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**CEIRPP 386th Meeting, Special meeting in observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977**

CHAIR: I declare open the 386th meeting of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. This is a special meeting to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly Resolution 32/40B of 2 December 1977.

It is, therefore, my honor and my pleasure to welcome His Excellency Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, President of the General Assembly; His Excellency Mr. Sebastiano Cardi, President of the Security Council; Ms. Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General and Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations; His Excellency Mr. Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations and Representative Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas at this meeting; Mr. Jeffrey Feldman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs; and Mr. Andrew Gilmour, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights and Head of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in New York. In addition, His Excellency Mr. Amrith Rohan Perera, Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka and Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, will join us during the second half of this meeting.

I also wish to welcome representatives of Member States, intergovernmental organizations, and representatives of civil society organization, and all those who have accepted the Committee’s invitation to participate in this special meeting. Special thanks also go to Mr. Salil Shetty, Secretary General of Amnesty International, who has kindly accepted our Committee’s invitation to participate in this meeting and deliver a message on behalf of civil society active on the question of Palestine.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, allow me at this point to make a statement in my capacity as the Chair.

Today, as we gather once again to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, we are reminded that this year marks 100 years since the Balfour Declaration. When the United Nations undertook to address the question of Palestine in 1947, a decision was made by the General Assembly in its Resolution 181 to—on 29 December 1947 to partition Palestine for the formation of two sovereign adjoining states. However, today one of those states, the State of Palestine, has yet to attain its independence and sovereignty over its territory.

It is worth reflecting that while the General Assembly continues to reaffirm annually with overwhelming support the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, regrettably, today there is still much to be done for the Palestinian people, including Palestinian refugees, to enjoy their universal human rights. As an international community, we must do more for the realization of the rights in line with the United Nations Charter, international law, and the relevant United Nations resolutions. You must also act to ensure that our collective desire for a future where the Palestinian and Israeli people live peacefully and in security without fear or prejudice becomes attainable, and that not another generation will have to endure this tragedy.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is a light of hope, reconciliation between Palestinians, unity between Palestinians and the end of the division between Gaza Strip and the West Bank, as well as the response to humanitarian challenges such as the catastrophic situation in the Gaza Strip, and the involvement of the Palestinian people in the peace process. We are pleased at the efforts made in this direction, and we call on the Israeli authorities in accordance with their commitments to constructively enter this process by taking decisive measures to favor peace.

It is essential for Palestinian reconciliation to translate into a peace process which is results-oriented, on the basis of long-established parameters, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid Principles, the Arab Peace Initiative, and the Quartet Roadmap for the Middle East. In this connection, we lend our support to the ongoing efforts aimed at relaunching the peace process, namely by the United States, the Russian Federation, and Egypt.

On this International Day of Solidarity, let us pledge on behalf of the Palestinian and indeed also of the Israeli people with all our diplomatic and moral might, to keep our commitment and resolve to materialize the ultimate goal of the two-state solution on the basis of pre-1967 borders. I wish to reaffirm that our committee, in line with the mandate bestowed upon it by the General Assembly, will continue its work to promote the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination and independence.

It is now my honor to give the floor to the President of the General Assembly, His Excellency Mr. Miroslav Lajčák.

H.E. MR. MIROSLAV LAJČÁK, PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY: Thank you very much, Mr. President. Good morning, Excellencies, Madame Deputy Secretary-General, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen. We are all here to mark the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, and I’d like to begin by thanking the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for organizing this special meeting.

In preparation, I looked up the definition of solidarity, and I read that it is a union which arises from common responsibilities and interests. There is no doubt about it. The international community has a common responsibility towards the Palestinian people, and we have a shared interest in the peaceful resolution of this long-running conflict. So it is clear why we are here: to show our solidarity with the Palestinian people.

I’ll make two main points on this today. The first is that we can show our solidarity through humanitarian assistance. We cannot just address the needs of Palestinian people on international days or at annual events like the one we are celebrating today; they demand our attention 365 days a year. People throughout the Palestinian territory are, as we speak, in need of concrete support. I want to focus, however, on the Gaza Strip where the situation is grave. The ongoing blockade has left people wholly dependent on international aid. The rebuilding of critical infrastructure has been hampered. The economy remains weak. Many people are in dire humanitarian need, with women and children living in particularly difficult circumstances. And the Strip is home to more unemployed people than almost any other part of the world.

I’d like to use this opportunity to sincerely thank all actors and entities which continue to provide humanitarian support to the Palestinian people. These include Member States, UN bodies, and regional and nongovernmental organizations. A vital role is played by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, and I’m concerned about the agency’s current serious shortfall of US$77.5 million. I encourage discussions on funding modalities to continue. Importantly, I want to express my appreciation to all Member States which contribute on a voluntary basis to the Agency’s budget and work.

We know that the question of Palestine can give rise to debate; however, when it comes to assistance to the Palestinian people, all United Nations Member States have been able to express solidarity in one voice, and consensus of the General Assembly has been essential in this regard.

I want to stress, however, that our responsibility to the Palestinian people extends beyond humanitarian support. And this brings me to my second point which is that international solidarity must be used to facilitate a peaceful resolution of the Palestinian question. In 1947, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 181. This formed a legal basis for the establishment of the State of Israel, as well as a second state for the Palestinian people. In the 70 years that followed, only one of these two things has come to pass. I firmly believe that a two-state solution is the only answer to what we call the question of Palestine. Support to this solution acts also as an expression of solidarity with the Palestinian people.

This further means supporting the establishment of conditions which are conducive to a successful peace process. We have seen some of these conditions beginning to take shape. I’m of course referring here to the recent commitments made to intra-Palestinian reconciliation. But we need more, including an immediate halt to settlement expansion. Other necessary conditions include the cessation and condemnation of all acts of violence, including terrorism as well as the incitement to these acts.

Excellencies, before I conclude, I want to go back to the definition of solidarity, and in doing so, I want to stress that solidarity is not sympathy. We usually express sympathy where things where there is nothing we can do. However, when it comes to the question of Palestine, we have a responsibility and we have an interest. Palestinian people do not need our sympathy. They deserve our solidarity. We came here today to express it. However, the people who need it the most will not be able to hear us. They are not sitting amongst us. They are not listening from the gallery. They are on the ground, many of them in conditions we could not imagine. So while our words in this hall are important, our actions outside of it will speak louder.

I thank you.

CHAIR: I thank the President of the General Assembly, His Excellency Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, for his important statement. Our committee is thankful for your stewardship of the Assembly in dealing with the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory and the Middle East as a whole.

I now have the honor of giving the floor to the President of the Security Council, His Excellency Mr. Sebastiano Cardi. You have the floor, sir.

H.E. MR. SEBASTIANO CARDI, PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Madame Deputy Secretary-General, Excellencies, colleagues, Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank Mr. President of the General Assembly. I would like to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for inviting me to address this meeting in my capacity as President of the Security Council in November. The Security Council has remained seized of the situation in the Middle East including the Palestinian question. The Council has continued to receive monthly briefings from the Secretary-General’s Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and from the Department of Political Affairs to hold open debates on this agenda item on a quarterly basis and to receive the Secretary-General’s reports and briefings by the Special Coordinator every three months.

