**Fourth Committee Concludes Its Work, Approving 9 Middle East Related Drafts Out of 10 Submitted for Adoption by General Assembly**

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Concluding its work for the main part of the seventy‑second session, the Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) approved 10 draft resolutions today, of which 9 related to Israeli practices in the occupied Arab territories and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

The Committee approved — by a recorded vote of 160 in favour to 2 against (Israel, South Sudan), with 10 abstentions (Cameroon, Canada, Côte d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Paraguay, Solomon Islands, United States) — a draft resolution titled “Assistance to Palestine refugees” (document A/C.4/72/L.17).

By that text, the General Assembly would express grave concern at the difficult situation of Palestine refugees under occupation, in particular those in the Gaza Strip, underlining the importance of assistance and urgent reconstruction efforts there.  It would call upon all donors to continue strengthening their efforts to meet the Agency’s anticipated needs, including for recent emergency, recovery and reconstruction appeals, plans for Gaza and for regional crisis responses to the situation of Palestine refugees in Syria.

The Committee also approved — by a recorded 156 votes in favour to 7 against (Canada, Israel, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, South Sudan, United States), with 8 abstentions (Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, Togo) — a draft titled “Persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities” (document A/C.4/72/L.18).

By the terms of that text, the General Assembly would reaffirm the right of all persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities to return to their homes or former places of residence.  It would further stress the need for the accelerated return of those displaced, strongly appealing to all Governments, organizations and individuals to contribute generously to UNRWA and others in that regard.

In a subsequent action, the Committee approved a draft titled “Operations of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East” (document A/C.4/72/L.19), by which the General Assembly would express deep concern about the Agency’s critical financial situation, noting that contributions had been neither predictable nor sufficient to meet its growing needs.  As such, the Assembly would stress the need for further efforts to comprehensively address the Agency’s recurrent funding shortages, while commending its measures to address the financial crisis.

However, the Assembly would, by other terms, express profound concern that despite such measures, UNRWA’s programme budget — funded primarily through voluntary contributions from Member States and intergovernmental organizations — faced persistent shortfalls that increasingly threatened the Agency’s core programmes.  Further, the Assembly would appeal to States and organizations to maintain their voluntary contributions to the Agency, as well as increase contributions where possible.

Further by the text, the Assembly would call upon donors to provide early annual voluntary contributions, less earmarking and multi‑year funding, in line with the Grand Bargain on humanitarian financing announced at the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, Turkey, in May 2016.  The Assembly would also voice concern about the continuing imposition of restrictions on free movement and access for UNRWA personnel, vehicles and goods, as well as the injury, harassment and intimidation of its staff.  The Committee approved that draft by a recorded vote of 160 in favour to 6 against (Canada, Israel, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, South Sudan, United States), with 7 abstentions (Bahamas, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Nauru, Paraguay, Solomon Islands).

The Committee went on to approve a draft titled “Palestine refugees’ properties and their revenues” (document A/C.4/71/L.20) by a recorded 158 vote of in favour to 7 against (Canada, Israel, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, South Sudan, United States), with 8 abstentions (Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, Solomon Islands, Togo).

By that text, the General Assembly would request that the Secretary‑General take all appropriate steps to protect Arab property, assets and property rights in Israel.  Further, it would call upon Israel to render all facilities and assistance to the Secretary‑General for the resolution’s implementation and call upon all parties concerned to provide the Secretary‑General with any pertinent information concerning such property in Israel.  Moreover, the Assembly would urge the Palestinian and Israeli sides, as agreed between them, to deal with the important issue of Palestine refugees’ properties and revenues within the framework of final‑status peace negotiations.

The Committee also approved a draft resolution titled “Work of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories” (document A/C.4/72/L.21) by a recorded vote of 86 in favour to 11 against, with 75 abstentions.  By that text, the General Assembly would request the Special Committee to continue investigating Israeli policies and practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, especially violations of the Geneva Convention, and to consult with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in order to ensure safeguards for the welfare and human rights of the peoples of the occupied territories.  It would also request that the Special Committee submit regular periodic reports to the Secretary‑General regarding the current situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and to continue to investigate the treatment and status of prisoners and detainees.

