th Committee. Again, we undertake the tedious task of drawing this committee's attention to the sheer waste and duplication, which some of our colleagues insist on imposing on the UN's woefully overtaxed agenda. Indeed, when we look around us in this very chamber, it is obvious that even those of us who do bother to attend the hearings and follow the long, interminable and vacuous speeches, do not seriously think that they produce any real effect on the ground.

It is an incontestable fact, that all these hours, days and weeks of futile rhetoric have no bearing whatsoever on the well-being of the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The only effect of this absurd, indeed shameful, waste of resources is to further undermine the credibility of the United Nations as a relevant, serious and balanced player in global politics. Moreover, it reinforces those voices (not only in Israel) who advocate the marginalizing of the UN, in order to leave the real and complex business of peace negotiations to other, more effective and more objective intermediaries.

But then again, it is not just a question of resources, but also the one-sided nature of the mandate of the Special Committee. Its very name establishes, a priori, the conclusions of its purported 'investigation'. Moreover, the fact that less than half of this body's membership votes to renew the Special Committee's mandate, attests to the international community's view of its work.

And let us not forget, that while the Special Committee 'investigates', while my esteemed colleagues deliberate endlessly in New-York and Geneva and while the observers are busy 'observing', the Palestinians themselves can – and should - actively pursue measures on the ground that – if carried out – would greatly improve their own situation on the ground.

Indeed, in 2005 it certainly did improve. According to the World Bank figures, total Palestinian GDP shot up by 9 percent and per capita – by 5 percent. The volume of bilateral trade with Israel increased by 13 percent, and unemployment diminished by 3.4 percent. The number of tourists visiting the Palestinian town of Bethlehem went up by 165 percent and the Palestinian "El Kuds" share-index propelled upwards by 300 percent. By the end of 2005 – again, according to the World Bank – the Palestinian GNP was back up to about 90 percent of its 2000 level. Not for the first time, a window of opportunity was briefly opened for the Palestinians. Things seemed to be moving in the right direction.

Mr. Chairman,

Last year Israel withdrew its army and communities from Gaza, and we addressed this Committee with words of hope and cautious optimism. Later on, in February 2006, the Israeli people elected a new government, headed by Mr. Ehud Olmert, which committed itself to a massive, unprecedented realignment of its forces and civilian population in the West Bank. Sadly, the Palestinians responded by electing a government drawn from the ranks of the Hamas terrorist organization, and by

continuing and escalating the Gaza-based terrorist activities, including rocket attacks, directed against Israeli towns and villages.

The response of the international community was clear. The Quartet (made up of the United States of America, the Russian Federation, the United Nations and the European Union), stated on the 26th January 2006:

"The Palestinian people have voted for change, but it is the view of the Quartet that their aspirations for peace and statehood..... remain unchanged. The Quartet reiterates its view that there is a fundamental contradiction between armed group and militia activities and the building of a democratic state. A two-state solution to the conflict requires all participants in the democratic process to renounce violence and terror, accept Israel's right to exist, and disarm, as outlined in the Roadmap".

Four days later, on the 30th January, the Quartet reiterated that message and added:

"It is the view of the Quartet that all members of a future Palestinian government must be committed to nonviolence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the Roadmap".

Unfortunately, the Palestinian leadership has not heeded those cautionary words. Instead, it continued to consolidate its terrorist links with Syria and Iran, and entrenched itself even further in an ideology of hatred and incitement. Consequently, the international community was left with no alternative but to sever its links with the Hamas government, and cut down its direct aid to Palestinian Authority organs. Hamas was thus itself responsible for plunging the Palestinian population into deeper levels of misery, deprivation and despair.

Now, this Special Committee and some of my colleagues in this room are treating us to a litany of depressing facts and figures, describing the tragic conditions for Palestinians on the ground. Yet again, everything is placed at Israel's doorstep. What we are told here, essentially, is that the Palestinians cannot be held responsible for their own choices. They are tantamount to children, who should not be held accountable for their own wrong decisions. Well, Mr. Chairman, we do not adhere to this view. The Palestinian people are just as responsible for their actions and omissions as any other people.

Israel cannot always be held responsible for the consequences of the bad choices made by others. The Palestinians were free to elect a peace-pursuing government, which could have built upon the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and the good faith and generous aid extended by the international community. They chose not to. Now they are unfortunately paying the price.

