



General Assembly

GA/PAL/1038

Department of Public Information • News and Media Division • New York

Committee on the Inalienable Rights
of the Palestinian People
299th Meeting (PM)

SECRETARY-GENERAL CALLS ON INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO USE CREATIVITY,

PERSISTENCE IN PURSUIT OF MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Addressing Palestinian Rights Committee, Also Calls For Right Mix of Flexibility, Firmness in Addressing 'Enormous' Challenges

Opening the first meeting of the Committee on the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for 2007 this afternoon, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called on the international community to profit from the political opportunities at hand and work to find a just and lasting peace in the Middle East with creativity, persistence and the right mix of flexibility and firmness.

Noting that the international community was at a critical juncture in efforts to move beyond crisis management and renew efforts towards genuine conflict resolution, he said nearly all the developments of 2006 had taken the Committee further from the goal shared by Israelis and Palestinians alike: two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side, in peace and security. The goal in 2007 would be to reverse that trend.

The challenges to progress were enormous, he added. Israeli military operations, severe movement restrictions, withholding of Palestinian revenues and socio-economic decline had precipitated a humanitarian crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Meanwhile, continued settlement activity and construction of the Israeli barrier had further eroded the quality of Palestinian life and also diminished efforts to achieve a viable Palestinian State. At the same time, continued rocket attacks and another suicide attack targeting Israeli civilians had only prolonged the feeling of insecurity among Israelis.

The recent agreement on a Palestinian national unity Government reached in Mecca was encouraging, he said, noting also the renewal of Israeli-Palestinian dialogue. Last week, United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had hosted talks with both leaders, thereby signaling the United States active engagement in working with the parties to address the fundamental issues of the conflict. Those steps were buttressed by the renewed engagement of the Quartet, which had met twice in the last month, and intended to meet again in the region before long, he added.

"We are seeking to combine our efforts to clarify the political horizon, and to ensure that a process of dialogue develops that leads to negotiations on how to bring forward a comprehensive settlement," he said. He hoped that would be backed up by a strong international assistance effort that focused on strengthening and preserving the Palestinian institutions, which must form the basis of a Palestinian State.

Updating the Committee on recent developments, Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer for Palestine to the United Nations, stressed the need to revive the political process to reach the objective of a two-State solution. The 40-year occupation – the longest occupation in history – should not be allowed to enter yet another drawn-out transition period. A truncated timetable was needed to end the occupation and give birth to the Palestinian State. In short, the Palestinian people needed to see light at the end of the tunnel for the implementation of the two-State solution.

He said he had hoped to start off the Committee's first meeting on a positive note, especially in light of the Mecca agreement, which had ended the internal fighting among the Palestinian people and opened the door for further positive developments. While the Palestinian side was trying to put its house in order, the so-called excavation in Al-Quds Al-Sharif was, in reality, a political move to antagonize the Palestinian side and the Islamic Ombudsman. Another aggression was being carried out in Nablus, the West Bank's biggest city outside of Jerusalem. Israel's action was not the action of a party interested in pursuing peaceful negotiations, but rather an attempt to sabotage a window of opportunity.

While Palestinians might have political differences, they did not have a tradition of resorting to violence to settle those differences, he said. The unfortunate incidents were attributed mainly to the conversion of Gaza into a huge prison due to the financial blockade and the two wars unleashed against it in the summer. The formation of a new national unity Government should contribute to the lifting of the unfair political and financial siege

against the Palestinian people. The Mecca agreement contained the essence of what was needed in terms of previous agreements and would open the door for the resumption of peace negotiations on the final status issues.

Speaking in his national capacity, Committee Chairman Paul Badji of Senegal said the Secretary-General's presence today reflected his resolve to spare no efforts for the attainment of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. Since its creation in 1974, the Committee had advocated for a peaceful solution to the question of Palestine. While some were unhappy with the fact that the Committee denounced the policy of occupation and colonization of the Palestinian territory by Israel, promoting the rights of the Palestinian people to dignity, a homeland and a sovereign and independent State did not in any way work against the interests of Israel. He urgently appealed to the international community and the Quartet to mobilize assistance to meet the needs of the Palestinian people given the worsening humanitarian situation.