The Committee then approved — by a recorded 159 votes in favour to 8 against (Canada, Israel, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Solomon Islands, South Sudan, United States), with 7 abstentions (Australia, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Paraguay, Togo, Vanuatu) — a draft titled “Applicability of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the other occupied Arab territories” (document A/C.4/72/L.22).

By that draft, the General Assembly would demand that Israel accept the de jure applicability of the Geneva Convention in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and other Arab territories occupied by Israel since 1967, and that it comply scrupulously with the provisions of the Convention.  Further by that text, the Assembly would call upon all High Contracting Parties to the Convention to continue to exert all efforts to ensure respect for its provisions by Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Taking up a draft titled “Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan” (document A/C.4/72/L.23), the Committee approved it by a recorded vote of 155 in favour to 8 against (Canada, Israel, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Solomon Islands, South Sudan, United States), with 10 abstentions (Australia, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Honduras, Malawi, Paraguay, Togo, Tuvalu, Vanuatu).

According to that text, the General Assembly would condemn acts of violence, destruction, harassment, provocation and incitement by Israeli settlers in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.  It would call upon Israel to accept the de jure applicability of the Geneva Convention and to comply with all its obligations under international law.  Moreover, the Assembly would demand that Israel comply with its legal obligations, as mentioned in the advisory opinion rendered by the International Court of Justice on 9 July 2004.

Taking up a draft titled “Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem” (document A/C.4/72/L.24), the Committee approved it by a recorded vote of 155 in favour to 9 against (Australia, Canada, Israel, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Solomon Islands, South Sudan, United States), with 8 abstentions (Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Honduras, Paraguay, Togo, Vanuatu).

By that text, the Assembly would demand that Israel cease all practices and actions violating the human rights of the Palestinian people, including the killing and injury of civilians, the arbitrary detention and imprisonment of civilians, forced displacement, and any obstruction of humanitarian assistance, among others.  The Assembly would also demand that Israel comply fully with the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention and cease all settlement activity, construction of the wall, and any other measures aimed at altering the character, status and demographic composition of the Occupied Palestinian Territory.  It would further demand that Israel comply with its legal obligations under international law, as mentioned in the 9 July, 2004, advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, and as demanded in General Assembly resolutions ES-10/15 and ES-10/13 of 21 October 2003.

The Committee went on to approve a draft titled “The occupied Syrian Golan” (document A/C.4/72/L.25) by a recorded 154 votes in favour to 2 against (Israel, South Sudan), with 17 abstentions.  By its terms, the General Assembly would call upon Israel to comply with the relevant resolutions on the occupied Syrian Golan, in particular Security Council resolution 497 (1981), by which the Council determined that Israel’s decision to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration on the occupied Syrian Golan was null and void, and without international legal effect, demanding that Israel rescind its decision.

Further by that text, the Assembly would call upon Israel to desist from changing the physical character, demographic composition, institutional structure and legal status of the occupied Syrian Golan, and to desist, in particular, from establishing settlements.  The Assembly would also call upon Israel to desist from its own citizenship and identity cards on the Syrian citizens of the occupied Syrian Golan.

In closing remarks, Fourth Committee Chair Rafael Darío Ramírez Carreño (Venezuela) noted that the Committee had approved 39 draft resolutions and 4 draft decisions.  Throughout the session, it had held 28 formal meetings, covering a wide range of issues, he added.

Also speaking today were representatives of the United States, Israel, Estonia (for the European Union), Syria and Iran, as well as an observer for the State of Palestine.

Representatives of Indonesia and Cuba presented the draft resolutions for action.

The Fourth Committee will reconvene at a date and time to be announced.

Action on Draft Resolutions

The Committee first took up a series of drafts relating to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) (documents A/72/C.4/L.17-L.20).

The representative of Indonesia introduced those drafts, saying they reflected the latest developments in the Agency’s operations, including severe and recurrent shortages in funding.  As highlighted in the Secretary‑General’s report on the Agency’s operations and consultations earlier in 2017, UNRWA was recognized as an important partner, even in the context of instability and socioeconomic deterioration in the region, noting efforts to mobilize resources and stabilize its financial situation.  Ensuring continuity in its services called urgently for predictable and sustainable funding, he emphasized, noting that the Secretary‑General had offered important proposals in that regard, including calling on States to maintain and increase their voluntary contributions, with less earmarking and multi‑year funding.  Those recommendations were reflected in the draft resolution before the Committee, he said, urging delegations to support its implementation.