Mr. Chairman, the situation in the Middle East remains a constant concern for the Security Council due to the lack of a just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Council remains fully committed to a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace in the Middle East based on relevant Security Council resolutions. The Council members continue to recognize and commend the vital humanitarian work by the United Nations Reliefs and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees in the Near East along with other United Nations and humanitarian organizations, including in addressing critical needs in Gaza, and expresses its hope that the international community, including nontraditional donors, will continue to support the Agency at this critical time.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, the Security Council will continue to contribute to a just, lasting, and peaceful solution in order to achieve the peace and security that the Israeli and Palestinian people both need and deserve.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIR: I thank His Excellency Ambassador Cardi, President of the Security Council, for his important statement which reconfirms that the Council remains fully committed to a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace in the Middle East based on the vision of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. Thank you very much.

I now have the honor to give the floor to the Deputy Secretary-General, Ms. Amina J. Mohammed, who will read out a message on behalf of the Secretary-General, Mr. António Gutteres.

MS. AMINA J. MOHAMMED, DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS: President of the General Assembly, President of the Security Council, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, I will begin my remarks with a message from the Secretary-General who would’ve wished to have been here.

I quote. “The question of Palestine is inextricably linked with the history of the United Nations and is one of the longest unresolved issues of the organization’s agenda. Seventy years since the adoption of the General Assembly Resolution 181, a sovereign and independent State of Palestine has yet to emerge alongside the State of Israel. I remain convinced that the two-state solution recognized by that resolution is the only premise for a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace between Israelis and Palestinians. The resolution of this conflict would also create momentum for greater stability throughout the region.

Last August, during my visit to Israel and Palestine, leaders on both sides restated their commitment to a negotiated peace. I encouraged them to tangibly demonstrate this commitment and create the conditions for a return to meaningful negotiations. The recent positive developments on intra-Palestinian unity should be harnessed by all to move the process in the right direction. I reiterate my readiness to work with all stakeholders, including the Middle East Quartet and countries in the region to support a serious political process, drawing on all relevant UN resolutions, international law, and agreements that will realize the two-state solution, end half a century of occupation, and resolve all final-status issues. Now is the time to end the conflict by establishing an independent Palestinian state living side by side in peace and security with the State of Israel. Thank you.”

I will now move on to my own remarks. For 70 years, we have gathered every 29th of November to express our unwavering support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and independence and for the establishment of a Palestinian state to settle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict once and for all. We must continue to collectively strive to reach this goal. We must focus on reversing the current negative trajectory and promoting confidence among Palestinians and Israelis that a peaceful future is possible and enduring. Ending illegal Israeli settlement activity and demolitions in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is crucial to the viability of a future Palestinian state and to realizing the legitimate national and historic aspirations of both people.

Eliminating violence and incitement is essential to building trust. Gaza remains squeezed by crippling closures and in a state of constant humanitarian emergency with 2 million Palestinians struggling with crumbling infrastructure, an electricity crisis, a lack of basic services, chronic unemployment, and a paralyzed economy, all taking place amid an unfolding environmental disaster. This unsustainable reality demands urgent humanitarian, economic, and political measures to support the Palestinian population. We must not leave Palestinian women, children, and youth behind. Recent headway in advancing Palestinian unity, particularly the full return of the Gaza crossings to the control of the Palestine Authority on the 1st of November, is a landmark development in the implementation of the intra-Palestinian agreement signed in Cairo on the 12th of October. It is vital that all stakeholders work collectively and determinedly to maintain the positive momentum. Reconciliation is a key step in reaching the larger objective of a Palestine state. The Palestinian government should provide Palestinians living in Gaza a much-needed sense that Palestine is and must remain one and enable Gazans to uphold their human dignity and begin rebuilding their lives. Ending the occupation and achieving a two-state solution is the only path to enduring peace between Israelis and Palestinians. There is no other option. It is the only way to achieve the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

On this International Day of Solidarity, let us affirm our commitment to making the vision set out 70 years ago a reality.

I thank you.

CHAIR: I wish to thank the Deputy Secretary-General for taking the time out of her busy schedule to participate in this special meeting of our committee. Through you, Madam, I would also like to express the Committee’s sincere appreciation for the important message by the Secretary-General and your own personal message.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations, who will read out a message from His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine. Ambassador?

MR. RIYAD MANSOUR, PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATIVE: Mr. Chairman, Mr. President of the General Assembly, Mr. President of the Security Council, Madame Deputy Secretary-General, and other friends on the podium, ladies and gentlemen, it gives me a great honor to read the letter of His Excellency President Mahmoud Abbas to this meeting.

“Your Excellency Mr. António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations; Your Excellency Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, President of the United Nations General Assembly; Your Excellency Mr. Sebastiano Cardi, President of the Security Council; Your Excellency Mr. Fodé Seck, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Palestinian People of their Inalienable Rights; Excellencies; ladies and gentlemen:

Seventy years ago, on this very day, on the 29th of November 1947, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 181 (II), unjustly deciding on the partition of Palestine without the consent of its people, against their will, and in blatant disregard of their right to self-determination. A few months later, Israel forcibly uprooted two-thirds of the Palestinian people from their land and destroyed over 400 towns and villages, violently clearing the way for its forced acquisition of more than three-quarters of Palestine’s territory, far beyond what was decided in the partition plan. Then in 1967, 50 years ago, Israel occupied what remained of Palestine’s territories, constituting 22% of historical Palestine which comprises of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip.

Israel was established in 1948 and joined the United Nations soon thereafter at the time when the Palestinian people were tragically entering their Nakba and the Palestinian question remained unresolved. Seventy years later, the Palestinian people are still awaiting their long overdue freedom and independence and their rightful place among the community of nations. As painful as it is, reflecting on the history and these undisputed facts is essential on this anniversary, as our Nakba persists to this very day.

The Palestinians continue to be deprived and displaced. Their inalienable rights and national aspirations continue to be denied. Resolving this conflict requires rectifying this grave injustice by promoting human rights and international law. This is fundamental to guarantee the freedom and rights of the Palestinian people and to reach a just solution that anchors genuine peace, security, and coexistence for both people.

For 70 years, our nation has turned to the international community for redress and support in its struggle for liberation. Yet, for 70 years too long, this injustice has been ongoing with its daily share of violence, loss of human life, suffering and hardship, oppression, colonization, imprisonment and confinement, and collective punishment. And yet, our people, even as they remain deprived of their most basic rights, including their right to self-determination, our people persevere and remain committed to peace, the rule of law, and UN resolutions as the only path to enjoy this right.

This year, their perseverance was reflected, inter alia, in the peaceful resistance of our people in Jerusalem which reversed the decisions taken by Israel to further its control over al-Haram al-Sharif and the hunger strike by heroic Palestinian prisoners. It is also embodied in the everyday epic steadfastness of our people, even in the face of this historic injustice and the immense challenges they face living under foreign military occupation, blockade, and in exile.

On this day, every year, we honor the resilience of the Palestinian people. We honor the global solidarity with our just case, one of the greatest solidarity movements in recent times. This solidarity is rooted in the core principles of justice, freedom, equal rights, and dignity, all enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, in international law, and the constant shared goal of peace.

The Palestinian people have stood side-by-side with many nations. They supported their struggle for liberation and independence. They have witnessed their attainment of their freedom as colonialism and apartheid were brought to an end in their countries with the support of the international community.

We are honored to see these countries and their peoples stand by the Palestinian people today as they carry on their struggle to end the longest foreign occupation in modern history and finally take their rightful place among the community of free nations. On this day, we recall the words of the hero Nelson Mandela, his words on the indivisibility of freedom; I quote: ‘Our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinian people.’