At the outset of the meeting, the Committee elected Paul Badji, Permanent Representative of Senegal, as its Chairman; Zahir Tanin (Afghanistan) and Rodrigo Malmierca Diaz (Cuba) as Vice-Chairman; and Victor Camilleri (Malta) as its Rapporteur. Putting forward the nominations, the representative of Lao People's Democratic Republic said the international community needed to redouble its efforts to enable the Palestinian people to achieve their inalienable rights. Cyprus' representative, seconding the nominations, agreed with the need to show solidarity with the Palestinian people in their hour of need.

In other business, the Committee approved its programme of work for 2007. It also took note of the Chairman's report on the United Nations Asian Meeting in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the United Nations Forum of Civil Society in Support of the Palestinian People, in Kuala Lumpur, held from 15 to 17 December 2006, as well as the report on the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People in Doha, which took place on 5 and 6 February 2007. The Committee also approved the provisional programme for the United Nations International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace to take place in Rome on 22 and 23 March.

In other action, the Committee decided to accredit three non-governmental organizations: Women for Palestine, Order of the Saint John of Jerusalem and the Palestine Freedom Project.

Also briefing the Committee were Farukh Amil of Pakistan and Andrew Whitley, Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) Liaison Office.

Other speakers included the representatives of Malaysia, Sierra Leone, Mali, Cuba and Italy.

The Committee will meet again at a date to be announced.

Background

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People met this afternoon to consider its work programme, elect officers, hear a statement by the Secretary-General and hear reports by the Chairman on past and future activities.

Statement by Secretary-General

United Nations Secretary-General BAN KI-MOON said that the path to a peaceful solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict had been filled with obstacles, frustration and tragedy. Many thousands of innocent lives had also been lost. Palestinians yearned for the freedom and dignity they had been denied for decades, while Israelis yearned for long-term security. Today symbolized a critical juncture in efforts to move beyond crisis management, and renew efforts towards genuine conflict resolution.

The challenges to progress were enormous, he continued. Israeli military operations, severe movement restrictions, withholding of Palestinian revenues and socio-economic decline had precipitated a humanitarian crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Meanwhile, continued settlement activity and construction of the Israeli barrier had further eroded the quality of Palestinian life and also diminished efforts to achieve a viable Palestinian State. At the same time, continued rocket attacks and another suicide attack targeting Israeli civilians had only prolonged the feeling of insecurity among Israelis.

Nearly all the developments of 2006 had taken the Committee further from the goal shared by Israelis and Palestinians alike: two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side, in peace and security. He said that the goal in 2007 would be to reverse that trend.

The Secretary-General said he was encouraged by the recent agreement on a Palestinian national unity Government reached in Mecca and thanked the leaders involved, particularly His Majesty King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. He was likewise encouraged by the renewal of Israeli-Palestinian dialogue: President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert had met in December to discuss practical steps to ease tensions. Last week, United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had hosted talks with both leaders, thereby signalling the active engagement of the United States in working with the parties to address the fundamental issues of the conflict. Those steps were buttressed by the renewed engagement of the Quartet, which had met twice in the last month, and intended to meet again in the region before long.

"We are seeking to combine our efforts to clarify the political horizon, and to ensure that a process of dialogue develops that leads to negotiations on how to bring forward a comprehensive settlement," he said. He expressed hope that would be backed up by a strong international assistance effort that focused on strengthening and preserving the Palestinian institutions, which must form the basis of a Palestinian State.

In conclusion, he expressed gratitude to donor countries that had increased aid for the economic, social and humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people, while commending the men and women in the United Nations, who performed their mission on the ground under difficult, and at times, dangerous conditions – particularly in Gaza. He urged the Committee to profit from the political opportunities at hand; and with creativity, persistence, and the right mix of flexibility and firmness, to find a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on an end to the 1967 occupation and the creation of an independent Palestinian State living side by side in peace with Israel.

