



**DIVISION FOR
PALESTINIAN RIGHTS**

**UNITED NATIONS
LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN MEETING
ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE**

**Caracas
13 and 14 December 2005**

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I. Introduction

1. The United Nations Latin American and Caribbean Meeting on the Question of Palestine was held in Caracas on 13 and 14 December 2005, under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolutions 59/28 and 59/29 of 1 December 2004. It was followed, on 15 December 2005, by a United Nations Public Forum in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace.
2. The Committee was represented at the meeting by a delegation comprising Paul Badji (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee; Victor Camilleri (Malta), Rapporteur of the Committee; Germán Sánchez Otero (Cuba) and Riyad Mansour (Palestine).
3. The theme of the Meeting was “Achieving the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people – the key to peace in the Middle East”. It consisted of an opening session, three plenary sessions and a closing session. The themes of the plenary sessions were “The situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem”, “International efforts at achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine” and “Support by Latin American and Caribbean countries for the realization by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights”.
4. Presentations were made by 16 experts, including Palestinians and Israelis. Representatives of 27 Governments, Palestine, three United Nations bodies and nine civil society organization, as well as special guests of the host country and representatives of the media and academic institutions attended the Meeting.

II. Opening statements

5. The Meeting was opened by **Alcides Rondón**, Vice-Minister for External Relations of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. He stressed that his country had offered to host the meeting because of its desire to strengthen international conditions conducive to a permanent solution to the situation of the Palestinian people. Venezuela had maintained a proactive and consistent position within international organizations and forums dealing with the Palestinian question and related issues. During the sixtieth session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela had co-sponsored resolutions on the Palestinian question and on 10 November 2005 was admitted to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People as an observer.
6. Mr. Rondón reiterated the support by the Government of Venezuela for the right of all peoples to freely determine their political status, without foreign interference, to strive for their economic, social and cultural development and to maintain their territorial integrity, with full respect for the Charter of the United Nations. Venezuela had traditionally maintained a position of non-interference in the internal affairs of other States and, faithful to that principle, its Government observed with great respect the situation in the Middle East and expressed support for direct negotiations between the parties as the ideal means of resolving the situation in the region.
7. He noted a change in the international context, when less favoured and less heeded-to countries were beginning to exercise their inalienable rights, to adopt a united stance in favour of a multi-polar world and of equality between the nations of the world. Venezuela’s position on the Palestinian question, reiterated Mr. Rondón, was, within a framework of respect for the rights of both parties, one of support for the efforts of the United Nations to find a peaceful solution to the conflict, thereby avoiding violence, tension and political instability in the region. He called for the continuation of peaceful negotiations and the implementation of agreements already reached. He called on the participants to support a civic

conscience for a better future through the building of new values in keeping with social justice and the sharing of well-being for all people.

8. **Kofi Annan**, Secretary-General of the United Nations, in a message read out on his behalf by his representative, David McLachlan-Karr, Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programme in Caracas, called the meeting an important opportunity for the countries of the Latin American and Caribbean region to contribute to the search for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. He lamented the fact that while ordinary Israelis and Palestinians, like all of us, yearned to live in peace, prosperity and harmony with each other, they paid the unconscionably high price of the failure to find a solution to their conflict: continuing suffering and death for civilians on both sides. He pointed, however, to some cause for optimism given by recent developments. Israel's completed disengagement from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank set a hopeful precedent for the future, while agreement on the Rafah crossing reached between Israel and the Palestinian Authority opened the door to further cooperation on the important issue of access and movement. The Quartet, through its Special Envoy James Wolfensohn, was working with both sides to ensure that the Rafah agreement was fully enforced.

9. The Secretary-General stressed the role of the Quartet's Road Map as the accepted way forward, and said it was vital that the parties redoubled their efforts to implement it. In particular, the upcoming Palestinian and Israeli elections should not prevent the parties from accelerating existing efforts to build mutual trust and from acting on their Road Map obligations. Palestinians needed to know that the future viability of a Palestinian State would not be eroded by settlement activity and barrier construction; Israelis need to be assured that their security would not be compromised by failure to act decisively against terror.

10. The Secretary-General reiterated the Quartet's recent call for renewed action in parallel by both parties to meet their obligations under the Road Map, and also called on Israel to abide by its legal obligations as set forth in the 9 July 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and in General Assembly resolution ES-10/15. He further reiterated his full commitment to efforts aimed at achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and the principle of land for peace. Addressing the participants, he said with their assistance, the parties could be helped to move towards the shared goal of a sovereign, contiguous and democratic Palestine, living side by side in peace and security with Israel.