Never have we stopped seeking our freedom through all peaceful, political, diplomatic, and legal means possible. Twenty-four years ago, the Oslo Accords were signed. Other interim agreements that were supposed to lead within five years to the independence of the State of Palestine and a peace treaty resolving final status issues were also signed. We recognized then Israel on the 1967 borders, and to this very day, Israel refuses to reciprocate, not only refusing to recognize the State of Palestine or even its mere right, the mere right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, but also by actively pursuing its colonial settlement activities on the territory of the occupied State of Palestine in grave violation of UN resolutions and international law, including humanitarian and criminal law, and obstructing our independence.

With such illegal policies and actions, all of which have been consistently deplored and rejected by the international community, including most recently in UN Security Council Resolution 2334 of 2016, Israel is anchoring its occupation rather than ending it. It is destroying the two-state solution and creating an existential crisis for the Palestinian people and the prospect for peace.

In the face of Israel’s blatant contempt of the law, UN resolutions, and the longstanding global consensus on the parameters of a just solution based on two states on the 1967 lines, decisive action is urgently needed. Each member of the international community must ask if they have done everything possible, if they have made every possible effort to end Palestinian dispossession and Israeli occupation and to bring about peace for all the peoples in the region. We believe much more can and must be done in this regard.

Israeli violations cannot remain unchallenged. They constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. They are an imminent threat to international peace and security. The United Nations’ responsibility vis-a-vis the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects with the obligations of all states to respect and ensure respect for international law must be upheld and translated into concrete, coordinated action.

We urge you to uphold your commitment not to recognize the unlawful situation created by Israel’s policies and measures in occupied Palestine, including East Jerusalem. We urge you not to render aid of assistance in maintaining this situation. We urge you to distinguish between the territory of the occupying power and the occupied territory in order to ensure accountability and bring this unjust situation to an end.

Only by ending Israeli impunity can we pave the way to peace. In this context, individual and collective action is vital to prevent further violations, secure justice for generations of Palestinian victims, and save future generations from oppression, subjugation, and forced exile.

It is vital to allow them to fulfill the promise of their own existence of their self-determination. Only with such action can we open a new chapter where genuine and lasting Palestinian-Israeli peace is possible. Peace is the most noble of purposes, and we will continue to strive to achieve it. We have adopted, together with Arab and OIC member states, the Arab Peace initiative which stipulates that once Israel ends its occupation and withdraws from the Palestinian and other Arab territories it has occupied in 1967, all states in the region will recognize it and normalize its relations with it.

Moreover, we have fulfilled our commitment under the Quartet Roadmap endorsed by the Security Council Resolution 1515 of 2003. However, Israel continues to violate this Roadmap until this very day. Moreover, we have supported all other peace initiatives, including the French initiative to save the two-state solution and promote peace. This initiative led to the convening of the Paris conference.

We have also supported the Russian president initiative and the initiative of the Chinese president, as well as the efforts of the U.S. president Donald Trump in the hope that such efforts would lead to a historic peace deal based on the two-state solution on the pre-1967 borders with Palestine and Israel living side-by-side in peace and security and good neighborly relations.

However, Israeli leaders have deliberately undermined all peace efforts. They prefer to declare and pursue their absolute commitment to colonize our land and dehumanize our people to the detriment of peace. Israel is attempting to make its colonial and military occupation irreversible. Its relentless aggression, provocations, and incitement against the Palestinian people continue today, including in Jerusalem and against Christian and Muslim holy sites undermining the historic status quo, most notably in al-Haram al-Sharif. Israel is, therefore, threatening to transform a solvable political conflict into a one-state reality of apartheid or a never-ending religious war.

We are fully committed to the international law and legitimacy and to the two-state solution on the pre-1967 borders. We stand ready to give every chance possible to regional and international efforts based on the long-standing terms of reference to achieve a just peace. However, if the efforts for such a solution fail, the Palestinian people will neither disappear nor will they accept a future of subjugation and oppression. Our people will continue their legitimate struggle to fulfill their inalienable rights. They will be entitled to strive for equal rights for all in historic Palestine without discrimination.

On this occasion we reiterate that our struggle was never directed against Judaism as a religion, as we respect all faiths and religions, but rather against the colonial occupation of our land and people and the denial of our inalienable human rights, including our right to self-determination.

We strongly believe in the law and international institutions despite decades of disappointment and dissolution. The State of Palestine will, therefore, continue to engage in all efforts to promote the rule of international law, including by strengthening its institutions and empowering its people, particularly women and youth.

In this regard, national reconciliation is a priority. It will contribute to our efforts to unify the Palestinian land and people. We will spare no effort to end the division in all its aspects and ensure that the Palestinian government is able to uphold its responsibilities in the Gaza Strip and fulfill its duties towards our people.

We seize this opportunity to reiterate that we deeply appreciate the efforts of Egypt and, once again, we call upon the international community to help us lift the illegal, inhumane Israeli blockades against the Gaza Strip and to offer the necessary support to remedy the grave humanitarian situation there.

On this centennial of the ignoble Balfour Declaration, on this 70th anniversary of Resolution 181, on the eve of 70 years of the Nakba, millions of Palestinian refugees continue to suffer in exile awaiting a just solution to their plight in accordance with Resolution 194. After more than 50 years of the foreign occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, we call, once again, for providing international protection to our people, for enforcing and implementing UN resolutions, and adopting all measures in compliance with international obligations to end Israel’s colonization and occupation of our land.

Respect for international law is the cornerstone for peace. But neither this respect nor the goal of peace can be achieved by statements alone. Words and commitments must be coupled with action to implement the law. On this Day of International Solidarity with the Palestinian people, we stress that this is a matter of urgency. We urge you to spare no efforts. We remain grateful to all those who firmly and nobly stand for international law and the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and peace. We await the day when we may together celebrate the freedom of our people in the independent State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, and we await the day when we will welcome you all in a Jerusalem reconciled with its original name, the City of Peace.”

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIR: Thank you, Ambassador. I would like to ask you to convey our sincere thanks and greetings to President Mahmoud Abbas for his very important message. I would also like to assure President Abbas, and through him the Palestinian people, of our Committee’s firm commitment to continuing its efforts as mandated by the General Assembly with a view to promoting a comprehensive, just, and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine and the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people including its right to self-determination as an independent State of Palestine and a fully fledged member of the United Nations.

I now give the floor to Mr. Andrew Gilmour, Assistant-Secretary-General for Human Rights, and head of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in New York.

MR. ANDREW GILMOUR, ASSISTANT-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, HEAD OF THE OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN NEW YORK: As other speakers have noted, this year marks the 50th anniversary of occupation for the Palestinians. And during that time, year after year the reports of the Secretary-General and of the High Commissioner of Human Rights have painted a bleak picture of the conflict in which serious violations of rights drive an ongoing cycle of violence with victims on both sides.

Now, these reports set out with depressing regularity violations by Israel as the occupying power with respect to obligations both of international humanitarian law and of international human rights law. The violations have had a profound impact on the daily lives of Palestinians living in the occupied territory. And over the years, it’s become clear that the occupation is the source of many human rights violations, and that the atmosphere of impunity that prevails with respect to these violations encourages further violence.