Other Statements

Speaking in his national capacity, Committee Chairman PAUL BADJI (Senegal), said the Secretary-General's presence today was a strong signal to the entire international community and a reflection of his resolve to spare no efforts for the attainment of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. Mobilizing public opinion worldwide was the mandate assigned to the Committee by the General Assembly. In 1974, the Assembly had defined those rights as the right to self-determination without foreign interference; the right to independence and national sovereignty; and the right of the Palestinian people to return to their homes and reclaim their goods.

Since its creation, the Committee had advocated for a peaceful solution to the question of Palestine, he said. It had welcomed the 1991 peace conference, which had begun the Middle East peace process on the basis of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). For a long time, the Committee had supported the coming into being of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within safe and recognized borders. It had also welcomed the Quartet Road Map and urged the parties to implement it. In its programme of activities, the Committee had dealt with socio-economic and humanitarian problems, underscoring also the need for mobilizing international support for the Palestinian people.

He noted that Senegal, like other members, was well aware that some Member States questioned the Committee's *raison d'être*, criticizing it as unbalanced and partisan. For its critics, he recalled that the Committee was the sole intergovernmental body within the United Nations dealing exclusively with the political aspects of the Palestinian question. The Committee had been set up by the Assembly to work for the achievement by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights and a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question.

Promoting the rights of the Palestinian people to dignity, a homeland and a sovereign and independent State did not in any way work against the interests of Israel, as one opinion would have it, he said. Some were unhappy with the fact that the Committee denounced the policy of occupation and colonization of the Palestinian territory by Israel, which punished collectively, hampered the movements of peoples and goods and was building a separation wall on a territory it had occupied for 40 years. Was the Committee, in light of such a situation, to remain silent and turn away in the face of Israeli behaviour that ran counter to international law? Senegal was at ease in denouncing the Israeli policy.

Today's meeting took place at a time when there were promising developments towards the resumption of discussion among the various parties to better define the political future and resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including the Mecca agreements on 9 February between Fatah and Hamas on a unity Government in Palestine. Those agreements were aimed at reconciling the main Palestinian leaders, which was a prerequisite for talks with the Israeli authorities. He also welcomed the tripartite meeting held on 19 February between United States Secretary of State Rice, Israeli Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas of the Palestinian Authority. The Quartet meeting on 21 February in Berlin led him to hope that a final settlement was at hand. Those signs had mitigated to some extent concern regarding the fragile security situation on the ground and the precarious living conditions of the Palestinians. He urgently appealed to the international community and the Quartet for emergency mobilization of international assistance to meet the needs of the Palestinian people given the worsening humanitarian situation.

RIYAD MANSOUR, Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, expressed appreciation to the Committee for its constant support for the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to self-determination, the independent State of Palestine and the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. The Secretary-General's participation assured Palestine of the importance he attached to the Committee's work and to the question of Palestine as a whole on the United Nations agenda. He reiterated confidence in the Secretary-General and his efforts both within the United Nations and as a Quartet member to promote peace and security for all people in the region.

Palestine stood ready to work with the Committee to ensure that the objectives of its proposed work programme were successfully accomplished, he said. He also thanked the Division for Palestinian Rights for its efforts in support of the Committee's important work. Over the years, the Committee had played an important role as part of the United Nations ongoing effort to address the situation of the Palestinian people and the continued violation and denial of their inalienable rights.

As the fortieth anniversary of the belligerent Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian land neared, the Palestinian people continued to face critical times, he said. Their humanitarian situation continued to deteriorate as they remained besieged by the illegal separation wall and ever-expanding illegal settlements. Those settlements continued to swallow up the Palestinian land and to separate entire villages and cities, including Occupied East Jerusalem, destroying the very fabric of Palestinian society, which continued to suffer severe socio-economic deterioration, compounded by the ongoing financial and political siege unfairly imposed upon the Palestinian people. The situations in Jerusalem and Nablus were but two examples of the ongoing tragedy and aggression against the Palestinian people. They also continued to face military aggressions by the Israeli occupying forces, as well as widespread arrest and detention, with more than 10,000 Palestinians imprisoned by the occupying Power until the current day.

In that connection, he said it was necessary to reiterate that, as affirmed in various Assembly resolutions throughout the years, the United Nations had a permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine until it was resolved in all its aspects in accordance with international legitimacy. The Committee played an indispensable role in that regard by exerting efforts towards the effective realization and exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights.