The representative of Cuba then introduced five drafts on the Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories (documents A/C.4/72/L.21-L25).  They focused on the many violations of international law, particularly international humanitarian law, committed by Israel, the occupying Power, he said, noting that the violations had been documented by the relevant United Nations organs as well as other human rights organizations.  They had been reported to the Special Committee on the basis of interviews with victims and civil society.  Unfortunately, Israel’s actions persisted, he noted, citing forced displacement and provocations, particularly in East Jerusalem, as well as the blockade of the Gaza Strip.  Israel had also persisted in illegal settlement activity, including the demolition of houses and the imposition of roadblocks, thereby undermining the viability of the two‑State approach to the Israeli‑Palestinian peace process.

The Committee then moved to take action on the UNRWA drafts.

The representative of the United States said in a general statement that his delegation opposed the drafts because they were biased against Israel and undermined trust between the two parties involved.  Member States continued to single out Israel with such texts, condemning settlement activity but not violence, he said, pointing out that the only mention of Hamas was praise of its reconciliation agreement with Fatah.  The United States would, therefore, vote against such one‑sided draft resolutions and encouraged others to do so as well.  He said that his delegation was especially concerned about drafts on such United Nations bodies as the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices, and the Division for Palestinian Rights, because they wasted limited resources without contributing to peace in the region, instead perpetuating a United Nations bias against Israel.  While the United States supported UNRWA’s work with refugees, it did not support funding the Agency from the United Nations regular budget.  That country had long been its largest donor, having already contributed more than $350 million in 2017, and being an active supporter of its attempts to secure new funding mechanisms.  He called for equal burden‑sharing among those States that cared about UNRWA, recalling that Member States expressing concern about the Agency’s funding shortfall as the Committee considered its work included those contributing only minimally to its budget.  He urged them to “match their rhetoric with action” and to provide voluntary donations.

The representative of Israel, speaking in explanation of position on all the drafts under consideration, asked whether the accusations of a regime guilty of committing heinous war crimes against its own people did anything to help the Palestinian cause.  Did false and offensive rhetoric do anything to promote dialogue and positive change?  The draft resolutions being considered today would do little to resolve the conflict in the Middle East and did nothing but pay lip service to the Committee’s mission, she said, emphasizing that they promoted a distorted picture of reality on the ground, absolved the Palestinians of any responsibility and failed to mention the positive developments achieved over the past year.  The draft on the Special Committee to investigate Israeli practices exemplified the waste of United Nations resources, she said.  As for the Temple Mount, the relative draft deliberately omitted any reference to Jewish or Christian connections to that site.  Since Israel’s founding, she noted, Palestinians had never changed their warlike attitude towards the Jewish people and they continued to reject efforts towards peace, she said, adding that they would rather demonize Israel in the Committee than work constructively to solve common problems.  Israel supported “two States for two peoples” and hoped Member States would not give the Palestinians a free pass for their one‑sided approach on that matter.  She expressed regret over the need to explain why her country would vote against the drafts since they did nothing for either party in their direct dialogue for peace and were nothing more than a political exercise.

The Committee then approved the draft resolution “Assistance to Palestine refugees” (document A/C.4/72/L.17) by a recorded vote of 160 in favour to 2 against (Israel, South Sudan), with 10 abstentions (Cameroon, Canada, Côte d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Paraguay, Solomon Islands, United States).

Taking up the draft “Persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities” (document A/C.4/72/L.18), it approved that text by a recorded vote of 156 in favour to 7 against (Canada, Israel, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, South Sudan, United States), with 8 abstentions (Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, Togo).

By a subsequent recorded vote of 160 in favour to 6 against (Canada, Israel, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, South Sudan, United States), with 7 abstentions (Bahamas, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Nauru, Paraguay, Solomon Islands), the Committee approved the draft “Operations of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East” (document A/C.4/72/L.19).

It went on to on to approve the draft “Palestine refugees’ properties and their revenues” (document A/C.4/71/L.20) by a recorded vote of 158 in favour to 7 against (Canada, Israel, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, South Sudan, United States), with 8 abstentions (Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, Solomon Islands, Togo).

The Committee then took up a series of resolutions relating to the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories (documents A/C.4/72/L.21-L25).