Settlements continue to expand despite repeated declarations of the illegality by the UN, freedom of movement is severely restricted, and many Palestinians are subject to frequent arrest and detention, and the right to development, to education, and to health are stifled.

The blockade of Gaza continues, now in its 10th year. And in view of the electricity crisis of recent months, residents of Gaza have lived in an unbearable situation with very little access to health care and clean water. The deterioration in infrastructure due to repeated bombardments and restrictions on reconstruction have further compounded the crisis.

And amidst these events, human rights groups are under increasing attack. Palestinian human rights defenders find themselves subject to arrest and detention for participation in peaceful protests, which remain severely restricted under Military Order 101. And Israeli human rights groups, many of whom have taken principled and courageous stances on the human rights of the Palestinian people, have been targeted by legislation, political rhetoric, and repeated efforts to undermine their credibility, legitimacy, and patriotism.

In this atmosphere in which many have lost hope for the future, the UN still helps the parties to achieve the long-promised two-state solution. Last June, High Commissioner’s Aid told the Human Rights Council, compliance with international law and ensuring its respect are not optional. They are the sine qua non condition for peace. Human rights violations are not merely symptoms of the conflict, but further fuel a cycle of violence which has now persisted for half a century. To break the cycle, he said, the root causes must be addressed. These include bringing the occupation to an end. Respect for human rights is the path which leads out of this conflict.

To end on a more hopeful note, the lately Cairo-brokered intra-Palestinian reconciliation agreement is an important step towards addressing the energy crisis and its devastating consequences for Gaza. We also hope it could contribute to moving the process forward so that the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza can finally see some hope of ending the harsh occupation that translates for them into the sustained and systematic suppression of almost every one of their human rights.

Thank you very much.

CHAIR: I thank Mr. Andrew Gilmour for his important statement, and for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights’ crucial work in support of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

I am now going to suspend the meeting for a few minutes to allow some of our guests to leave the conference room. Also, on behalf of the Committee, I would like once again to thank His Excellency, the President of the General Assembly; His Excellency, the President of the Security Council; and the Deputy Secretary-General and the Assistant-Secretary-General for Human Rights for their contribution to this important meeting and expression of solidarity with the Palestinian people.

The meeting of the Committee is resumed.

I would now like to give the floor to His Excellency, Mr. Amrith Rohan Perera, Chairman of the Special Committee of the United Nations to investigate Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs of the occupied territories. Ambassador, you have the floor.

H.E. MR. AMRITH ROHAN PERERA, CHAIRMAN OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE ISRAELI PRACTICES AFFECTING THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE AND OTHER ARABS OF THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES: Thank you, Mr. Chairperson. I’m honored to address this special meeting to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. And I take some to thank you, His Excellency, Mr. Fodé Seck, Chairman of the Committee on the exercise of inalienable rights of the Palestinian people for the kind invitation extended to me to address this special meeting in Sri Lanka’s capacity as Chair of the Special Committee to investigate Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs of the occupied territories.

The International Day of Solidarity reminds us of the urgent need to find a just and peaceful solution to the question of Palestine, and most importantly, to address the plight of the Palestinian people and to provide for their humanitarian needs.

Earlier this year in Amman, civil society representatives, victims, and witnesses of Israel practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people, as well as Palestinian and United Nations officials, briefed the Special Committee on the situation of human rights within the occupied territories and the occupied Syrian Golan. These briefings and testimonies once again brought to the attention of the Committee the daily violence and humiliation suffered by Palestinian men, women, and children, whose every aspect of life continues to be impacted by the unlawful occupation. Settlement expansion has had a direct impact of the escalation of violence in the occupied territories and has largely contributed to the increase in the number of Syrian casualties that include infants. This is a matter that has engaged the particular attention of the Special Committee in recent years as reflected in its reports.

Mr. Chairperson, we must remain deeply concerned of reports that dozens of families of Palestinians killed have been denied the right to a proper and dignified closure on the basis of security councils. While many of the bodies have now reportedly been released, unacceptable conditions have been imposed regarding the release of bodies such as the prohibition of autopsies and limitations on funeral rights.

According to testimonies before the Special Committee, Israel practices have also included state-sanctioned land seizures, interactive legalization of outposts, demolition of Palestinian homes and livelihood structures, denial of building permits, restriction of movements or access to livelihoods, and lack of accountability for settler violence. The cumulative impact of these measures on the human rights of the Palestinian people is a matter of serious concern.

Year after year, for the better part of half a century, since the establishment of the Special Committee, the information received by the Committee has affirmed the trends and patterns of human rights violations associated with occupation, and its inextricable link to the “settlement enterprise”.

Mr. Chairperson, an emerging issue of particular concern brought to the attention of the Special Committee has been the shrinking democratic space for civil society, particularly local Palestinian and Israeli organizations working to promote human rights in occupied territories. The Special Committee’s report this year also covered the situation in Gaza, where Israel’s land closure and naval blockade has now entered its 11th year. The impact of the electricity crisis on already-strained health and sanitation infrastructure was one of the key issues highlighted to the Committee. At the time of reporting, hospitals had been forced to reduce services, and access to essential care was limited consequent to this crisis.

The report also highlights the situation of the human rights in the occupied Syrian Golan and the impact of settlement expansion. While we here today pledge our solidarity with the people of Palestine, I wish to acknowledge with deep appreciation the work done by UNRWA to provide care and deliver vital human development services and emergency assistance to over 5.2 million Palestine refugees since 1950. The work of UNRWA needs the continuing support and engagement of states through adequate and predictable resourcing, to ensure the effective discharge of their invaluable mandate.

Mr. Chairperson, as Chair of the Special Committee, I repeat the call for a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine and an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people. Both parties of the conflict must create the necessary environment to facilitate peace. There is an urgent need for mutual confidence-building measures in support of efforts to resume dialogue and substantive negotiations. Israel must protect the Palestinian civilian population in the occupied territories, and desist from actions that are contrary to the established rules of international law and practice.

We reiterate our support to General Assembly Resolutions 242 of 1967, 2443 of 1968, and 32/40B of 1977, and the implementation of all other UN General Assembly resolutions regarding the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to statehood, and the attainment of a two-state solution based on 1967 borders. We are encouraged that despite decades of disappointment, the people of Palestine have resolutely sustained their spirit and their strength of purpose to gain their legitimate rights and have prevailed over the considerable challenges facing them. We hope that the Palestinian people will work together to preserve national unity, which is imperative for the creation of a fully sovereign and independent Palestine.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairperson, the resilience and endurance of the people of Palestine must inspire us. Surely it must also energize and motivate us to act now. This is not a struggle they can fight alone. It is a struggle we must engage in together as a global community.

I thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

CHAIR: I thank His Excellency Mr. Amrith Rohan Perera for his important statement. We are appreciative of your committee’s continued contribution to our meeting, as well as for your country’s participation in our committee’s activities as an active observer.

I now have the pleasure of giving the floor to His Excellency Mr. Maged Abdelaziz, Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States to the United Nations, who will read out a message from His Excellency Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States. You have the floor, sir.