Mr. BADJI (Senegal), Committee Chairman, took the floor to note a number of developments and activities that had taken place since the Committee's last meeting. That included a meeting of the Security Council on 12 December 2006, where a statement read on behalf of the Council expressed grave concern over the deteriorating humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people and called for emergency assistance through the Temporary International Mechanism. On 15 December 2006, the General Assembly had convened the Tenth Emergency Special Session, wherein 27 speakers had taken the floor and resolution ES-10/17, calling for the establishment of the Register of Damage, had been adopted. That same month, the Committee had held the United Nations Asian Meeting in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the United Nations Forum of Civil Society in Support of the Palestinian People in Kuala Lumpur. On 23 December, Israeli Prime Minister Olmert had met with Palestinian Authority President Abbas, and on 2 February, the Quartet had met in Washington, D.C., reaffirming its commitment to meet regularly.

He said that subsequently, a Seminar on Assistance had been held in Doha on 5 and 6 February 2007, while on 8 February, an agreement had been reached in Mecca between the Fatah and Hamas leaderships after a meeting hosted by His Majesty King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. The Security Council had also met on 13 February to consider "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question", he noted.

Lastly, he said that, on 19 February, United States Secretary of State Rice had hosted a trilateral meeting in Jerusalem, where she, Prime Minister Olmert, and President Abbas had affirmed their commitment to a two-State solution and reiterated their acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the Road Map.

HAMIDON ALI (Malaysia) said that, though the conflict had been ongoing for 40 years, a resolution had yet to be reached. A sovereign and independent Palestinian State was necessary, and it was vital that the international community exert its best efforts in finding a just, lasting and peaceful solution.

Malaysia had hosted the United Nations Asian Meeting in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the United Nations Forum of Civil Society in Support of the Palestinian People from 15 to 17 December 2006, he said. He hoped that had helped influence international public opinion, and he was encouraged that meaningful political dialogue – in accordance with Road Map and adopted resolutions – had resumed. He looked forward to the upcoming Rome meeting at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) headquarters. Indeed, the perpetual cycle of violence needed to stop, and his delegation would work closely with the Committee in finding a solution.

Mr. BADJI (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee, took the floor to introduce the draft programme of work.

SYLVESTER ROWE (Sierra Leone) said that adding a section that addressed the humanitarian, social, and economic aspects of the Palestinian question, would be a good idea. Paragraph 6 noted that the Committee was extremely concerned about the humanitarian situation.

The Chairman said that the draft did need to be worked on and, surely, those aspects were very important. However, elements could be added to build that section up.

The Committee then approved its programme of work for 2007, as contained in document A/AC.183/2007/CRP.1.

Speaking after the programme's adoption, CHEICK SIDI DIARRA (Mali) welcomed the determination shown in implementing the programme. He reiterated his support for the initiative and said that, when the situation on the ground worsened, it was important to have a mandate to review that situation, and heighten international awareness to events that were urgent in nature.

Updating the Committee on latest developments in the region, Mr. MANSOUR, Permanent Observer of Palestine, said he was hoping to start the Committee's first meeting on a positive note, especially after the Mecca agreement which had not only contributed to ending the internal fighting among the Palestinian people, but also opened the door for further positive developments. While the Palestinian side was trying to put its house in order, the so-called excavation in Al-Quds Al-Sharif was, in reality, a political move to antagonize the Palestinian side and the Islamic Oma.

Aside from the developments in Al-Quds, another aggression was being carried out in Nablus, the West Bank's biggest city outside of Jerusalem, he said. The old section of that city had been under curfew for a few days, resulting in death, dozens arrested and homes demolished. Israel's action was not the action of a party interested in pursuing peaceful negotiations, but rather an attempt to sabotage the positive window of opportunity. The international community needed to lobby the Secretary-General and the Security Council, so that they shouldered their responsibility for pressuring Israel to stop the aggressions in Jerusalem and Nablus.