11. **Paul Badji**, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, thanked and welcomed Venezuela, whose recent decision to join the Committee as an observer demonstrated its belief in the objectives of the Committee and the need for a more vigorous engagement of the international community in pursuit of the Palestinian people's legitimate aspirations. In its support of the Palestinian people, Venezuela joined the majority of the countries of South America, which was strikingly reconfirmed by the Brasilia Declaration, adopted at the South American and Arab Countries Summit held in Brasilia on 10 and 11 May 2005.

12. He further pointed out that the Committee was established by the General Assembly as the only intergovernmental body in the United Nations solely devoted to the political aspects of the question of Palestine. Its thirtieth anniversary in 2005, however, was not an occasion for celebration, but an opportunity to re-examine the persistent but so far unsuccessful efforts of the international community and the parties themselves to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It remained obvious that this long-standing conflict would have no final solution without the achievement by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights defined by the General Assembly in 1974: the right to self-determination without

external interference; the right to national independence and sovereignty; and the right of Palestinians to return to their homes and property, from which they had been displaced and uprooted.

13. Mr. Badji noted the efforts by the Quartet and the international community to push the political process forward and found some recent developments encouraging despite many obstacles and frustrations. He commended the United Nations system for remaining determined to help improve the situation for Palestinians and to support efforts to reach a political solution that would bring peace to the Middle East. He stressed, however, that the Palestinians were still facing facts on the ground that consolidated the Israeli occupation of their land, in particular, the continued settlement construction and expansion in the West Bank, as well as the construction of the wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory in defiance of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and the position of the international community. On behalf of the Committee, Mr. Badji appealed with a sense of urgency to the world community to help the parties extricate themselves from the quagmire of violence and mistrust by restoring normality and returning to a meaningful political dialogue. However, finally reaching the goal of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine required great dedication and persistence from everyone working towards this objective.

14. **Riyad Mansour**, Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, said President Mahmoud Abbas had wanted to be represented at the meeting by Saeb Erakat, head of negotiations for the Palestinian Liberation Organization. Unfortunately, Israel had unilaterally decided to freeze the organization of bus convoys connecting the West Bank with Gaza and it was important for Mr. Erakat to stay in the region to ensure that this component of the agreement on movement and access was implemented. While Palestinians were interested not in the conferences per se but in finding, as quickly as possible, a just solution to this problem in all its aspects, Mr. Mansour stressed the importance of the meeting in confirming the commitment of the international community to finding such a solution. The meeting and others like it were also crucial in bringing pressure to bear on the parties to the conflict, particularly the Israeli side, which refused to comply with its obligations and to implement resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

15. Turning to the current events, Mr. Mansour said the Palestinians had welcomed Israel's decision to dismantle settlements in Gaza. However, that unilateral step had left a host of unresolved issues such as the removal of rubble, including hazardous material, and the status of the seaport and the airport. At the end of November 2005, an agreement had been brokered with regard to the Rafah crossing, but Israel had just suspended talks on implementing its obligations under that agreement, in particular as related to a transportation link between Gaza and the West Bank. He said that the disengagement had been considered a first step expected to be followed by others in the West Bank to implement the Sharm-el Sheik agreement, with the situation in the West Bank returning to what it was in September 2000. But all the unresolved issues in Gaza created enormous problems, including the donors' reluctance to continue their contributions.

16. He noted that the issues of settlements and the construction of the Wall were the most crucial ones. If the international community, the United Nations and the Quartet, did not stop Israel from creating these facts on the ground, Jerusalem would be encircled and the West Bank would be dissected, making a two-State solution very difficult to attain. Continuation of the construction of the Wall and the expansion of settlements would create isolated pockets of Palestinian population, leading not to a Palestinian State but to something similar to what existed in apartheid South Africa.

17. The Palestinians would continue with municipal elections on 15 December 2005 and would hold legislative elections on 25 January 2006, Mr. Mansour said. Israel, however, was meddling in the elections, and would not allow elections in East Jerusalem, as happened in the 1990s, refusing even to

meet with Palestinian representatives to discuss the issue. Palestinians should be allowed to have free and democratic elections without interference and without anyone telling them who should be representing them. Such interference should be condemned by all. He was confident that modern and reasonable components of the Palestine Liberation Organization would win the majority of the seats in the coming elections, although irresponsible actions by the Government of Israel were helping the extremists. Regarding the upcoming Israeli elections, Mr. Mansour said that Palestinians had opted for negotiations and peace. They hoped that the Israeli Government would have a mandate similar to that of the Palestinians so that there could be a solution. However, if the Israelis did elect a Government with a mandate to move in the same direction as the Palestinian Government, this historical opportunity would be lost.