H.E. MR. MAGED ABDELAZIZ, PERMANENT OBSERVER FOR THE LEAGUE OF ARAB STATES: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Allow me to read the statement of the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, on the occasion of the Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

“Mr. Fodé Seck, Chairman of the Committee for the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Your Excellencies, ladies, gentlemen, in solidarity with the Palestinian people and their legitimate struggle and just cause, their attachment to justice and liberty, we celebrate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People every year, reaffirming their inalienable rights and denouncing the injustices being inflicted upon them by the Israeli occupation. This day is celebrated in accordance with the 1977 General Assembly resolution proclaiming the 29th of November every year the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, until such a time as they are able to regain their legitimate rights, in particular their right to self-determination, and to create an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

November is of particular importance to the Palestinian people, recalling the scope of the injustice, the suffering and the tragedies they have been enduring for decades. Indeed, on the 2nd of November 1917, the malignant Balfour Declaration was signed to create states of Palestine and Israel. And in the same month, the resolution dividing Palestine into an Israeli and an Arab state was passed. Without an Arab state, there will be no justice or peace in accordance with the two-state solution, which is the subject of international and Arab consensus.

So on the 29th of November, the General Assembly of the United Nations accepted in 2012 to admit to Palestine as a non-member observer state, with the approval of 138 states. This process opened the path for potential acceptance of Palestine as a full member in the future.

The position of Palestine has continued to be strengthened, and it is an independent state which is recognized on the international stage, which was recently reinforced by Palestine joining INTERPOL after 75 votes in favor. This reflects the support of the international community to the rights of the Palestinian people. In this context, the League of Arab States will continue to support each and every initiative in favor of the Palestinian people and coordinated Arab action on the international stage, in order to defend the status of Jerusalem and to recognize the state of Palestine, and to make it possible for Palestine to become a full member of the United Nations.

Ladies and gentlemen, in October, a fortunate event took place, which was the reconciliation of Palestinians. This long-awaited reconciliation will prevent the Israeli state from putting aside the peace process by saying that there is no Palestinian partner which truly aspires to peace. We hope that the path of reconciliation will continue and that pending issues will be settled, thus bolstering the position of Palestine.

Ladies and gentlemen, after 50 years of occupation, Israel continues its policies undermining the two-state solution and any possibility of achieving peace. They continue to build settlements despite repeated international condemnation. This is a flagrant violation of international law and international resolutions, in particular Security Council Resolution 2233 of 23 December 2016 which describes Israeli settlements as illegal and illegitimate under international law. Israeli violations continue in occupied Palestinian territory including East Jerusalem. So do attacks against the holy places, in particular al-Aqsa Mosque, as well as the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip which has gone on for a decade, without forgetting extrajudicial killings, checkpoints, and violations of the rights of Palestinian prisoners and detainees in Israeli prisons.

Ladies and gentlemen, Israel is well known for its disregard of the United Nations resolutions and bodies. Nevertheless, despite this shameful reputation, Israel is trying to reach an elected seat on the Security Council for the period from 2019 to 2021 even though the Security Council is supposed to uphold international peace and security. They are trying to do this as a sort of compensation for the occupation, and its allies are encouraging Israel to continue its efforts to undermine the two-state solution. There must be an opposition to this candidature. The League of Arab States categorically rejects this candidature and calls on other states to disregard it as well.

Ladies and gentlemen, the impasse of the peace process augurs no good either for the Middle East or for the world. This is why serious negotiations should be restarted within a clear mechanism and with a clear time line in order to put an end to the Israeli occupation and create an independent Palestinian state, a sovereign state with East Jerusalem as its capital. We hope that the US administration and other partners will be able to achieve this objective in cooperation with international partners in order to put an end for once and for all to this long-standing conflict. We hope that the Quartet will play a constructive role and that it will take its responsibilities to achieve peace. The League of Arab States is prepared to coordinate with the Quartet in order to ensure peace is achieved. The enlargement of the Quartet to include the League of Arab States would certainly make it possible for this objective to be reached.

Ladies and gentlemen, in conclusion, on this International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, we express our respect and our admiration for the Palestinian people for their legendary stoicism in the face of injustice, suffering, and torture. It is time for the rule of law to prevail over the rule of force and for the Palestinian people to achieve their freedom, their rights, and their motherland.”

Thank you for your kind attention.

CHAIR: I thank His Excellency Mr. Maged Abdelaziz for his statement. I request him to kindly convey to His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, the sincere appreciation of the Committee for his important message and for its strong support of our committee’s activities.

I now have the pleasure of giving the floor to His Excellency Mr. Shaher Awawdeh, Deputy Permanent Observer of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to the United Nations, who will read out a message from His Excellency Dr. Yousef Ahmed Al Othaimeen, Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

H.E. MR. SHAHER AWAWDEH, DEPUTY PERMANENT OBSERVER OF THE ORGANIZATION OF ISLAMIC COOPERATION: Thank you. Ambassador Fodé Seck, Chairman of the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Distinguished Representatives, ladies and gentlemen, it is an honor for the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to address this important meeting on observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. On this occasion, I am pleased to express the profound appreciation of the OIC for the United Nations and its various committees and organs for their unwavering efforts to promote international solidarity with the Palestinian people and support their legitimate national rights.

Mr. Chair, we meet to observe this occasion, which coincides this year with the first centenary of the ill-fated Balfour Declaration that represented the beginning of the historical injustice whose ramifications continue to be felt by the Palestinian people who, for decades, have suffered occupation, oppression, expulsion, and ethnic cleansing. This occasion also comes after 70 years since the United Nations General Assembly adopted its Resolution 181 on the partitioning plan of Palestine. However, the State of Palestine has yet to achieve its independence, and the Palestinian people remain deprived from exercising their legitimate national rights.

On this occasion, the OIC reaffirms the historical, legal, political, and moral responsibility which the international community carries to find the just solution to all aspects of the Palestinian question in accordance with international law and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations. This responsibility inter alia involves the necessity of ending the Israeli occupation, full recognition of the State of Palestine, ensuring justice for the Palestinian people, enabling them to exercise their right to self-determination, and to establish their sovereign independent state on the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967 with East Jerusalem as its capital, and finding a just solution to the issue of Palestinian refugees in line with the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194.

While we assert that East Jerusalem is an integral part of the Palestinian territory occupied in 1967 and the capital of the State of Palestine, we equally underscore the religious status of al-Quds and the eternal linkage of Muslims all over the world to the blessed al-Aqsa Mosque and Muslim shrines in the city. We also reiterate our call on the international community to take practical and effective measures that will put an end to Israeli violations and illegal practices aimed at changing the geographical and demographic status in and around East Jerusalem. These measures are null and void under international law and they threaten to transform the political conflict to a religious war, the consequences of which no one can predict.

The OIC is following with deep concern the continuation of the policy of building and expanding Israeli settlements on the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem. We have warned at many international fora and on different occasions against the failure of the international community to hold Israel, the occupying power, to account for its noncompliance with the principles of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions which can undermine the international efforts to find a just and comprehensive solution based on the vision of the two-state solution. In this regard, we call for translating the international condemnation of the Israeli policy of settlement building into practical and effective measures in implementation of international resolutions, for most of which is the Security Council Resolution 2334, as part of supporting the efforts for achieving peace.

Ladies and gentlemen, while we welcome the positive developments relating to the Palestinian national reconciliation, including the assumption by the Palestinian unity government of its responsibilities in the Gaza Strip, we call on the international community to continue to support the Palestinian reconciliation. At the same time, we affirm our stance that the continued illegal Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip is tantamount to collective punishment and a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, resulting in grave humanitarian consequences for the Palestinian people, and it must stop.