On the Mecca agreement, he thanked the people and Government of Saudi Arabia for their efforts to reach that accord. He also expressed appreciation to all Arab countries and regional leaders who had contributed to efforts that had culminated with the agreement, which had put an end to internal fighting. While Palestine might have political differences, it did not have a tradition of resorting to violence to settle political differences. The unfortunate incidents were attributed mainly to converting Gaza into a huge prison due to the financial blockade and the two wars unleashed against Gaza in the summer. One should expect violence. The Mecca accord was ending internal fighting.

The agreement, he added, had also led to the resignation of the previous cabinet and the commissioning by President Abbas of a new Prime Minister designate to form a new national unity Government, which should contribute to the lifting of the unfair political and financial siege against the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. While the agreement did not reflect the words of what the Quartet was expecting, it did, however, contain the essence of what was needed in terms of the continuation of previous agreements between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel. It also should open the door for the resumption of peace negotiations on the final status issues.

He said he had hoped the tripartite meeting to be more productive, especially on the part of Israel. The Palestinian people needed a clear timetable to end the occupation and establish an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital. That horizon was needed, as transitional negotiations had not accomplished the termination of occupation and the establishment of an independent State. He was encouraged by some statements, including that of the Quartet, as well as some bilateral meetings in Europe. He noted in particular the statement by the President of France that the formation of a national unity Government would be a significant step in the right direction to end the blockade against the Palestinian people.

The political process needed to be revived and its pace accelerated in order to reach the objective of a two-State solution, he said. The 12-year transition period should not end with yet another transition period. A timetable was needed to end the occupation and give birth to the Palestinian State. A truncated time period was needed for all to work diligently for the implementation of that objective. In short, the Palestinian people needed to see light at the end of the tunnel for the implementation of the two-State solution. He also stressed the need to restore respect for the Fourth Geneva Convention, the provisions of which were being extremely eroded. Israel was violating that Convention left and right.

He said the Committee needed to play an active role in the United Nations with the Security Council to accomplish the objective of the two-State solution in a well-defined timetable. In that connection, the Committee could play an advisory role to the Secretary-General. The idea had been raised with the new Secretary-General of an advisory body of countries in the United Nations system to advise him on how to continue in his work. The Committee should continue its active engagement for a more intense role by Europe, which would focus on pushing the political process forward. In that regard, he was delighted about the active role Italy was playing in the preparation of the political conference to take place in Rome next month.

He also stressed the need to continue efforts to expand the Committee's membership. The Committee should play an active role in ensuring the formation of the register of damage. The Committee should also highlight that the occupation, in its fortieth year, was the longest occupation in modern history. That would require the doubling of efforts to end the occupation and human rights violations against the Palestinian people. Emphasizing the importance of the Palestinian Rights Division, he hoped it would receive the support it needed.

FARUKH AMIL (Pakistan) said that unrest was a consequence of a complex political crisis that had yet to be resolved. At the very heart of the Middle East conflict remained the Palestinian-Israeli issue. Such pressing matters also afflicted neighbouring regions and in light of that, his country's President had brought together several countries to discuss ways to find fresh impetus to the stalled peace process.

Noting the meeting that took place in Islamabad on 25 February, he said there was danger of further escalation, which could have both regional and global consequences. There was, therefore, need for a strong new initiative.

On 22 February, Prime Minister Pervez Musharraf and President Abbas had spoken, and the leaders of Iran and Syria had also been consulted, he said. They were exploring new ideas and addressing external and internal challenges within the Muslim World. To conclude, all States needed to respect Lebanon's sovereignty and strongly commit to fight terrorism and extremism. At the forthcoming Mecca summit, all those issues could be discussed.

RODRIGO MALMIERCA DÍAZ (Cuba) said that the situation on the ground had not improved. Israel continued to occupy Palestine and continued to use force. For a just and peaceful resolution to be viable, it was imperative that Israel end its illegal occupation. The General Assembly and Security Council resolutions also needed to be followed and respected. Moreover, the veto by one permanent member of the Council did not contribute to dialogue in the near future.

While welcoming the Mecca agreement, he reiterated the need not to block aid flows and said no conditions should be placed on assistance to the Palestinian people. To conclude, his delegation, along with other members of the Non-Aligned Movement, would continue to work with the Committee in achieving its goals.

