



General Assembly

Official Records

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

306th meeting

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New York

Chairman: Mr. Badji (Senegal)

The meeting was called to order at 10.45 a.m.

International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): Today, as in past years, the Committee is holding a solemn meeting to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977.

It is my honour and pleasure to warmly welcome His Excellency Mr. Srgjan Kerim, President of the General Assembly; His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations; His Excellency Mr. Marty Natalegawa, Permanent Representative of Indonesia, President of the Security Council; His Excellency Mr. Hamidon Ali, Permanent Representative of Malaysia, Vice-Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories; Mr. Yasser Abed-Rabbo, Secretary-General of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and representative of Palestine; and Mr. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

I convey my warmest appreciation in welcoming all of you — representatives of Member States, intergovernmental organizations and civil society organizations and all of those who have accepted the Committee's invitation to participate in this solemn

meeting. By taking part in this commemorative ceremony, we wish to solemnly express here our full and complete solidarity with the just cause of the Palestinian people and pay wholehearted tribute to all those who have dedicated their lives to bringing about peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

Allow me at this point to make a statement on behalf of the Committee.

We are greatly honoured by the presence of so many distinguished guests at today's solemn meeting.

The inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, defined by the General Assembly as the right to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty and the return of Palestine refugees to their ancestral homes and lands, do not simply represent a political issue and an essential part of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They also represent an enduring human story — both individual and collective. Their story is one of suffering, sacrifice and perseverance in the face of adversity, which finds few parallels in modern history. The courageous journey of the Palestinians — many of whom have been dispossessed, driven away and forgotten about for so long, but who nevertheless stand proud, hopeful and uncompromising in their insistence that their legitimate rights be respected — resonates deeply with people worldwide. On this solemn occasion, we reaffirm our solidarity with the people of Palestine.

This year's observance is particularly meaningful because of the convergence of several important

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anniversaries. It was 30 years ago that the General Assembly called for the International Day of Solidarity to be observed annually. It was 90 years ago that the British Government issued the Balfour Declaration encouraging the creation of a Jewish national home in Palestine. It was 60 years ago that the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II) partitioning mandated Palestine. It was 40 years ago that, following the 1967 war, Palestinian land came under Israeli occupation, which has continued up until this day. Finally, it was 20 years ago that the Palestinians as a people stood up to the occupation, and the world learned a new word: intifada.

Those and other fateful events have defined the destiny of the courageous Palestinian people over the decades. The Palestinians remain in limbo; they are dispersed, exiled or internally displaced on their own land — stateless in their own country. They live under the yoke of the occupation. Over the years this long and interminable occupation has been accompanied by the occupier's increasingly disproportionate and arbitrary use of military force against the civilian population; the taking of Palestinian land for the construction of settlements and, more recently, the separation wall; and repeated acts of collective punishment and grave violations of international humanitarian law.

An already impoverished and overcrowded Gaza Strip has been choking in recent months under an increasingly suffocating Israeli blockade. Designated a "hostile territory" by Israel, that part of the Palestinian territory experiences shortages of everything, including life-saving medicines for its population, which is now faced with cutbacks of vital fuel and power supplies.

Our Committee has repeatedly condemned all attacks against civilians, both Palestinian and Israeli, including the Palestinian rocket attacks originating from the Gaza Strip. However, to force nearly one and a half million Palestinians to live a life of deprivation is both illegal under international law and morally unacceptable. The situation has been further exacerbated by internal Palestinian tensions, culminating in an armed takeover of the Gaza Strip by Palestinian militias. The Committee urges the Palestinians to unite behind President Mahmoud Abbas, the elected leader of the Palestinian people, and to respect the legitimate institutions of the Palestinian Authority.

The question of Palestine has frustrated the peacemaking efforts of the international community for a very long time. On the conceptual level, however, the progress made in the past decades has been nothing short of remarkable, as the inalienable national right of the Palestinians to their own sovereign State has become part of an international consensus. The right of return of Palestine refugees remains widely recognized. The Road Map has charted a course to a final peaceful settlement. The Arab Peace Initiative, a major element in moving the peace process forward, was relaunched in Riyadh in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia at the beginning of this year.

The slow pace of practical progress on the road to Palestinian statehood looks all the more disheartening because all of the efforts made take place in an atmosphere of gloom and mistrust. Concerted and vigorous action is needed to close the gap between rhetoric and reality. The credibility of the international community is at stake. The time for a Palestinian State is now. There should be an end to the proverbial windows of opportunity and promises of a political future for Palestinians. The Palestinians yearn for peace, freedom and justice now. It is in our common interest, and it indeed is our moral obligation, to help the Palestinian people achieve their national rights. To quote William Gladstone's famous words, "Justice delayed is justice denied".

Despite the many setbacks, there are reasons for hope. Our Committee is encouraged by the latest diplomatic efforts aimed at revitalizing the peace process. In this connection, we are hopeful that the Annapolis Conference, with its special emotional dimension, will generate the much-needed momentum and psychological impact leading to serious-minded effective permanent status negotiations on all aspects of the Palestinian question, including, inter alia, the attainment of two independent States — Palestine and Israel — living side-by-side in peace and security. It is important that the members of the Quartet, their regional partners and all other international actors support the parties by fully committing themselves to this crucial initiative and implementing it without delay.

Today's commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity gives us an opportunity to solemnly reaffirm our commitment to working tirelessly to advance the cause of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. I wish to pay tribute to the ongoing

efforts of the Quartet, the League of Arab States and the international community as a whole. As the United Nations body charged with addressing the question of Palestine, the Committee is deeply committed to carrying out the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly.

On behalf of the Committee, I wish to express our deep gratitude to His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, who, with remarkable energy, is personally involved in the efforts to find an equitable solution to the question of Palestine — efforts that he has included among his priority activities. I should also like to pay a well-deserved tribute to His Excellency Mr. Srgjan Kerim, President of the General Assembly, who is leading the work of the Assembly with great skill and effectiveness, and to His Excellency Mr. Marty Natalegawa, President of the Security Council and Permanent Representative of Indonesia, who has tirelessly defended the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

I also wish to commend the commitment of the bodies, funds, programmes and agencies of the United Nations system that are working tirelessly to provide vital assistance to the Palestinian people. Particularly for the Gaza Strip, those agencies have become the only link to the outside world.

Finally, we should like in particular to thank our valuable partners — the organizations of civil society. Constant sources of dynamism that are always challenging the status quo, they have played a crucial awareness-raising role by encouraging policy changes in their own societies and have filled significant gaps by providing much-needed assistance to the Palestinian people.

The year 2007 has been rich in terms of anniversaries and symbolism but, much like the modern history of the Palestinian people, poor in terms of reasons to celebrate. Over the years, new words such as such as *Al-Nakba* (“the catastrophe”) and *intifada*, which evoke images of loss and confrontation, have appeared in the international vocabulary. It is our earnest hope that in the years to come, Arabic words signifying rebirth, hope, peace and reconciliation will also spring up in Palestine and Israel and the rest of the Middle East and spread throughout the world.

I now have the honour to give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Srgjan Kerim, President of the General Assembly.

Mr. Kerim (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), President of the General Assembly: I am honoured to be invited to address the Committee on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Respect for the dignity of all nations and peoples is a principle at the heart of the peaceful resolution of all conflicts. Peace and solidarity go hand in hand. Today, we all have the opportunity to express our solidarity with the Palestinian people and the Palestinian Authority.

In 1975, the General Assembly established the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. I would like to commend the Committee’s contribution to international efforts to bring peace, security and stability to the Middle East. Over the years, the conflict has produced great losses and immense human suffering on both sides. It has had wider security implications for the region and for peaceful relations between nations around the world.