Taking up the draft “Work of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories” (document A/C.4/72/L.21), the Committee approved it by a recorded vote of 86 in favour to 11 against, with 75 abstentions.

It then approved — by a recorded vote of 159 in favour to 8 against (Canada, Israel, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Solomon Islands, South Sudan, United States), with 7 abstentions (Australia, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Paraguay, Togo, Vanuatu) — the draft “Applicability of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the other Occupied Arab territories” (document A/C.4/72/L.22).

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It went on to approve — by a recorded 154 votes in favour to 2 against (Israel, South Sudan), with 17 abstentions — the draft “The occupied Syrian Golan” (document A/C.4/72/L.25).

The representative of Estonia, speaking in explanation of position on behalf of the European Union, said the bloc had not found a legal qualification of the term “forced displacement” in the draft resolutions.  Furthermore, use of the term “Palestine” was not recognition by the European Union of the State of Palestine.  The European Union was concerned about the worrying developments at the Temple Mount site and recalled the special designation of holy sites, she said, emphasizing the importance of upholding the status quo in that regard.  The European Union’s vote did not represent a change of position on those issues, but the choice of language may affect its future voting patterns, she said.

The representative of Syria said in a general statement that the Committee had, once again with the exception of two Member States, sent a clear message to Israel that its occupation of the Syrian Golan contravened international law.  He called upon that country to end its occupation of Arab territory and to respect human rights and the Fourth Geneva Convention.  Israel’s activities in support of terrorist groups had been condemned by those protecting the primacy of international law, he said, emphasizing that the Balfour Declaration did not constitute divine justification of Israel’s crimes in Palestine.  Israel was cooperating with Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da’esh) and Nusrah Front, he said, recalling the deaths of “Blue Helmets” from Fiji at the hands of those groups.  In doing so, Israel was in violation of Security Council resolutions prohibiting support of terrorists, he noted.  Israel had arrested the “Mandela of Syria” simply for his opposition to the occupation of the Syrian Golan and detained him once again because he had documented the cooperation between Israel and Nusrah Front.  In closing, he described Zionism as a weapon of mass destruction, a chemical weapon that had perpetrated mass destruction in the Middle East.

FEDA ABDELHADY-NASSER, Deputy Permanent Observer for the State of Palestine, expressed gratitude to all delegations that had voted in favour of the draft resolutions under consideration.  They constituted important recommendations to the General Assembly on core issues and challenges since the occupation and, indeed, the partition of Palestine.  “These are principled resolutions, not cynical,” she said, emphasizing that they were firmly rooted in international law.  Far from being one‑sided, she said, the texts reflected the international consensus, constituting a genuine expression of multilateralism despite ongoing attempts to nullify international law in that regard.  It was important to support the rights of Palestine refugees, she said, confirming that those rights had not been diminished.  The draft resolutions were “not empty pieces of paper”, but instead represented safeguards of those rights, she said.  The State of Palestine mobilization of all efforts aimed at upholding the international community’s responsibility to end the unjust and unlawful situation.

The representative of Iran said the representative of the Israeli regime should not waste the Committee’s time defending her country’s actions.  Instead, she should repent Israel’s various sins, such as occupation and the killing of innocent children.  Citing the Secretary‑General’s report, he noted that the Israeli regime had killed 63 innocent Palestinians in 2017, 20 of them children.

Finally, the Committee turned to the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly.  Acting without a vote, it approved the draft decision “Proposed programme of work and timetable of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) for the seventy‑third session of the General Assembly” (document A/C.4/72/L.11).

Concluding Remarks

RAFAEL DARÍO RAMÍREZ CARREÑO (Venezuela), Chair of the Fourth Committee, noted that it had approved 39 draft resolutions and 4 draft decisions during the session.  It had held 28 formal meetings, covering a wide range of agenda items.  Welcoming the presence of senior officials during the session, including the President of the General Assembly and various heads of department, he also noted that States had been represented by members of parliament, directors and other high‑level officials.  During the decolonization debate, 116 individuals and organizations had addressed the Committee as petitioners from several Non‑Self‑Governing Territories, he said, recalling also that the Committee had held a joint panel discussion with the First Committee (Disarmament and International Security) during the outer space discussion.  Noting that some delegates had been concerned about proceedings in the Committee, he emphasized that its discussions had been guided by the sovereignty of all States, expressing gratitude to all who had attended and demonstrated that respect.