The OIC also reiterates its commitment to the message of the Palestinian prisoners in Israeli detention centers, including its support for their resilience. We call for effective action to defend their rights, internationalize their cause, and get Israel, the occupying power, to respect the provisions of international humanitarian law and relevant human rights instruments.

The OIC reaffirms its solidarity with the Palestinian people and renews its commitment to support the international efforts aimed at achieving just and comprehensive peace, pursuant to relevant resolutions of the United Nations and the Arab Peace Initiative. It also calls on the international community to shoulder its responsibility for providing international protection for the Palestinian people, providing mechanisms for implementing relevant international legitimacy resolutions, and launching a political process with multilateral international sponsorship in accordance with a specified time frame as a real contribution to consolidating and implementing the two-state vision to which we renew our commitment.”

Thank you.

CHAIR: I thank His Excellency Mr. Shaher Awawdeh for the important statement on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which is an active partner of our Committee.

I now give the floor to Mrs. Louise Sharene Bailey, Charge d’Affaires of the Permanent Observer Mission of the African Union to the United Nations, reading out a message from His Excellency Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission. You have the floor, Excellency.

MRS. LOUISE SHARENE BAILEY, CHARGE D'AFFAIRES OF THE PERMANENT OBSERVER MISSION OF THE AFRICAN UNION: Thank you, Mr. President. Ladies and gentlemen, we have gathered today as we have done for the past 40 years to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People in support of the just struggle of the Palestinian people and the State of Palestine in their quest for the restoration of their legitimate right to establish an independent State of Palestine, coexisting peacefully on the borders of June 1967 with East Jerusalem as its capital.

On behalf of the African Union Commission, I wish to commend the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for organizing the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, a unique opportunity to raise awareness on the unresolved question of Palestine and reiterate our solidarity with the Palestinian people.

I also wish to pay tribute to His Excellency Ambassador Fodé Seck, Permanent Representative of Senegal, for his sterling leadership of the Committee. I bring warm greetings of solidarity and support from his Excellency Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission.

Mr. Chairman, our continental organization has consistently defended the cause of the Palestinian people, placing it as a priority on the agendas of all summit meetings and adopting relevant decisions, resolutions, and declarations as a clear demonstration of the African Union’s solidarity and support to the cause of the Palestinian people. The African Union further commends and welcomes the reconciliation deal reached in Moscow earlier this year in January between Palestinian organizations to form a unity government, including the most recent signing of the intra-Palestinian agreement on 12 October 2017.

The African Union expresses grave concern over the critical situation of Palestinian refugees. According to recent reports, the Israeli occupation in Palestine continues to adversely define every aspect of the daily lives of youth and [camp] residents, affecting everything from security and freedom of movement to livelihoods and employment. For the past two years in particular, Palestine refugees continue to face serious protection challenges due to ongoing occupation, armed conflict, and displacement, sinking deeper into poverty and desperation. Clearly, conditions on the ground remain volatile and the situation in East Jerusalem and the West Bank continues to be a source of serious concern.

We reiterate the African Union’s condemnation of the illegal settlements in the West Bank, Jerusalem, and in the occupied territory of the Syrian Golan Heights, and the continued occupation of Palestinian lands and their Judaization campaign aimed at changing all Islamic and Christian features of the Holy City and reducing the Palestinian population to the fullest extent through the confiscation of their lands and the destruction of their homes. We further re-echo the demand of the African Union for the immediate lifting of the land and sea blockage imposed by Israel on the Gaza Strip and all other restrictions.

Mr. Chairman, regrettably, as we meet today, the path towards durable peace still remains unclear. The peace process now hangs from a thread and the process of rapprochement seems to be slipping away. The lack of progress against the backdrop of renewed tension requires sustained collective attention. The international community should continue to support the parties to overcome their differences and return to the peace talks on the basis of the two-state solution. The United Nations and the Quartet have a pivotal role to play in this regard.

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, as we commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, we call upon the international community and all stakeholders to strengthen their support and assistance to the Palestinian people to ensure their realization of their inalienable rights and the establishment of their own viable state, including achieving durable peace within the region. The African Union remains resolute in its commitment to continue to support the just cause of the people of Palestine.

I thank you.

CHAIR: I thank Mrs. Louise Sharene Bailey for the very important message of the African Union, a valued partner of our Committee.

I now have the pleasure of giving the floor to His Excellency—

CHAIR: —Mr. Rafael Darío Ramírez Carreño, the Permanent Representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, reading out a message from His Excellency Mr. Nicolás Maduro, the President of Venezuela on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. You have the floor.

H.E. MR. RAFAEL DARÍO RAMÍREZ CARREÑO, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE BOLIVARIAN REPUBLIC OF VENEZUELA: Thank you very much, Mr. President. I wish to clarify that this is a summarized version of the original speech.

Mr. President, it is an honor for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to take the floor on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement during this solemn meeting in observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, particularly today which marks another somber anniversary for the people of Palestine: the 70th anniversary of the General Assembly’s decision to partition and mandate Palestine by its adoption of Resolution 181.

The Non-Aligned Movement fully supports the celebration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People which is a prominent occasion to reflect on the continuing injustice and dire situation being endured by the Palestinian people across the decades in occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem and including in the blockaded Gaza Strip due to the continued denial of their inalienable rights by Israel the occupying power.

After more than half a century of foreign occupation that has subjected the Palestinian people to gross and systematic human rights violations and untold pain and suffering in 70 years since the General Assembly’s decision to partition, mandate Palestine, and the ensuing Nakba in 1948, and the conflict we continue to face, it is clear that the Palestinian question lies at the heart of, and is among the root causes, of so many of the other crises and dilemmas we witness in the Middle East today. This International Day of Solidarity provides an opportunity for renewing our shared commitment to a just and lasting solution for the question of Palestine and ultimately to a durable peace in the Middle East as a whole.

Mr. Chairman, from the very establishment of the United Nations the question of Palestine has been on its agenda. Seven decades have passed and yet the Palestinian people continue to be deprived of their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and freedom, and they still count on the effective contribution of the United Nations in accordance with international law and the relevant resolutions to fulfill their aspirations of achieving the independence and sovereignty of the State of Palestine.

Despite decades of their participation in peace efforts in good faith, despite their proven commitment to the two-state solution for peace, despite their adherence to international law, and despite the painful compromises made, the Palestinians’ plight has worsened on all fronts and the situation on the ground is dramatically deteriorating due to Israel’s persistent illegal policies and practices which have further destabilized and exacerbated the situation on the ground, undermining all peace efforts and obstructing justice over these years.

As the Security Council remains silent and paralyzed on this issue in spite of its charge of duties, the international community continues to witness in horror Israel’s brutal military occupation in all its manifestations in breach of international law and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council.

Under the umbrella of this unjust occupation the occupying power continues its oppression and collective punishment of the defenseless Palestinian people and continues to perpetrate grave human rights violations and reported war crimes. In light of this continued illegal and unjust situation, the Non-Aligned Movement calls, once again, for measures to be taken in accordance with international law to remedy the violation of the human rights of the Palestinians, including through the provision of protection to the Palestinian people for as long as this occupation continues.

Mr. Chairman, the Non-Aligned Movement condemns Israel’s continuing military occupation of the Palestinian Territory in breach of international law and United Nations’ resolutions. In this regard, we condemn the illegal Israeli settlement activities by which the occupying powers continue to colonize occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and forcibly displacing Palestinian civilians in grave breach of international law and Security Council Resolution 2334 of 2016.