The General Assembly’s call on the parties to resume direct peace negotiations has been realized. I would like to praise President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert for their courage and willingness to engage in substantive, results-oriented discussions in Annapolis, which have led to a joint understanding of the way forward. I would also like to commend the President of the United States, George Bush, for bringing the parties together to launch a serious process of final-status negotiations and for his personal commitment to support the conclusion of a peace treaty between Israel and Palestine before the end of 2008.

The outcome of the Annapolis Conference offers a great opportunity for a permanent two-State solution. However, as the Secretary-General emphasized during his address in Annapolis, the prerequisite for success is a resolute commitment to boldly follow words with deeds. The only way to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace is through continuous dialogue and compromise and a resolute commitment to achieve a permanent solution. Both the Israelis and the Palestinians are going to have to be honest with their own peoples about the price of peace. This will require difficult choices and sacrifices on both sides as part of a shared vision for a better future.

The stakes are high, but the alternatives are worse. I would like to call on all Member States to make every effort to support this process. The General Assembly has repeatedly reaffirmed its commitment to support a two-State solution — Israelis and Palestinians living side by side in peace and security within recognized borders — as the most viable solution.

The most encouraging aspect of the meeting was that both sides agreed to that approach and expressed their determination to end violence and to usher in a new era of peace based on freedom, security, justice, dignity and mutual respect — principles at the core purpose of the United Nations.

The General Assembly continues to emphasize the need for the parties, with the help of the international community, to fully and speedily resolve all remaining issues in the Gaza Strip. That includes a durable arrangement for the border crossings, the airport, the construction of the seaport, the removal of rubble and the establishment of a permanent physical link between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

The General Assembly also stresses the need for full implementation by both parties of the Agreement on Movement and Access and the agreed principles for the Rafah crossing, as well as the need for Israel to withdraw from Palestinian territory that it has occupied since 1967, for the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and for the resolution of issues related to Palestinian refugees, in conformity with resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948.

The General Assembly has also expressed its concern over the continued deterioration of humanitarian conditions in Gaza and the West Bank. Without immediate progress, the ongoing situation will further exacerbate the humanitarian, economic and security situation of the Palestinian people.

Over half of Palestinian households live below the poverty line. There are acute strains on social services, particularly on education. There is a shortage of drinking water; electricity is limited, and so are medicines. The Palestinian economy has slumped by nearly one quarter over the past year. Over half of those under 25 years of age had no jobs. The private sector in Gaza is almost completely paralysed. Three quarters of the Gazan population is dependent on United Nations food aid. The worsening security and economic situation is increasing the suffering endured

by women and hampering the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

The General Assembly is committed to ensuring that peaceful resolution of the conflict continues to be at the forefront of the international community's agenda. The Quartet has welcomed the commitment to launch peace negotiations leading to the establishment of a Palestinian State. The Quartet's representative, Tony Blair, has proposed concrete measures to strengthen Palestinian institutions and rehabilitate the economy. The Paris conference to be held in December offers an important opportunity to fund these proposals and lay the foundation for a viable Palestinian State. I urge the international community, therefore, to offer its full financial, technical and political support to make these reforms a reality and to help alleviate the humanitarian suffering of the Palestinian people.

I also appeal to both Israeli and Palestinian officials to redouble their efforts to implement immediately their respective obligations under the Road Map and create the necessary conditions for long-term peace based on mutual respect and recognition.

The United Nations must play a significant role to support this process. If we really want to succeed in achieving lasting peace, I encourage all parties to learn from the mistakes of the past and confront the causes of the failure. True reconciliation requires not only an end to hostilities, but also a change of attitude. Some people believe that to make peace is to forget; I would say that to reconcile is a fair compromise between remembering and forgetting.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank the President of the General Assembly for his important statement.

I now give the floor to His Excellency, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations.

The Secretary-General: This International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People comes at a time when Palestinians continue to suffer the indignities and violence of occupation and conflict, but also at a time when a new beginning has been made in efforts to achieve a two-State solution to the conflict.

Two days ago in Annapolis, President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert, meeting under the auspices of President Bush and before a wide cross-section of the

international community, including members of the Arab League, agreed to launch negotiations on all core issues, without exception, in order to conclude a peace treaty resolving all outstanding issues. They pledged to make every effort to do this by the end of 2008.

Implementation is now paramount. What we do tomorrow is more important than what we say today. In Annapolis, I pledged the full support of the United Nations for the renewed effort. I stressed that, for 60 years, the Organization has provided the broad parameters for peace, first in the partition plan and then in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), and that today the United Nations has few higher priorities than seeing this conflict resolved.

We all know the reasons why. The Palestinians have been deprived of their inalienable right to self-determination for 60 years. Palestinian society has been increasingly fragmented: territorially, by settlements, land expropriation and the barrier in the occupied Palestinian territory; socially and economically, by closure; and politically, between Gaza and the West Bank. They have begun to fear that the dream of statehood may be slipping beyond their grasp. This growing sense of despair must be reversed.

The process launched at Annapolis must change the lives of Palestinians and secure their independence and freedom. The process must end the occupation and create an independent and viable State of Palestine, at peace with itself and its neighbours. It also must deliver on the vital interests of Israelis: a Palestinian State that is a true partner and not a source of terrorism, secure and recognized borders and a permanent end to the conflict.

We cannot close our eyes to the profound doubt and mistrust on either side about the will and capacity of the other to achieve these goals. Despite several diplomatic landmarks, conditions on the ground have become harder, not easier, for most Palestinians — and for many Israelis, too. Israel faces genuine security threats, and Israeli civilians have died or been wounded in rocket attacks. Palestinian civilians have been killed or injured in Israeli military operations. The Gaza Strip has been almost entirely closed, with tight restrictions on supplies and movements of people, leading to a grave humanitarian situation. Settlements have expanded throughout the West Bank. Checkpoints and

a barrier have been erected on occupied land. Unemployment and poverty are rising.

The indignities, injustice and fear on both sides make it difficult to build faith in the political process. But that is exactly what we have to do. We must abandon piecemeal approaches and address all aspects of the conflict. Final status negotiations need to begin in earnest and address all the issues: Jerusalem, refugees, borders, settlements, security and water. The broad outlines of solutions to these issues are clear.

We must also help the Palestinian Authority to rebuild, reform and perform. I hope a wide range of donors will step forward with political and financial support at the upcoming Paris conference and beyond.

The situation on the ground must also improve, rapidly and visibly. Without implementing long-standing commitments under the Road Map and the Agreement on Movement and Access, the diplomatic process cannot succeed. Progress requires parallel actions and clear monitoring.

If peace is built on hope, not despair, we must also reach out to the people of Gaza. They have suffered more than anyone else from conflict and poverty. Humanitarian aid is vital, and United Nations efforts need the support of donors. But such aid is no substitute for a functioning economy. The time has come for concrete initiatives to ease their suffering. The unity of Gaza and the West Bank under the legitimate Palestinian Authority will also have to be restored for a peace agreement to be sustainable.

The vision of an end of occupation, an end of conflict and two States living side by side in peace and security is a vision of justice, security and peace. It is still achievable. But it will only happen if all involved take responsibility for contributing what they can. Now that the Palestinian leadership has embarked on a new quest with Israel to end the conflict and secure a better future for their children, let us show our solidarity with the Palestinian people — and the Israeli people, too — by giving our unyielding support to their efforts and not resting until the goal is achieved.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General for his important statement. I would like to express our deep gratitude to him for his tireless personal efforts to promote a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine.