Naturally, we do not consider ourselves beyond criticism. Nothing leveled at us in this Chamber can even begin to compare to the degree and intensity of the self-criticism so acute in Israeli society. You are all invited – especially my Arab colleagues – to peruse our free press (some of it also in English and Arabic), in order to witness for yourselves the severity with which we judge ourselves, and the openness of our social and political culture. Furthermore, Israel wishes to make clear that it is open - as a democratic state - to discussion of the human rights situation in the West Bank and

Gaza Strip. In any given year, the region is examined by foreign government agencies - such as the US Department of State; by the European Union; by UN bodies and Special Rapporteurs; and reputable NGO's of international stature such as Amnesty International. It is however a pity that some of the afore-mentioned choose to examine Israeli actions, but for some reason refrain from examining the Palestinian Authority actions, which so often impinge upon the human rights of its own people.

Distinguished colleagues, you are therefore asked to consider: Do we really need yet another body to rehash the work that is already being done by others? And can we really accept the work of the Special Committee when its outcome has been pre-dictated by its own mandate?

The answer is, of course, that we must not sanction such a body. That is precisely why a majority of states do not vote in favour of the resolution. Nevertheless, the resolution has passed as a matter of course year after year.

And in all those other states where the "human rights situation" is examined - it goes without saying that all violations by all relevant parties should be equally and objectively investigated. Why is it then that this Committee is called upon to authorize a mandate of "investigation" of one side only? Surely no one in this chamber contends that the Palestinian Authority is innocent of numerous human rights violations as documented repeatedly by the international community and responsible NGOs.

However, the imbalance does not stop with the Special Committee. Let us not forget the existence of two other redundant bodies: the Division for Palestinian Rights, the only division within the DPA that is devoted to one people, and the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable rights of the Palestinian People. All are bodies that invariably serve as anti-Israel propaganda apparatuses, countering the principles of the Charter and the objective of a more effective United Nations that abides by high standards of integrity, efficiency and prioritized allocation of resources.

In this context it would be appropriate to repeat the budgetary consideration already raised by my delegation in the past. The UN budget for the biennium 2006-2007, earmarks 227,500 USD for the Special Committee. That comes on top of 61,000 USD for the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, 604,600 USD for the Information Programme within the DPI, and 5,826,700 USD for the Department of Palestinian Rights within the DPA.

The above figures betray the most amazing truth: the UN has decided to expend during 2006-2007 no less than 6.7 million USD out of its own regular operations' budget on these 4 organs. That is astonishing, especially when compared with the UN regular budget of just 9.7 million USD earmarked for Africa.

Mr. Chairman,

Our committee will soon conclude its deliberations. At this point, we would like to remind the distinguished delegates of the words of paragraph 161(f) of the Outcome Document of the High-Level Plenary Meeting (A/59/L.70) of 13th September 2005:

"We strongly urge the Secretary-General to make the best and most efficient use of resources in accordance with clear rules and procedures agreed by the General Assembly, in the interest of all Member States, by adopting the best management practices, including effective use of information and communication technologies, with a view to increase efficiency and enhance organizational capacity, concentrating on those tasks that reflect the agreed priorities of the Organization".

Many of my distinguished colleagues in this Chamber will agree that the work of the Special Committee does not serve in any conceivable manner the agenda or agreed priorities of the United Nations as a member of the Quartet, cosponsoring the Road Map process to end terror and violence and renew dialogue in the Middle East. We must not shy away from putting an end to this futile waste of UN resources. We therefore call upon all like-minded member-states to withdraw their support for this redundant Committee.

Mr. Chairman,

Israel believes that the work of the Special Committee is utterly divorced from reality. The text before us betrays a biased and anachronistic picture of the situation in the region, where the rights of only one side are acknowledged. We therefore urge the Palestinians to stop wasting their efforts on futile diplomatic maneuvers and concentrate on the only possible way for emerging out of the current situation, namely: ending terror, acceptance of all existing agreements and the re-opening of direct and sincere peace negotiations with Israel. We call upon the international community to take real, constructive measures in order to assist and support the Israeli and Palestinian peoples in their attempt to end their decades-long bloody conflict. Unfortunately, the work of the Special Committee does not constitute such a measure.

I thank you Mr. Chairman.