ANDREW WHITLEY, Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) Liaison Office, said that, while he hoped for a general improvement in conditions under the new Government, certain socio-economic trends were unlikely to change in the immediate period. It would take months, if not years, for the Palestinians to recover from deep poverty. As employment in Israel was unlikely to be a future option for many Palestinians, dependence on external assistance was likely to remain high in the foreseeable future. While the West Bank and Gaza Strip remained a single territory, the conditions in each varied markedly. The two regions were becoming ever more distinct. There was a long way to go before seeing a discernable impact on ordinary people's lives under the access and movement agreement.

The West Bank was defined by tightening internal controls on Palestinian movement within the territory. Prime Minister Olmert's promise to relax controls had not been met, he said. While the economies of neighbouring countries had grown in 2006, the Palestinian gross domestic product (GDP) had slumped by some 21.2 per cent in the last quarter compared to the same period in 2005. The permits regime had also hampered the Agency's work. The trisecting of the territory was even more tightly enforced. The continued growth of the separation barrier or wall was another defining feature of life in the West Bank today. Over 230 square kilometres of the most fertile land had already been confiscated. Few of the crossing gates were open or functioning as promised. A significant proportion of those suffering were refugees. Due to the financial squeeze on the Palestinian Authority and the economic freefall, unemployment had risen. Over half of Palestinian households were living below the poverty line. The intensification of Israel Defense Forces operations had been observed in 2006.

Clashes were becoming ever more lethal, he said. In the Gaza strip, unemployment was higher than in the West Bank. Over half of those under 25 had no jobs. Acute social strains had resulted. The private sector in Gaza was almost completely paralysed. The survival of three quarters of the Gazan population depended on United Nations food aid. UNRWA was disappointed, moreover, by the response to its new emergency appeal. The factionalization of Palestinian society was even affecting school children, who were now dividing themselves as Hamas and Fatah. Given factional violence and the breakdown of law and order, the current ceasefire remained fragile, and there was a risk of more bloody violence. The failure of foreign Governments to engage seriously with the unity Government could lead to a further breakdown.

After announcing that his country would soon be hosting a meeting at FAO headquarters to support international efforts in achieving peace in the Middle East, ALDO MANTOVANI ([Italy](#)) said that the Israeli-Palestinian issue was marked by protracted military action, as well as a lack of implementation concerning key international norms and resolutions. The issue had truly become a symbol of the rift between Muslim and western societies. He also reiterated the fundamental role of important players in the Middle East, while stressing the enduring relevance and authority of the Road Map.

Mr. BADJI ([Senegal](#)), Chairman of the Committee, then reported on the United Nations Asian Meeting in Support of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the United Nations Forum of Civil Society in Support of the Palestinian People. The highly successful meeting, which had taken place in Kuala Lumpur from 15 to 17 December 2006, had mobilized the Asian and the Pacific countries in support of the Palestinian people. Divided into five phases, the event had enjoyed the participation of 74 Governments and Palestine, as well as several United Nations bodies and agencies, and 19 civil society organizations.

Participants there had emphasized that the continuing occupation of Palestine – now in its fortieth year – remained the root cause of the conflict. They had also expressed concern over the escalation of Israeli military attacks in Gaza – particularly the events in Beit Hanoun. They recognized that a third-party monitoring mechanism was vital. Furthermore, while urging donors to address the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation, participants pledged to develop a cohesive strategy towards the media.

He then reported on the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, held in Doha, 5 and 6 February 2007. That seminar had enjoyed the participation of 51 Governments and Palestine, 4 non-governmental organizations, 11 United Nations agencies and bodies, 10 civil society representatives, and several media representatives. Thirteen expert presentations had been made, including some by Palestinians and Israelis.

Panelists had addressed the socio-economic and humanitarian emergency situation and international response to the needs of Palestinian people. There was a renewed call for the international community to redouble efforts to assist Palestinians in need. At the same time, participants had agreed that Israel needed to resume periodic tax payments without delay and that emergency assistance was not enough to provide for sustainable development. Finally, movement restrictions were the most major obstacle to long-term economic recovery, according to participants.

He then reported on the United Nations International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, to take place at FAO headquarters in Rome, on 22 and 23 March.

* * * * *

For information media • not an official record