I now have the great pleasure of giving the floor to the President of the Security Council, His Excellency Mr. Marty Natalegawa.

Mr. Natalegawa (Indonesia), President of the Security Council: First of all, I would like to extend our gratitude to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for inviting me to address this solemn meeting in my capacity as President of the Security Council for the month of November.

This year's observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People coincides with the continuing presence of challenges to peaceful coexistence between Israel and Palestine and the emergence of new opportunities for progress and the robust regional and international desire for peace in the Middle East.

We have seen repeated setbacks as a result of continued violence on the ground that serve only as further obstacles on the road to a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine. The Council urges all parties concerned to exercise restraint and refrain from any measure that could undermine peace in the region. The Security Council remains concerned over the socio-economic and humanitarian conditions in Gaza. The Council, therefore, calls for continued emergency and humanitarian assistance to the people in Gaza, without obstruction.

At the same time, the Council recognizes constructive developments in the efforts to bring peace to the Palestinians and other nations in the region. Dialogue between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has been renewed. This consultation has been stepped up further by the formation of Israeli and Palestinian teams to discuss the core issues that are essential to progress towards their shared goal of a negotiated two-State solution. The recent convening of an international Conference in Annapolis to launch negotiations leading to the ending of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was commendable.

The Security Council has constantly exerted efforts towards contributing to the creation of a conducive environment for progress on the political horizon for Palestinian statehood, consistent with the Road Map and its relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions. The Council continues to support existing initiatives in the realization of the vision of

two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. The Security Council recognizes the vital role of the Quartet, and also the League of Arab States. It attaches great significance to the Arab Peace Initiative, a regional initiative that is a vital element of the efforts to advance towards negotiated, comprehensive, just and lasting peace. The Security Council also acknowledges the importance of restoring the inter-Palestinian dialogues aimed at rebuilding Palestinian national unity.

The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People provides an opportunity for the international community to reflect upon its role and contributions in advancing the objective of the two-State vision. It is the day when the international community reaffirms its commitment to the Palestinian people and the establishment of an independent and sovereign State of Palestine.

The Security Council recognizes the critical need to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; this would contribute to security and stability in the Middle East and put in place a process with the goal of creating an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State, as envisioned in the Road Map, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Joint Understanding announced in Annapolis.

The Security Council underlines, in this regard, the importance of the Paris donors conference to be convened on 17 December to mobilize the donors, following on from the Annapolis Conference, and to provide financial and political support for the Palestinian Authority in order to enable it to build a viable and prosperous Palestinian State.

As mandated by its Charter, it is the responsibility of the Council to assist Palestine in achieving sustainable peace and in maintaining peace and security in the region. The Council will, therefore, continue to be actively seized of the matter.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank the President of the Security Council for his important statement.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Yasser Abed-Rabbo, Secretary-General of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization, who will read out a message from the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation

Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority, His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas.

Mr. Abed-Rabbo (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to read out a message from President Mahmoud Abbas on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

“On behalf of the Palestinian people and their leadership, I wish to extend our warmest and most sincere greetings and our most profound gratitude to all those who join us in commemorating the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This day was designated by the General Assembly in 1977 as an occasion to remind all of the suffering of the Palestinian people and to stress the necessity of achieving a just resolution of their cause, based firstly and lastly on the principle of the right to self-determination and an end to the Israeli occupation, leading to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The annual commemoration of this occasion by the United Nations is testament to the importance and centrality of the question of Palestine in relation to international peace and security.

“I avail myself of this opportunity to express our profound appreciation to our brother, His Excellency Ambassador Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and to all of the other members of the Committee. I wish also to thank His Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, for his efforts and for his message on this occasion. Further, I wish to thank His Excellency Mr. Srgjan Kerim, President of the General Assembly, and His Excellency Mr. Marty Natalegawa, President of the Security Council for the month of November. I extend our warmest greetings and gratitude to all speakers and to all others present today, who are sharing with us the commemoration of this occasion in all parts of the world as an expression of their solidarity with the Palestinian people in their struggle to attain their legitimate rights.

“The General Assembly adopted this date for the commemoration of this occasion in 1977 as a reminder of its 1947 resolution on the

partition of Palestine. It was also decided to underscore the necessity of bringing an end to the long suffering of our people, who have paid a high price without having committed any crime. They have been living for decades either as refugees deprived of their homeland or under occupation, enduring all kinds of harsh practices against them, including oppression and subjugation, the confiscation of their land, mass arrest campaigns and other measures and crimes which occur daily before the very eyes and ears of the entire world. Generation after generation of Palestinians have not known the taste of freedom and have not enjoyed the smallest fraction of what other peoples of the world enjoy. The time has come to put the past behind us and to begin a new era that is free from occupation and animosity, an era based on the logic of rights, not on the logic of force.

“The Palestine Liberation Organization, the sole legitimate representative of our people, has endeavoured, on the basis of resolutions adopted by the Palestinian National Council and since the declaration of Palestinian independence of 1988, to achieve a political settlement leading to the peace to which we all aspire, based on the recognized terms of reference, starting from United Nations resolutions, the Road Map, the Arab Peace Initiative, President Bush’s vision and the agreements signed between us and the Israeli side.

“The historic Conference held in Annapolis two days ago was a very important juncture and opportunity for launching serious peace negotiations within a set time frame under the auspices — and with the participation — of the international community, including members of the international Quartet, in order to put an end to the conflict and achieve a peace that will end the Israeli occupation of our Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, provide for a just and agreed solution to the issue of Palestine refugees on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) and guarantee the establishment of our independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living in peace and security with all its neighbours, including Israel.

“Peace cannot be achieved by the construction of the apartheid wall, which was

condemned as illegal by International Court of Justice in The Hague, or by the expansion of settlements, the Judaization of Jerusalem or the prevention of Palestinian citizens, both Christian and Muslim, from entering their city, even to exercise their right to religious worship. Security cannot be achieved by imposing a siege on the city of Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus Christ, surrounding it with walls and settlements and transforming its holy places into isolated antiquities. Security cannot be achieved by imposing a siege on the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly the Gaza Strip. Security cannot be achieved by military attacks, raids and incursions into Palestinian cities, towns and villages. Security cannot be achieved by confiscating Palestinian lands or allowing extremist, fanatical settlers to attack Palestinian civilians and set fire to and uproot their crops. Security for both peoples can be achieved only through the achievement of a just peace and through relations based on equality and mutual respect.

“On this day, 29 November, which coincides with the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption of the partition resolution of 1947 and the fortieth anniversary of the occupation of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, in 1967, our people look forward with great hope to the future. They are determined to uphold their rights, confident that the international community will not allow the loss of this opportunity to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict on all tracks, starting with the core and cause of the conflict, namely, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

“The wide international participation in the Annapolis Conference is a manifestation of the level of attention given by all the peoples of the world to peace in our region. On this occasion, I reiterate our gratitude and appreciation to all those who have contributed to and participated in the commemoration of this Day. I look forward with great hope to commemorating it with you next year, God willing, in our free, peaceful and independent State of Palestine, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.”

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank the Secretary-General of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization for reading out that

message from the President of the Palestinian Authority. I ask him to convey our respectful greetings to His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority, and to thank him for his very important political message. On behalf of all of us, I extend to the President of the Palestinian Authority our feelings of solidarity with the Palestinian people in their aspirations to and quest for a prosperous future in a secure and viable State of their own that is recognized by the international community. I would like also to assure President Abbas and, through him, the Government of Palestine and the Palestinian people as a whole, of our Committee's firm commitment to continuing its efforts, as mandated by the General Assembly, to promote a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine.