Israel must cease all attempts and measures aimed at colonizing the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and forcibly displacing thousands of Palestinian civilians with a view towards altering the demographic composition, legal status, character and geographic nature of this territory, and facilitating the de facto annexation of more Palestinian land. All such illegal measures are violating the human rights of the Palestinian people and are undermining the realization of just and lasting peace on the basis of the two-state solution, the viability of which the occupying power is destroying on a daily basis.

Mr. President, the Non-Aligned Movement believes that all efforts should be directed toward the independence and sovereignty of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital in accordance with the relevant resolutions and to support the admission of Palestine to the United Nations as a full member state.

To conclude, the Non-Aligned Movement reiterates on this important day its unwavering commitment to a just and comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict with the question of Palestine at its core and the immediate restoration of the inalienable rights of the heroic Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination and to their independent, contiguous, and viable State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital and a just solution for the plight of the Palestinian refugees on the basis of General Assembly Resolution 194. It is such a just solution that will guarantee the peace that the international community and the Palestinian people have long sought and committed to and usher in a new era of peace and stability for the region.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIR: I thank you, Mr. [Henry Suarez] for his statement and I request him to convey His Excellency Mr. Nicolas Meduro, president of Venezuela, the sincere thanks of the Committee for his very important statement in his capacity as Chairman of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Thank you.

It is my pleasure to give the floor to Dr. Ahmad Tibi, Deputy Speaker of the Israeli Knesset. Dr. Tibi, you have the floor.

DR. AHMAD TIBI, DEPUTY SPEAKER OF THE KNESSET: Mr. President, Your Excellency the Secretary-General, Your Excellency the President of the GA, Your Excellency Ambassador Fodé Seck, the Head of the Special Committee, Your Excellency Ambassador Riyad Mansour. Excellencies, we meet today on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People who are still subjected to occupation, struggling to achieve independence, and end one of the longest-running occupations. It’s actually the one and only occupation that is still standing to this very day.

Mr. President, in this building a few meters away came yesterday the Deputy or the Vice-President of the USA to commemorate the establishment of the State of Israel. Ninet sung here yesterday the song of Jerusalem from [sic] Gold. The lyrics state that Jerusalem is made from light and gold. However, Your Excellencies, al-Quds today is made of check points, bullets, occupation, and not light or gold that should be enjoyed by everyone if there is a real just peace that would put an end to the occupation of the Palestinian people so that occupied Jerusalem would become a real capital of hope and light for the independent State of Palestine.

Once again, ladies and gentlemen, I came to you from the beautiful city of Quds [Galilee] here to the United Nations to bring to you the voice of my people who call for just peace, for liberation, independence, and full equality instead of occupation, instead of the policy of racial segregation that the Palestinian people are suffering from. They are suffering from a lacked nationalization and discrimination in all aspects of life, in land, housing, employment, education, industrial zones, infrastructure, as well as the violation of mosques and churches. The last time I talked to you about [Herr Handan] that martyr who was killed by the Israeli soldier’s bullets. The father of that martyr asked me to remind you that the police officer is still free. The killer of the martyr [Yakoub Tehan] who was killed with cold blood is still also free. The countries in [Nakoub] are being destroyed and demolished to build another city called [Heron]. The killer of other Palestinian martyrs are also free and not detained. Instead of trying to bring about peace, accepting the other coexistence, the government of Israel nowadays, and I’ve just come from there, is working on legalizing the national bill which provides that the right for self-determination in our country is only for the Jews. And it also violates the right of the Arab language, the nationalism of Arabs, and the values of democracy without any equality. In a very dangerous manner, it states for the very first time, to establish cities solely made for Jews, clear and cleansed from Arabs. That is Israel in 2017.

We, in our joint list, in addition to the advanced Jews and the leftists, are standing against this law since racism has become a central trend in Israel. We have listened to proposals for a peace process by the US. We’ve listened to that in a direct manner, or through mediators, however, we cannot have an independent sovereign State of Palestine unless we end the occupation. There is no moral sovereignty, or a country without borders, or a Palestine without Jerusalem as its capital with its mosques and churches with all its shrines and holy shrines. It seems that they have succeeded in obstructing the two-state solution and now they want to negotiate on a one-state solution with conditions that are not providing any rights for the Palestinians. Since the occupation today does not cost a lot for the occupying power, either two-state solution or one-state, there are no other alternatives but the apartheid that is refused by the international community.

The Palestinian people have suffered a lot since al-Nakba from injustice because the decisions of your organization on the Palestinian people have never been implemented. It’s high time to move to the implementation phase and compel Israel to abide by the international law and the relevant international legitimate resolutions. It’s high time for the UN to have a more vital role that has a real impact on the ground, granting the Palestinian people their right for freedom and self-determination just like all other peoples in the world. We have the right to establish an independent State of Palestine with full sovereignty in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank with East Jerusalem as its capital. The international community and the international organization must also stop Israel from bringing about undemocratic laws and to recognize the Arab minority so that everybody, Palestinians, Israelis, and the region at large, enjoy peace and development far from war and its carriages.

Mr. President, we have listened to the song Jerusalem from Gold [sic], which called also for the idea that the surroundings of Jerusalem are empty. All the Palestinians then were filling all those squares and other squares recently when the gates of al-Aqsa mosque were closed, we prayed in such squares. Yes, we did pray over there. They closed the gates of al-Aqsa mosque for 90 years during the different campaigns all over the history. [Tameena Baruthia], the great poet, has described al-Quds in a way that was never done before. In al-Quds there were soldiers running to preserve its liberty and independence and we have prayed in its squares. Peace be upon you.

Thank you, Mr. President.

CHAIR: I thank Dr. Ahmad Tibi, Deputy Speaker of the Israeli Knesset for this important declaration.

I now have the pleasure of giving the floor to Mr. Salil Shetty, Secretary-General of Amnesty International, who will make a statement as a representative of civil society active on the question of Palestine. Mr. Shetty, you have the floor.

MR. SALIL SHETTY, AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL: Thank you, Ambassador Fodé Seck. Chairman, Your Excellencies, and friends, I’m very grateful to have this opportunity to speak both on behalf of Amnesty International, which is a global movement of more than 7 million people across the world and humbly reflect, to some extent, the voice from the street, not just in the Arab world but across the entire world, and I would say largely speak the same voice which civil society believes in. Nobody in this room needs convincing about the urgency of this discussion. The neglect of the serious human rights abusers against the Palestinian people is amongst the deepest and ugliest scars on the world’s conscience.

And as if we needed reminding of the unique and grave situation facing Palestinians, today, this year, comes the convergence of three significant anniversaries. The first, 100 years since the Balfour Declaration. This has become a symbol of the international failure to ensure the human rights of Palestinians, including millions of refugees.

The second, it’s 50 years since the Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian territories and Golan Heights with no end in sight. Millions of Palestinians face the brutal every day consequences in the occupied territories, the destruction of their homes and properties on a vast scale; 50,000 since 1967, the plundering of their land and natural resources for the benefit of 600,000 Israeli settlers. Israel’s policy of constructing and expanding settlements on stolen Palestinian land is illegal, discriminatory, and unjust. It is a key driver of the massive human rights violations resulting from the occupation. And even as we stand here today, tens of Palestinian villages in the West Bank are at risk of destruction to make way for settlement expansion.

