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Committee on the Inalienable Rights
of the Palestinian People
324th Meeting (AM)

Israel Faces Future 'Catastrophic Outcome' unless It Changes Aggressive Stance.

Former Envoy Tells Palestinian Rights Committee after High Seas Raid

Chairman Outlines Recent Activities, Developments As Permanent Observer of Palestine Declares His Side Ready for Proximity Talks

Israel needed to change its aggressive stance towards the Palestinians or face the possibility of a catastrophic outcome in the future, Edward Peck, a former United States ambassador to Mauritania and Iraq, told the Palestinian Rights Committee today.

At the invitation of the United Nations body formally known as the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Mr. Peck, President of the civil society organization Foreign Services International, gave a first-hand account of the recent raid by Israeli commandos on the Free Gaza flotilla, saying eight heavily armed men wearing balaclavas had boarded his vessel at around 4 a.m. carrying submachine guns, stun grenades and tasers.

Recalling that two of the raiders had fastened paintball guns to the tops of their submachine guns, he said they had been used to strike a man, whom he described as a survivor of the 1967 Israeli sinking of the *USS Liberty*, in which 200 United States sailors had been killed or wounded. The attackers had set off a stun grenade to break through a human chain formed by shipmates seeking to protect the wheelhouse, he added.

After overtaking the ship, the raiders had forced it to dock at the port of Ashdod, where the captured crew had been told to sign a Hebrew-language document under threat of jail, he said. Members of the flotilla had then been deported after being told they had entered Israel illegally, despite having been brought in from the high seas against their will. "If the assault had taken place off the coast of Somalia, it would have been called piracy," he said.

Pressed by several delegates to comment on the proper role of the United States, Mr. Peck said that even if that country's Government were to end its support for Israel "tomorrow" that would not prevent it from continuing to act in its perceived best interest, an indication that the international community needed to act persuasively.

Many delegates echoed Mr. Peck's opinion and expressed support for an independent, international investigation into the 31 May attack, as proposed by the Security Council.

Briefing the Committee on recent developments, Paul Badji (Senegal), its Chairperson, recalled that Turkey's Minister for Foreign Affairs had characterized Israel's actions as a grave breach of international law, when he had presided over the emergency Security Council meeting called on 31 May to discuss the naval raid, in which nine Turkish nationals had been killed. (See Press Release [SC/9940](#).)

Mr. Badji further recalled that the Council had gone on to issue a presidential statement condemning Israel's attack, and had also called for an impartial investigation. In Geneva, the Human Rights Council had adopted a resolution the following day, deciding to dispatch an independent international fact-finding mission to investigate violations of international law resulting from the attack.

As several speakers took the floor, Turkey's representative commented that the impartial, credible and transparent investigation called for by the Security Council must be international, warning that if it was led by one nation, it should not be Israel, but Turkey, since the attack had been carried out against a Turkish ship on the high seas, and Turkish nationals had been killed or wounded. A post mortem examination had shown that 30 bullets had been fired, some at close range. One of the dead had five bullets in the head, he added.

Continuing with his address to the Committee, Mr. Peck — a self-described patriot who had served in the Second World War and the Korean War — said he had made numerous trips to help facilitate a solution to the Middle East conflict, but had come to believe that, as long as Israel was certain of unhesitating security and financial support from the United States, it would not see the need to change tack.

The former ambassador also expressed discomfort with commonly-used descriptions of events in the region, which did not reflect reality. While the question of Palestine and Israel was one of occupation, and a relationship between occupier and occupied, talk of a "peace process" or "ending the conflict", coloured the way in which people saw the issue, he said, adding that, as a secular Jew, he feared that "very bad things" would continue unless Israel could be convinced that its current course would lead to catastrophe, a sentiment already expressed by such Israeli leaders as President Shimon Peres, former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Defence Minister Ehud Barak. As for the proposed proximity talks, he said Israel would use them to continue its present policy.