I will now suspend the meeting for a few minutes to allow some of our guests of honour to leave the Chamber. On behalf of the Committee, I would like once again to thank Their Excellencies, the President of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General, the President of the Security Council and the Secretary-General of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization for their presence at this commemorative ceremony and for the important messages that they have read out today.

The meeting was suspended at 11.40 a.m. and resumed at 11.45 a.m.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Hamidon Ali, Vice-Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.

Mr. Ali (Malaysia), Vice-Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories: I have the honour to address this meeting on behalf of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.

The occupation of the Palestinian territories — namely, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem — has now continued for four decades. After

40 years, the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory still continues to deteriorate. The inhabitants of the West Bank are subjected to severe restrictions of their right to freedom of movement, which are implemented through more than 500 checkpoints, roadblocks and other types of physical obstacles, as well as a system of permits. There are 149 settlements in the West Bank, inhabited by some 480,000 settlers. In addition to the confiscation of Palestinian-owned land for settlements, land in the West Bank is also taken through the elaborate network of bypass roads connecting the settlements with each other and with Israel.

On 24 September the Israeli army announced new land confiscations for a road east of Jerusalem which will further cut the city off from the rest of the West Bank. The West Bank is increasingly being fragmented into ever smaller parts that render the viability of a Palestinian State less and less likely. In addition, 80 per cent of the separation wall is currently being built in occupied territory, taking in the best Palestinian agricultural land and other resources. With recent extensions in the southern part of the West Bank, the separation wall will now encompass some 13 per cent of that territory. The 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the legal consequences of the building of the separation wall in occupied Palestinian territory has gone unheeded to date.

There are some 11,000 Palestinian prisoners detained in Israel, of whom about 400 are children. The cities and towns of the West Bank are subjected to constant military incursions, arrests and search operations, as well as targeted assassinations.

The situation of human rights in the Gaza Strip is even more dire, and it is facing a rapidly deteriorating humanitarian crisis. Gaza has been cut off from the rest of the world since June, when all the crossings in and out of it were closed. The Israeli Army has carried out regular incursions into Gaza and has destroyed property there. Gaza is subjected to repeated air strikes and targeted assassinations of militants in which innocent civilians are often hurt or killed. Seriously ill Palestinian patients from Gaza have increasingly been denied access to hospitals in Israel, and their number has fallen from an average of 40 a day in July to less than five a day in September. In October, a 21-year-old cancer patient from Gaza died after his entry into Israel was delayed for 10 days.

The situation in Gaza deteriorated further when it was declared “hostile territory” or an “enemy entity” by Israel. A number of Israeli banks have stopped dealing with banks in Gaza; this makes the sending of remittances from abroad more and more difficult, and it is starting to cause cash shortages. At the end of October, in violation of international law, the Government of Israel started reducing the supply of electricity and fuel to the Gaza Strip; this is likely to endanger, among other things, the functioning of hospitals, sewage and water services and amounts to collective punishment of some 1.5 million inhabitants.

The international community needs to take urgent measures to remedy the current situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory through a peaceful, just and lasting solution that would lead to the end of the occupation and would enable the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination in a viable Palestinian State.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Rodrigo Malmierca Díaz, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Cuba to the United Nations and Vice-Chairman of this Committee, who will read out a message from His Excellency Mr. Felipe Pérez Roque, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Cuba, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Mr. Malmierca Díaz (*Cuba*) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to read out the following message from His Excellency Mr. Felipe Pérez Roque, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cuba, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

“On the important occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, it is my honour, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the people of Cuba, to address the members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

“Full support for the struggle of the Palestinian people to achieve its inalienable rights holds a permanent place in the Non-Aligned Movement, which has many times raised its voice in international bodies calling for the exercise of the right of the Palestinian people to a sovereign and independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement have reaffirmed at the highest level the solidarity of

the non-aligned countries with the Palestinian cause.

“At the fourteenth Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in Havana in September 2006, our leaders once again considered the serious situation imposed on the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and expressed their deep regret that the Palestinian people continue to suffer under the prolonged and brutal Israeli military occupation of their land and continue to be denied their inalienable rights, including the right of self-determination, to the return of Palestinian refugees to their territories and to the full implementation of its right to establish a sovereign, independent State.

“Over the years, the Non-Aligned Movement has maintained a firm position of solidarity with the Palestinian people and its just cause, has rejected Israel’s illegal occupation of Arab territories and has condemned massive, flagrant and systematic violations of human rights and of international humanitarian law committed by the occupying Power.

“On 29 November we will mark the sixtieth anniversary of the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 181 (II), which decided upon the partition of Palestine and the creation of two independent States, which should live in peace and harmony with each other. This historic commemoration is marked by innumerable activities being carried out in varying parts of the world in support of the Palestinian cause. Moreover, let us continue to recall the forty years of the so-called Six-Day War, which marked the beginning of the occupation of the Palestinian territory by Israel, which we remembered with sorrow in June.

“In spite of the long period between these two events, the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital continues to be an unachieved objective. The occupying Power continues to violate international law and systematically and with impunity fails to comply with more than one hundred resolutions adopted by various United Nations organs, including more than 60 of the Security Council. Over a period of four decades,

Israel has applied deliberate and illegal policies and practices intended to modify the demographic composition, character and nature of the Palestinian lands and has de facto annexed those lands, particularly through implementing its illegal settlements policy, to which it has, since 2003, added the illegal construction of a wall on the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem and the areas around it.

“The Non-Aligned Movement has condemned those and other illegal measures taken by Israel over those years. That includes, of course, the aggressive acts against the Palestinian people over the last few months, which have seriously undermined the functioning of the Palestinian Authority and have contributed to the polarization of Palestinian society.

“Allow me to reiterate the firm commitment of the Non-Aligned Movement to continue supporting the Palestinian people and their leadership in order to put an end to the Israeli occupation, in accordance with the norms and principles of international law and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, as well as to extend economic and financial assistance to the Palestinian people in order to mitigate the current humanitarian crisis, for which the support of the international community will be decisive.

“I also reaffirm the aspiration of Cuba to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace for all peoples of the Middle East, without exclusion, a peace that will grant the Palestinian people their right to exercise self-determination and sovereignty in their independent State based on borders prior to 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital. In the search for peace, the Arab peoples can always count on the full solidarity of Cuba.

“Please accept, Sir, the assurances of my highest consideration.”

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank His Excellency Mr. Rodrigo Malmierca Díaz for reading out the statement on behalf of Foreign Minister Pérez Roque. I would request that he convey to Mr. Pérez Roque the sincere thanks of the Committee for that important statement.

I now give the floor to Mr. Robert Tachie-Menson, Deputy Permanent Representative of Ghana, who will read out a statement to the Committee on behalf of the President of the Republic of Ghana, His Excellency Mr. John Kufuor, in his capacity as Chairman of the African Union.

Mr. Tachie-Menson (Ghana): I have the honour of presenting the statement of His Excellency Mr. John Kufuor, President of the Republic of Ghana and Chairman of the African Union, on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The statement reads as follows:

“The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People provides an opportunity for the international community to focus its attention on the fact that independent statehood for the Palestinian people has still not been achieved, and that the Palestinian people are yet to attain the exercise of their inalienable rights, as defined by the United Nations General Assembly.

“This year, the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People has assumed more significance against the backdrop of recent positive developments in respect of the Middle East as regards the Middle East Peace Conference held in Annapolis, Maryland, in the United States of America. Indeed, the Conference offered the opportunity for those who desired peace in this troubled region to once again engage in deliberations towards the resolution of the impasse. We acknowledge however that some agreements reached in the past have yet to be implemented, especially insofar as their substantive aspects are concerned. We call on all parties who have an interest in the conflict to continue to engage in the viable political process that would lead to peace, and to avoid any actions that could jeopardize further progress. We are confident that all parties will also commit themselves to sustaining the new spirit that Annapolis brings to the Middle East peace process so that the goals of statehood for Palestinians and security for the State of Israel may be realized.