And then there are the daily abuses that Palestinians suffer. The hundreds of checkpoints and closures that restrict movement for nearly 5 million people. The detention of tens of thousands of women, men, and children, for months, sometimes years, without charge or trial. The beatings, the torture, the 10,200 killings, often unlawful, since 1987 and virtually zero accountability.

And it’s also the third anniversary this year. It’s 10 years since the inhumane and illegal blockade on Gaza began. A decade of collective punishment and complete air, sea, and land closure of Gaza devastated the economy and cut off Palestinians from each other and the world. During that time, three separate wars have killed thousands of civilians, including children, and destroyed essential civilian infrastructure. The manmade humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza has made life barely tolerable. Ninety-six percent of the water is contaminated and unfit for consumption. Eighty percent of the population rely on humanitarian food aid. This is compounding massive inequalities between Israelis and Palestinians. It simply can’t be accepted. And of course, it is necessary to acknowledge it is not only Palestinians who have suffered. Since 1987, over 1,400 Israelis have been killed by Palestinians, hundreds of them civilians, by armed groups.

But merely to condemn 50 years of settlements, 50 years of war crimes is not enough. We must confront the double-standards of some Western powers, or the so-called international community, particularly the United States of America, in turning a blind eye to the war crimes of Israel. The United States has repeatedly and cynically abused its veto power as a Permanent Member of the UN Security Council. In addition, the United States and EU Member States have been transferring arms and munitions to Israel, which pose a significant risk of being used for serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

Yet despair is not an option. Amnesty International is based on the belief that when people come together, change is possible. And we believe there is a way forward. We can end mass violations against Palestinians while ensuring the rights of both Palestinians and Israelis to live in dignity, and I want to propose three ways forward.

First, United Nations Member States took an important step with Security Council Resolution 2334 of 2016. Its strong language reaffirming the illegality of Israeli settlements was welcome, but strong language has not translated into any action. Since the resolution was passed, the settlement project has increased rapidly. Israel introduced laws which approved grabs of private Palestinian land retroactively, and thousands of new settlement units in the future. Implementing Resolution 2334 is imperative for ending mass violations. Amnesty International urges states to ensure its implementation, and to mandate progress reports to this end. And critically, states must distinguish between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967. And we urge states to take action to ensure they do not recognize or assist settlements and their expansion.

And this leads me to my second point. Hundreds of millions of dollars worth of goods produced in settlements are exported each year. It’s high time for states to back up condemnation with real action. Over 50 years, Israel has deprived Palestinians of the use of their own natural resources—fertile land, water, quarries, and minerals. Meanwhile, it has unlawfully seized control of these resources and diverted them to benefit settlement industries, and these produce goods that are often—produce goods that are often exported. So Amnesty International is calling on states to ban settlement goods from entering their markets. States should also prevent corporations domiciled in their territories from operating in settlements or trading in settlement products. Our call is based on states’ existing obligations not to recognize or assist in the illegal situation created by Israel settlements, and it is fully in the power of states to do this.

Thirdly, many Palestinian and Israeli human rights defenders are standing up for those who are oppressed. They are calling for justice and an end to the occupation, but they’re suffering toxic consequences. Smear campaigns against them—and some of them are in the room here today—and their families, surveillance, threats to their lives and livelihoods, Palestinian defenders are facing charges, judicial attack, and detention. Those in Israel are labeled as foreign agents and traitors, and human rights defenders from abroad are being denied into the country. Our solidarity with the Palestinian people means solidarity with these human rights defenders as well. We can perpetuate their plight with silence and inertia, or we can choose to support them and call for justice.

Today, Amnesty International launches our 15th global letter-writing campaign called Write for Rights. People across the world will write millions of messages for those whose rights are under attack. Among the brave people featured in this campaign are Palestinians Issa Amro and Farid al-Atrash. Both of them are facing baseless charges before an Israeli military court for organizing a protest against settlements. And we, Amnesty International and our millions of members, stand in solidarity with Issa and Farid, and demand that Israel drops charges against them, and stops silencing people who are defending their rights.

So in conclusion, Mr. Chairman, we have been speaking about mass violations of Palestinian’s rights for 50 years, in a world where the demonization of whole groups of people based on their identity is becoming more and more mainstream every day. It’s time for a fresh resolve. In the face of these injustices, we are not helpless. Let us stand together to make a real difference in the lives of millions of Palestinians who have endured decades of injustice, indignity, and discrimination.

Thank you.

CHAIR: I thank Mr. Salil Shetty for his important statement. Allow me to take this opportunity to thank all civil society organizations active on the question of Palestine throughout the world for their work in support of and in solidarity with the Palestinian people. Thank you, Mr. Shetty.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, it is my honor now to announce that our committee has received messages of support and solidarity from many heads of state and government, from ministers for foreign affairs, governments, and organizations. I would like to read out the list of officials who sent them in the order that they were received.

We have received messages from the following heads of state: Brunei Darussalam, the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Jordan, Bahrain, Sri Lanka, Laos, Tunisia, Namibia, Iran, Indonesia, Turkey, Vietnam, Senegal, Mali, Iraq, the Russian Federation, China, Afghanistan, Algeria, and Brazil.

We have also received messages from the following heads of government: Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Thailand, and Malaysia.

The Committee has also received messages from the following ministers of foreign affairs: Syria, Cuba, Argentina, Japan, Saudi Arabia.

We have received messages from the following governments: Ecuador, Zimbabwe, Venezuela, Malta, and South Africa.

The Committee has also received messages from the following organizations: the Non-Aligned Movement, the League of Arab States, the European Union.

All messages of solidarity received will be posted on the website on the question of Palestine maintained by the Division for Palestinian Rights, or unispal.un.org.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to express our sincere appreciation to the heads of state and government, ministers for foreign affairs, governments, and the organizations I have just mentioned, and to all participants for their persistent efforts through all 50 years of Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory aimed at achieving a comprehensive, just, and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, and for the support they have always given to the mandated activities of this committee.

I also wish to avail myself of this opportunity to indicate that there are over 10 Palestinian journalists with us. They have just concluded their training at the DPI. Up to now, 200 Palestinian journalists have been trained under the capacity-building program for the Palestinian state.

Before adjourning this special meeting, I wish to thank everyone who has made this meeting possible, in particular the staff members of the Division for Palestinian Rights, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the Department of Public Information, the Office of Central Support Services, the interpreters, and everybody who worked behind the scenes.

At 3:00 p.m. this afternoon, the General Assembly will begin its debate under the question of Palestine, where I will introduce the draft resolutions related to this agenda item. Our Vice-Chair, His Excellency Mr. Neville Melvin Gertze, Permanent Representative of Namibia, will introduce the report of the Committee. We strongly encourage you to attend and support the adoption of the resolutions.

I would also like to invite you this evening to the inauguration of a photo exhibit entitled The Palestinian People: Everlasting Roots, Infinite Horizons. The exhibit tells of the positive contribution of Palestinians in the political, cultural, and artistic fields. We have here with us today Ms. Marian Azer [Batayenay], Ms. [Neteria Hendal], and Mr. [Mohamed Sevarnay] who are featured in the exhibit and traveled from Palestine to be here today. The opening of the exhibit will be held at 6:30 p.m. at the General Assembly Visitors Lobby followed by a reception. I am looking forward to seeing all of you this evening.

Thank you very much. The meeting is adjourned.