Offering the Palestinian view, Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, said his side would continue to maximize efforts for the success of the proximity talks. The Palestinians and other Arabs had agreed to proceed with the talks mainly because of "positive signals" from the current United States Administration, which would broker them. A major goal for the Palestinian side was to reach an understanding on borders, in four months, that would reflect the June 1967 borders. Such an understanding would pave the way for the continuation of negotiations on other permanent status issues, such as Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, water and security, he added.

Mr. Mansour went on to say that discussions involving important stakeholders — including today's meeting in Washington, D.C., between the Palestinian Authority and the United States Government — would focus on ways to encourage the lifting of the blockade on Gaza once and for all. Existing Security Council resolutions and presidential statements contained the language and other elements necessary for the lifting of the siege, he said, expressing hope that the United States would demonstrate leadership in articulating that vision.

Arab nations would stand behind the United Nations Secretary-General in carrying out the will of an independent investigation, he stressed, pointing out that the members of the League of Arab States and the Non-Aligned Movement were meeting with all members of the Security Council as well as the Secretary-General to convey that support. So far, "many important parties" were intensifying efforts to reach agreement on steps towards lifting the blockade, including by guaranteeing that assistance reached the people of Gaza, he said.

Committee Chairperson Badji (Senegal) explained that the idea of holding proximity talks had been accepted by Palestinian Chief Negotiator Saeb Erakat, after a 9 May meeting between President Mahmoud Abbas and George Mitchell, United States Special Envoy for Middle East Peace. Arab Foreign Ministers had already given their support for the talks at a meeting of the Arab Peace Initiative Follow-up Committee in Cairo on 1 May, he said, adding that the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) had also endorsed the proposal for indirect talks between PLO and the Israeli Government.

Joining the discussion were the representatives of Mali, Algeria, Venezuela, Nicaragua, South Africa, Cuba and Indonesia, who expressed solidarity with supporters of Palestine, calling for the prompt release of victims of the flotilla attack, and for an end to the Israeli occupation. They also offered their condolences to the Government of Turkey for the loss of life.

The Committee also heard from a representative of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Reporting on the Committee's own activities, Mr. Badji said it had convened the United Nations International Meeting in Support of the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process on 25 and 26 May in Istanbul. That Meeting had been followed on 27 May by the one-day United Nations Public Forum in Support of the Palestinian People at Istanbul Kültür University.

Zahir Tanin (Afghanistan), Committee Vice-Chairperson, who had led its delegation to Istanbul, reported in those events, noting that participants had cautiously welcomed the idea of proximity talks. Many of them had said that, while the immediate focus should be on the Israeli-Palestinian process, it was imperative to address the regional dimension of the conflict at the appropriate stage. Additionally, they had stressed the importance of setting forth principles based on international law, United Nations resolutions and signed agreements to guide negotiations. They had stressed that broad and vague framework agreements would not work, and that such accords must be precise and include mechanisms for implementation and monitoring.

Participants had also expressed support for the Palestinian Authority's diplomatic initiative to achieve international support for Palestinian statehood, he continued. They had called on the international community to be prepared to recognize the State of Palestine based on the 1967 borders, including through a Security Council resolution, once the Palestinian Authority had declared statehood at the appropriate time. In that regard, participants had stressed the importance of Prime Minister Salam Fayyad's two-year State-building plan, scheduled for implementation in 2011.

He said information about the events in Istanbul was available on the "Question of Palestine" website that had recently been redesigned. Mr. Badji added that the Division for Palestinian Rights had launched the redesigned [website](#) on 27 May with a number of new, user-friendly features.

Also today, the Committee approved the provisional programme of work for the upcoming United Nations African Meeting on the Question of Palestine, to be held in Rabat, Morocco, on 1 and 2 July 2010, under the theme "Strengthening the support by African States for a just and lasting solution of the question of Jerusalem".

Established by the General Assembly in 1975, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is mandated to raise international awareness about the question of Palestine and to mobilize international support for and assistance to the Palestinian people.

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

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