“We reaffirm our commitment to initiatives, including the Annapolis Conference and all of their genuine efforts, geared to finding a just,

peaceful, comprehensive and lasting solution to the conflict in the Middle East. In this regard, we restate our position for a solution which guarantees the Palestinian people’s legitimate right, as well the right of all States in the region, to live within secure and universally recognized boundaries.

“Finally, we will continue to lend our full support to all efforts for an early, equitable and peaceful resolution of the Palestinian problem, and appeal to the international community to lend its support to the Annapolis initiative.”

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Tachie-Menson for reading out the statement on behalf of His Excellency Mr. John Agyekum Kufuor, President of Ghana and Chair of the African Union. I request that you, Sir, convey to him the sincere thanks of the Committee for that important statement.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Yahya A. Mahmassani, Ambassador, Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States to the United Nations, who will deliver a message on behalf of Mr. Amre Moussa, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

Mr. Mahmassani (League of Arab States) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is an honour for me, Mr. Chairman, to convey to you and to the other members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People the greetings of Mr. Amre Moussa, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, and to express his deep appreciation for the positive and vital role the Committee plays in protecting the Palestinian people and their legitimate national rights, particularly their rights to self-determination and to establish an independent, sovereign State on their national soil, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant internationally legitimate resolutions, terms of reference and internationally recognized principles, particularly the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force, the principle of land for peace and the continuation of that role for the search for a just, lasting and comprehensive resolution to the Palestinian question.

Today’s marking of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People coincides with the ninetieth anniversary of the Balfour Declaration and with the passage of 40 years of Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories and the ensuing

negative repercussions and destructive effects on the Palestinian people and their daily lives. The appropriation of Palestinian territories in order to intensify its settlement activities, and the creation of the separation — represent a flagrant violation of international legitimacy, the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and the rights of the people of the Palestinian territories — makes it impossible for the Palestinians to establish a viable, contiguous and sovereign state.

Israel continues to Judaize Al-Quds Al-Sharif and to alter its demographic and historic characteristics and is trying to create a new situation in the territory. This is one of the most sensitive final status issues because of its importance for millions of believers worldwide and is a flagrant violation of relevant and legal international resolutions and is hindering negotiations on the final status of Al-Quds Al-Sharif. Infringing on Al-Quds Al-Sharif and Al-Aqsa Mosque is a red line which should not be crossed. The international community must preserve all Islamic sacred places as well as Christian holy sites. Israeli practices, in particular in the Gaza Strip, have created a critical humanitarian, economic and social crisis that is unprecedented in scale that and has been denounced in international reports of intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations.

Israel has declared the Gaza Strip “hostile territory” and has threatened to halt the supply of fuel, water and electricity. Israel is showing no respect for international humanitarian law and human rights. The Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the occupied territories, Mr. John Dugard, reported on Israel’s threats to cut off supplies of water and electricity and said that such economic sanctions could not be applied against a territory, the Gaza Strip, which is not an independent country.

Excessive military sanctions create a dangerous situation for all civilians. This is an occupied territory and all States have the responsibility to improve the living conditions there. Daily incursions by Israel into towns and villages, extrajudicial assassinations, and the kidnapping and detention of Palestinians, the confiscation of Palestinian land, the building of roads and bypass roads for the settlements are a violation of international law, international humanitarian law and the Fourth Geneva Convention. Those constant practices impact the daily political, security, economic and social lives of Palestinians. Infringement on the

daily activities of the Palestinian people has led to an increase in tensions and the deterioration of the political and security situation, which, in turn, has led to armed conflict between Palestinian factions and created more suffering for more than 1.5 million Palestinians.

In September 2007, the Council of Ministers of the League of Arab States reaffirmed the Arab commitment to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace as the strategic choice. It reaffirmed that the peace process is a comprehensive process which will come about through the withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan Heights as well as the Sheba’a farms in southern Lebanon. On that basis, the Council of Ministers of the League of Arab States felt that the 16 July 2007 statement by President George Bush and his invitation to hold an international Conference were positive elements which could lead to productive results for a two-State solution, the creation of an independent Palestinian State, and to a halt in the construction of settlements, as well as to an agreement on final status issues such as the question of refugees and the status of Al-Quds Al-Sharif.

The Council of Ministers of the League of Arab States also reaffirmed on 30 July 2007 its support for the holding of the international conference, with the participation of all parties concerned, in accordance with international law and the terms of reference already agreed upon for direct negotiations on all tracks and on all final status issues of the Israeli-Arab conflict and to do that within a set timetable.

The results of the international Conference in Annapolis have created a genuine opportunity for relaunching the peace process and there is a real possibility of that occurring. If Israel does not understand this, regional peace and security will be threatened because of its occupation and lack of respect for the national rights of Palestinians, their dignity, their right to live in peace, their right to self-determination and to create an independent state with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. If the international community does not understand the critical need and importance of those issues with regard to the efforts to end the Arab-Israeli conflict on the basis of the Arab Peace Initiative and the agreed terms of reference, there will be nothing but more violence, counter-violence and extremism, which could spill over and threaten international peace and security.

Respect for international legitimacy and efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace are necessary in order to ensure tolerance, rejection of violence, mutual respect, dialogue and respect for civilizations of the region. This region has seen heightened tension due to the injustices done to the Palestinian people, whose day of solidarity we are celebrating today.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I request the Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States to kindly convey to Mr. Amre Moussa our sincere thanks for his important message.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Munir Akram, Permanent Representative of Pakistan, who will read a statement by His Excellency Mr. Inam ul Haque, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Pakistan, in his capacity as Chairman of the thirty-fourth session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers. I now give him the floor.

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): This is a message from His Excellency Mr. Inam ul Haque, the Foreign Minister of Pakistan, in his capacity as Chairman of the thirty-fourth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

“The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) joins the international community in reaffirming its strong support and solidarity with the Palestinian people for the realization of their inalienable rights, including their legitimate right to self-determination and freedom from foreign occupation.

“The General Assembly has repeatedly affirmed that the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people is indispensable for the solution of the question of Palestine. The United Nations has a permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects in a satisfactory manner in accordance with international legitimacy.

“The root cause of the Arab-Israeli conflict is the Israeli occupation of Arab territories. The Palestinian question is the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The OIC has a natural and strong attachment to the issue of Palestine and is deeply committed to its just and peaceful settlement.

“The cause of Al-Quds Al-Sharif is central to the entire Islamic ummah. The position of the

OIC on the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the core issue of Palestine and the basis and principles for resolving these conflicts, are clearly spelt out in its declarations, communiqués and resolutions adopted at the summit and ministerial levels. In brief, the OIC calls for the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace based on international law and relevant United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), as well as agreed principles which call for Israel’s complete withdrawal from occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem and all other occupied Arab territories; the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to exercise self-determination and sovereignty in their independent and viable State of Palestine, on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital; and a just resolution to the plight of the Palestine refugees in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948.

“The observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People this year coincides with the fortieth anniversary of the adoption of Security Council resolution 242 (1967) which had set out the principles for a just and lasting settlement, that is, inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war, withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from the territories occupied in the 1967 conflict, and a just settlement of the refugee issue, among others. That resolution remains unimplemented until this day, like numerous other resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

“Sixty years have lapsed since the Palestinian *nakba* and the adoption of resolution 181 (II) of 29 November 1947. As a result, lasting peace and stability in the Middle East has remained elusive. Over decades, this cauldron of conflict in the Middle East has resulted in untold suffering, death and destruction, caused misery, anger and frustration, raised emotions and bred mistrust, antagonism and violence. There is a growing realization nonetheless that the world can no longer afford to let these conflicts fester. The occupation must be brought to an end. There is a unanimous call for achieving comprehensive

and lasting peace in the Middle East, for which a just and final settlement of the core issue of Palestine is imperative. There is also broad consensus and recognition that lasting peace and stability can only be achieved through pacific settlement, and not by unilateral actions and the use of force.

“In this context, it is encouraging that our expression of solidarity with the Palestinian people today comes in the wake of extensive regional and international engagement to resolve the long-standing Palestinian issue. This includes the revival of the Arab Peace Initiative and the just-concluded peace Conference in Annapolis. There is a broad willingness to move the peace process forward. We hope the Annapolis meeting will be the beginning of the end of the tragedy of Palestine and will usher in an era of peace in the Holy Land. The Islamic countries participated in the Annapolis Conference, in response to the invitation from the United States, to signal their commitment to a just, comprehensive and lasting peace between Israel and Palestine and throughout the Middle East.

“We welcome the commitment to the establishment of the Palestinian State and the agreement to start final status negotiations to resolve all core issues, including borders, refugees, settlements and Jerusalem. To be fair, these issues must be resolved on the basis of previous agreements, the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the Madrid Peace Conference terms of reference, the Quartet’s Road Map, and the Arab Peace Initiative. This will entail Israeli withdrawal from occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. We hope the peace treaty will be finalized before the end of 2008 and then be implemented in earnest. Delays and obstructions could exacerbate, rather than enhance, the prospects for peace.

“In the meanwhile, it is important to build an environment of trust and confidence to support the peace process. We remain deeply concerned over the continuing plight of the Palestinian people, their humiliation and collective punishment under Israeli occupation. Violence and military aggression, grave breaches of

international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, and socio-economic deprivation and strangulation are affecting all aspects of the lives of the Palestinian people. The dire situation in the occupied territories is depicted in detail in various United Nations and other reports. The international community must ensure full compliance by Israel of its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention, which is applicable to all the occupied territories. Israel must also end policies and actions that seek to change the realities on the ground that would prejudice final settlement, including the integrity and viability of a future Palestinian state.

“There are some immediate requirements to create the conditions for success. First, rapidly and tangibly improving the situation on the ground in the occupied territories; ending the oppression and suffering of the Palestinian people; ceasing military campaigns by Israel; releasing prisoners; halting the construction of the illegal separation wall; freezing settlement activities; dismantling unauthorized settler outposts; removing all kinds of blockades and restrictions; ending the siege of Gaza, and the illegal declaration of Gaza by Israel as an “enemy entity”; and ending all violence.

“Secondly, providing enhanced humanitarian, economic and social support by the international community to the Palestinians, including the immediate restoration and unimpeded provision of all essential goods and services to the Palestinian people in all the occupied territories.

“Thirdly, providing support to the Palestinian Authority for building state institutions, including its security apparatus. In this regard, we look forward to a successful donors conference in Paris to meet these objectives.

“Obviously, together with the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, efforts must continue to revive Palestinian unity. Durable peace is impossible with a divided people.

“At this crucial juncture in the search for lasting peace in the Middle East, the Organization of Islamic Conference reaffirms its steadfast support to the Palestinian people in their rightful quest for self-determination and the establishment of a sovereign, viable and independent

Palestinian State based on the pre-1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

“We call on all parties to remain fully committed to the peace process and to address all outstanding issues through dialogue. An early comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the core issue of Palestine, must be our collective strategic objective. The international community must pledge its complete commitment to this objective and throw its full moral, diplomatic, political and economic support behind its early realization. The Organization of the Islamic Conference shall continue to play its rightful role in this collective endeavour.”

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I request the representative of Pakistan to convey to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Pakistan our sincere thanks for his important message.

It is with great pleasure that I now give the floor to Mr. Chris Ferguson, representative of the World Council of Churches to the United Nations, who will make a statement on behalf of the International Coordinating Network on Palestine, an international network of civil society organizations that supports the Committee’s activities.

Mr. Ferguson (World Council of Churches): Let me begin with a deep expression of appreciation to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for extending an invitation to civil society representatives to participate in this solemn commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Not only has the Committee, under the leadership of its Chairman, Ambassador Paul Badji, and other Committee members, worked tirelessly to keep the occupation of Palestinian territories and the rights of the Palestinian people before the international community; it has done so by forging a strong partnership with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups. Such efforts to keep diplomatic and political attention focused on the Palestinian people and their rights have never been more urgently needed or more difficult than in this fortieth year of the occupation, which is the sixtieth year since the adoption of resolution 181 (II), on the United Nations partition plan, and the fifty-ninth year since the *nakba*.

It is both a great privilege and an impossible task for me to attempt to adequately represent international civil society. That is simply because those participating around the world, including Palestinian and Israeli NGOs and civil society groups, working in solidarity with the Palestinian people to end the illegal occupation and to achieve a just peace for all parties to the conflict, are many and varied, each with a distinctive voice. There are movements, networks and groups on every continent in a growing and expanding mobilization of solidarity, support and determined non-violent action to end the occupation, to protect the civilian population and to insist on the implementation of United Nations resolutions and international law through non-military solutions.

The civil society groups and NGOs engaged in these actions not only span the world’s regions; we come from many sectors of society. Among the wide variety of groups visibly working for a comprehensive and just peace are a constant and growing number of churches and other faith-based organizations. I am privileged to speak for that sector of the community today.

This year of painfully significant dates is marked by great urgency in the face of the deepening suffering of the people in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem and the refugees in the region and throughout the world. This week, the attention of the world was drawn to Annapolis. The meeting held there heralded the reactivation of the peace process. Mr. Sam Kobia, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, sent a letter to United States Secretary of State Rice, Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas before the meeting, laying out our view of possible ways to measure the success and relevance of any actions to be taken. Following the Annapolis Conference, his comments are of even greater relevance:

“As this initiative is set to begin, we would like to suggest three criteria for success, based on 60 years of international church advocacy for peace in this conflict.

“Good-faith negotiations are the first criterion. The crux of the problem — the final status issues — will not yield without sustained and robust good faith negotiations by all sides.

“Secondly, negotiations must recognize and involve all parties with legitimate interests at

stake in the solution to the conflict. From the earliest possible juncture, peace negotiations must include their representatives in a meaningful and appropriate way. The participation, now confirmed, of States in the Arab Peace Initiative is an essential opening in this direction. Any process launched must be genuinely multilateral in order to advance the cause of peace.

“Thirdly, scrupulous adherence to the international rule of law is essential. Any agreement or process that you entertain will be judged against United Nations Security Council resolutions and the treaty obligations of the parties involved, international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

“These legal standards are the foundations of peace, as the international community has affirmed again and again through the United Nations and through international organizations of civil society, including the World Council of Churches. Similarly, the specific United Nations Security Council resolutions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are the architecture of peace. These include Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) and General Assembly resolution 194 (III), on the question of Jerusalem and refugees.

“Also, during negotiations, the negotiating parties’ behaviour in Israel and the occupied territories must be governed by the same body of international law. Early action on ending the isolation of Gaza and the collective punishment of its 1.5 million residents, stopping attacks on civilians by either side, releasing prisoners denied due process on both sides, freezing all settlement growth of any kind, ceasing land expropriation, stopping work on the separation barrier, opening negotiations about the occupied Golan Heights and other well-known steps will empower the Annapolis process if implemented, but will hobble and weaken it — if not frustrate it — if not. Such steps will also signal the level of good faith behind the process, making reconciliation between the main Palestinian political groups, Fatah and Hamas, eminently more feasible.

“We submit that negotiations based on good faith, on multilateral participation and on the rule of law will require the United States

administration, in their role, not only to convene, but also ensure that the final agreement preserves the indivisibility of justice for Palestinians and Israelis.”

Obviously, rights are not a bargaining chip in the process of negotiations. Yet, as we speak, the international community remains woefully inactive and complicit in its silence in the face of the dramatically deteriorating situation in Gaza. True, some evident but insufficient attention is being paid to the desperate humanitarian aspect of the crisis, but there is no sign of real will or moral courage to address the gross and flagrant violation of international law and the breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention by Israel in declaring Gaza an enemy entity and inflicting unconscionable collective punishment on 1.5 million people.

The international community cannot and should not abandon the civilian population of Gaza and leave it without the protection that it is guaranteed. Neither Palestinian internal conflicts nor the terrorizing Qassam rocket attacks justify the denial of food, fuel, economic livelihoods, medical care and freedom to travel and study — not to mention the current threat to cut off electricity and water — to 1.5 million innocent civilians. Church-related hospitals and clinics break our hearts daily with reports of ill and injured children and patients who are dying because they cannot travel for needed medical treatment or because supplies are not available. Eighty per cent of the people living in poverty and 1.1 million surviving on food aid: this is an intentional and utterly illegal “starvation diet” designed to punish and pressure the population, supposedly to end rocket activity for which it is not responsible and which it cannot control. In large part, the situation in Gaza is a further expression of the international community’s boycotting and isolating Palestinians for the exercise of their democratic rights. The blind eye turned to the right of civilians in Gaza to protection makes a mockery of all other United Nations pretensions to care for unarmed and defenceless civilians.

Peace must be built on rights, rights for all, protection for all. The international community has failed and continues to fail to stand with the people in Palestine in Gaza, the West Bank, East Jerusalem and worldwide in ending the brutal military occupation, ongoing dispossession and securing the right to return. Crucially, this failure also impedes the peace, justice, security and rights that we seek, uphold and desire for

Israelis. This failure is an obstacle to regional peace and foments world insecurity and disorder.

We speak morally of a just peace based on full and scrupulous implementation of international law because we know that any lasting solution for the Palestinian people is intertwined with a lasting solution for peace and justice for Israel. We actively seek the well-being of both peoples and insist that both the Palestinian people and Israel have legitimate security concerns.

We see also the aspect of religion at play here. We see that although religion is not at the root of the conflict, religion has become part of the problem and, therefore, religious leaders and interreligious cooperation have to be part of the solution so that Christians, Muslims and Jews will again understand one another and live as neighbours as they have in the past.

Here is another indication that there must be a partnership with civil society and full participation in seeking a solution. There is no military solution and this memory-filled year has marked a reinvigoration of strong calls by international civil society to redouble all efforts for non-violent actions for peace.

Notably, the International Coordinating Network on Palestine, meeting in Brussels in August of this year, launched a strong and resolute plan of action under the title: "Sixty years is enough; end the dispossession; bring the refugees home". The call to action included a commitment to strengthen the global campaign for boycotts, divestment and sanctions, emphasizing that this campaign responds to a call from Palestinian civil society and is, in the words of the call to action, a non-violent effort against Israeli occupation, apartheid and oppression. The Network has further committed itself to a campaign identifying and opposing Israeli policies as violations of the International Covenant on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid.

Speaking now with the voice of the religious community, I point out that in June of this year the World Council of Churches convened in Amman an International Peace Conference of Churches from around the world. The "Amman Call", which emerged from that meeting, is not meant to be another statement but simply the visible sign of a renewed commitment to church advocacy for peace, aimed at ending the illegal occupation, in accordance with United Nations

resolutions, and at demonstrating the World Council's commitment to interreligious action for peace and justice that serves all the peoples of the region.

That meeting launched a new initiative: The Palestine/Israel Ecumenical Forum, dedicated to church action for both peacemaking and peacebuilding. In their own way, many churches around the world are increasingly looking at non-violent methods such as morally responsible investment, which use economic measures dedicated to stopping illegal behaviour that supports the occupation. This initiative will form strong interreligious alliances as well, all in order to break new ground and commit to what the Amman Call describes as costly solidarity.

Civil society in general, and the churches in particular, are showing new vigour faced with the morally repugnant and unjustifiable situation. Costly solidarity means taking non-violent, constructive action which may, in fact, cause discomfort, tension and serious disagreement. However, doing something different and acting in a new way is an ethical imperative at this moment.

We are committed — the civil society of the world that is committed to peace — to look at our own selves, to reinvigorate our own actions in solidarity; but we are also committed to holding the international community accountable to the norms and standards of international law for all. Palestinian rights can no longer be the exceptions to the rule of international law.

Civil society, in its various forms and forums, have called for a recommitment to all actions for resolute campaigns for rights and freedoms. We have called, and continue to call, on the international community to embrace the principles of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions and to vigorously apply them. The churches themselves have based their actions on respect for United Nations resolutions and the rule of law. Can Member States do less?

There is an ethical and spiritual imperative to implement laws and use non-violent means to achieve peace and justice. The call is simple: join us in costly solidarity. It is not easy; nor should it be. However, the dispossessed and oppressed Palestinian people have that right. All the peoples affected by the conflict deserve no less. A just peace for Palestine and Israel demands it.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I would like to emphasize the very clear nature of this very direct message. It does honour to the civil society you represent, Mr. Ferguson. I would also like to thank, through you, the active civil society organizations throughout the world that are making generous commitments to finding a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine. I would like to thank them for their valuable contribution to the work of the Committee. I thank them, in particular, for their collaboration with the Committee. It was a privilege for me to have so much contact with numerous civil society organizations which help us greatly and who push us to the limit, past our diplomatic formulas and reserve. Of course, we are representative of Governments and must take account of varying views in order to progress together, but I thank them for their interest in the work of the Committee.

It is now my honour to announce that the Committee has received messages of support and solidarity from many heads of State or Government, as well as from Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Governments and international organizations. I would like to recall that these messages will be published in a special bulletin by the Division for Palestinian Rights. However, I would like to read out, in the order they were received, the list of these individuals who sent messages today.

We have received messages from the following heads of State: His Excellency the President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, His Majesty the King of Jordan, His Excellency the President of the Federative Republic of Brazil, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Turkey, His Excellency the President of the Republic of the Sudan, His Highness the Amir of the State of Qatar, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Senegal, His Majesty the King of the Kingdom of Bahrain, His Excellency the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, His Excellency the President of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, His Excellency the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, His Excellency the President of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, His Excellency the President of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, His Excellency the President of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, His Excellency the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, His Excellency the President of Indonesia, His Excellency

the President of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, His Excellency the President of the Russian Federation, His Excellency the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Maldives, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Tunisia, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Guinea, His Excellency the President of Nicaragua, His Excellency the President of the United Arab Emirates, His Excellency the President of Mexico, His Excellency the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Namibia and Her Excellency the President of the Republic of Chile.

We have received messages from the following heads of Government: His Excellency the Prime Minister of Thailand, His Excellency the Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, His Excellency the Chief Adviser and Prime Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, His Excellency the Prime Minister of India and His Excellency the Prime Minister of Mauritius.

The Committee has also received messages from the following Ministers for Foreign Affairs: His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic, His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Madagascar and His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Colombia.

We have received messages from the following Governments: the Government of the Dominican Republic, the Government of the Republic of South Africa, the Government of Lebanon and the Government of Guyana.

The Committee has received messages from the following intergovernmental organizations: His Excellency the Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and the European Union.

The Committee has also received messages from the following civil society organizations: the World Young Women's Christian Association, the Bishop of Grahamstown and Archbishop-elect of Cape Town on behalf of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, and the International Coordinating Committee on Palestine.

The Committee will surely continue to receive messages, and those messages will be included in the bulletin of the Division for Palestinian Rights.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to express our sincere appreciation to the heads of State or Government, Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Governments and organizations that I have just mentioned, to those who will address messages to us in the future and to all participants in the current meeting for their persistent efforts 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.

The statements that we have heard today and the messages of solidarity that we have received demonstrate once again the unwavering support of the international community for the establishment of peace in the Middle East and the realization by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights, on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and international law.

I can assure all participants that the members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People will spare no effort to achieve those objectives.

I now have the pleasure to give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Riyad Mansour, Ambassador and Permanent Observer for Palestine to the United Nations.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): I want to thank you, Mr. Chairman, and to thank the Committee for organizing again this year this very important celebration and commemoration on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Speaking at the end of the meeting, after all these statements, there is nothing to add. Nevertheless, I want to add my voice, the voice of the Palestinian people and the voice of our leadership and President Abbas, to thank those who have spoken in expressing their solidarity with our people, those who have sent messages — heads of State and leaders from all corners of the globe — and all those who have been present with us this morning. Looking around this room I noticed people from all continents — Asia, Africa, South America, North America and Europe. These

people expressed their solidarity with the just struggle of the Palestinian people. We appreciate that. We thank them for their strong messages of solidarity.

I would also like to say that the fact that the Secretary-General was, as usual, with us at this gathering, along with the President of the General Assembly, the President of the Security Council and so many ambassadors and other representatives of countries, is a very strong demonstration of the commitment of the international community, and the United Nations in particular, in continuing their concern for the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all of its aspects. To us, that means the end of the Israeli occupation of all of the land that they occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem, and the establishment of our independent Palestinian State, side by side with Israel, on the land that was occupied in 1967, with a just and agreed resolution of the question of the Palestinian refugees on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

Along with that, we would also like to see an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict through the total withdrawal of Israel from all other Arab land that they occupied in 1967, as stipulated in the Arab Peace Initiative in order to open a new chapter in the relationship among the people of the region, based on Israel's total withdrawal from the land occupied in 1967. In exchange for this would be the total normalization of relations with Israel.

Now this gathering has a special flavour to it, not only because of the fortieth anniversary of the occupation and the 60 years of the *nakba*, but because we are gathered following a successful Conference in Annapolis. The commitment of the international community and the United Nations to the question of Palestine needs to shift gears, because the role of the United Nations, as expressed by the Secretary-General and my friend, the Chairman of our community, would require from all of us a massive amount of involvement, energy and support to ensure the success of negotiations between the Palestinian side and the Israeli side and, hopefully, on other Arab tracks very soon, in order to reach a treaty between us and Israel sometime in 2008, to enable the independent Palestinian state to be born. That would require, of course, a process of negotiation on the six final status issues: borders, Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, water and security.

Our side is determined to negotiate in good faith, based on points of reference that are known to everyone and on which there is consensus: relevant United Nations resolutions, the Arab peace initiative, the road map, the principle of exchanging land for peace. We are extremely determined to exploit this historic moment to reach a peace treaty with our neighbours, the Israelis, so that we can open new chapters in our relationship with them.

We need your help to ensure the success of that exercise. We need the help of everyone that is interested in peace and justice in the Middle East so that, hopefully next year, we can celebrate here, in Palestine and in East Jerusalem, the future capital of our State, a different kind of solidarity. Maybe we will be celebrating the birth of the independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Therefore, your efforts and the efforts of the United Nations are needed more than ever for the success of that exercise.

I just also want to add that this International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is not only about giving speeches — which are wonderful to receive and give our people the strength and determination to continue the struggle to accomplish our national objectives — but that we also have other events during the course of the day. This afternoon, we will begin the debate on the question of Palestine, in which Palestine and many others will participate. It will culminate in the adoption of resolutions that will be helpful in pushing the peace process forward.

In addition to that, this evening we will have cultural events, including one at 6 p.m., in which all will be given an opportunity to see the creativity of our people and their genius through the display of stitching and different clothes of people from different parts of Palestine. We are proud to show you a dimension of the Palestinian people that is different — of a people that is determined to continue to live and to be creative under very difficult conditions. That will be at 6 p.m. at the entrance of the lobby of the General Assembly building.

At 7 p.m., we will demonstrate another dimension of the creativity of the Palestinian people. We will have a concert of music in which a fabulous, brilliant Palestinian-American musician and his troupe will entertain you by providing beautiful classical Arabic music with an infusion of jazz. We want you to see that the Palestinian people are so many things. They are not

only what is sometimes stereotyped in the media as being this or that. They are musicians; they are people who can produce beautiful embroidered dresses; they are golf players; they are skiers; they are football players; they are artists; they are normal human beings, and they excel even under very difficult conditions. We are brilliant physicians, brilliant engineers, brilliant lawyers.

We have so many things. The only thing that we do not have, and which we hope that we can have by the end of the year 2008, is our independent Palestinian State, to be as normal as all of you and to be as normal as all 192 Members of the United Nations. We want to be the 193rd Member of the United Nations.

I therefore urge you to come this evening and celebrate all these contributions with us. See how we can be creative in different fields of life. We want to share that, and to thank everyone for being with us today. I am looking forward to seeing you this evening.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Mansour for his important statement. On behalf of the members of the Committee, and above all on behalf of the members of its Bureau and on my own behalf, I would like to thank him for his words. Personally, I am not surprised by his eloquence, as I am in his company practically every day. I know his resolve, his perspicacity, his courage. I have been at his side in moments of joy and in moments of difficulty and pain. We speak often and advise each other frequently. From that has emerged what I would call an active complicity that allows me to address him in a personal way.

In any event, I thank him for the friendship he has extended to me and for the advice he offers me on a daily basis as we go about our work. I thank him, too, for the attention he accords to my proposals and advice in often very difficult moments, when one sometimes has trouble mastering one's emotions and heeding counsel. He has always demonstrated patience, wisdom and perseverance, for which I thank him.

I ask him today to understand that he will always be a friend and colleague to me and to the members of the Bureau as we pursue the work that has been assigned to us until the day when independent Palestine is born and we can finally have the pleasure of visiting it, communing with the Palestinian people, and celebrating with it all the beautiful works it can produce, a sample of which we are invited to see this

afternoon. We will go happily and with great enthusiasm, because we are and always will be his friends — even his brothers.

Before adjourning this solemn meeting, I wish to thank everyone who has made it 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 and everyone who works quietly and effectively behind the scenes to make such meetings the brilliant success they deserve to be.

I also want to remind you that a Palestinian cultural exhibit, presented under the auspices of the Committee in cooperation with the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine, will take place at 6 p.m. in the public lobby of the General Assembly building.

The Ambassador of Palestine has just told us about it. This year's exhibit is entitled "Palestine: A Continuing Legacy". The event will be followed by a concert by Simon Shaheen and Qantara, which is to begin at 7 p.m. in conference room 4. All are cordially invited.

Following this meeting, at 1 p.m. in the Dag Hammarskjöld Library Auditorium, all members are invited to attend a screening of the film entitled "Knowledge is the Beginning: Daniel Barenboim and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra". I believe the film deserves to be seen.

I wish to thank all those present here today for their participation, and I express our gratitude for the messages we have received.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.