18. Statements were also made by representatives of Governments and intergovernmental organizations. The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic said his Government continued to support the implementation of United Nations resolutions and the international legal system for achieving peace and security, and for this reason had always demanded a definitive, just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the Middle East question. It was the only way to finally eliminate tensions in the Middle East. Israel, however, constantly violated international law, as witnessed by its refusal to implement United Nations resolutions, and by its continued occupation of Palestinian territories, Syrian Golan and parts of south Lebanon. Its acts of defiance showed disregard for the United Nations principle that prohibited the acquisition of territory by force and deviated from the peace process, which had started in Madrid in 1991 but was now paralyzed because of the Israeli Government's policies. The behaviour of the Israeli Government demonstrated that Israel had no real interest in achieving peace. Moreover, its continued building of illegal settlements and of a discriminatory, divisive wall in spite of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice made reaching a final solution even more difficult. He called on the United Nations to assume its responsibility in the application of its resolutions regarding the Palestinian question and the occupied Arab territories, with the same strictness with which other resolutions were executed, in order to demonstrate that there was neither selectivity nor double standards in their application. He called on the international community to continue their maximum effort to find a lasting, comprehensive and just solution to the Middle East question by pressing Israel to respect the legality of international resolutions and agreements, to contain military aggression by Israel against the Palestinian and Arab territories and its civil population, and to stop the nuclear threat in the region. He stressed that it was indispensable to base the peace process on the Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973); the principles of the Madrid Peace Conference, especially the land for peace principle; the Arab peace initiative adopted by the Arab League at the Beirut summit of 2002 which called for Israel's withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories, thus re-establishing borderlines as they existed on 4 June 1967. He pointed out that his country had been and always would be a peace loving State that sought the application of justice, which could be proved by Syria's constant respect for and implementation of international law.

19. The representative of Cuba said the key to peace in the Middle East was respect for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. General Assembly resolution 181 (II) remained only partially implemented 58 years later: the State of Israel had been created, but the full establishment of a sovereign and independent State of Palestine remained an issue the resolution of which could not be further postponed. The Security Council had adopted many resolutions on the issue that required urgent implementation; resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) deserved special attention, as they inter alia demanded the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied territories. Full Israeli withdrawal from those territories and establishment of the sovereign and independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital remained the essential objective. The much lauded Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and certain settlements in the West Bank would mean little or nothing if it was not part of an integral substantive process that provided a just solution, the solution that the world was waiting for and which

should have been achieved years ago had the Security Council acted transparently and without a double standard. The so-called Gaza disengagement plan should not be an obstacle to achieving other vital points in negotiating peace in the Middle East, including the return of refugees, the determination of the final status of Jerusalem, the solution to the problem of settlement outposts in the West Bank and the issue of the separation wall that was a violation of international norms as stated in the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and which meant annexation of the important parts of the West Bank. Israel would also continue to control the Gaza Strip after the withdrawal due to its control of the borders, sea and air space. The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean must continue to denounce the crimes committed against the Arab people, particularly the Palestinians. Just and lasting peace in the Middle East was impossible without cessation of the Israeli occupation and until the Palestinian people can exercise their legitimate right to establish an independent State with its capital in East Jerusalem.

20. The representative of Senegal urged the occupying Power, Israel, to keep the trend of recent events by initiating measures, similar to the Gaza withdrawal, in all the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. That would enhance the political process and lead to the implementation of the Road Map. All parties should be encouraged to pursue negotiations to increase confidence and prevent violence and the death of innocent victims. It was incumbent on the members of the Quartet to urge the parties to fulfil their obligations and to promote peace, security and regional reconciliation and the creation of an independent and sovereign State of Palestine. He urged the Member States, the international community and the civil society to remain committed to attaining a negotiated and peaceful solution to this conflict, and called upon Israel to respect all its obligations and to abide by the ruling of the International Court of Justice. Israel should immediately stop the building of the separation wall in the Palestinian territory and dismantle the wall built beyond the border of 1967, while the international community should refuse to accept a fait accompli. Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) and other relevant resolutions of the United Nations should be observed, as should the conclusions of the Madrid Conference, the principle of exchange of territory for peace, as well as the courageous initiative of King Abdallah of Saudi Arabia, adopted by the Arab summit in Beirut.

21. The representative of Indonesia noted that there had been some encouraging developments in 2005 that generated optimism and raised hopes for further progress in the efforts to revive the Middle East peace process, among them the democratic election of President Mahmoud Abbas, the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip and the Rafah border agreement. Yet the humanitarian situation and the economic life of the Palestinians had continued to deteriorate and the violation of their human rights became routine, all of which gravely undermined the peace process. Worse still, despite the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice denouncing the illegality of the construction of the separation wall, the Israeli Government had accelerated the building of its new sections around the occupied city of Jerusalem, and continued to expand its settlements in the West Bank. These policies raised serious doubts as to Israel's intention for peace. Six General Assembly resolutions adopted with the overwhelming support of Member States early in December 2005 reflected the international concern about this situation. He looked forward to the Secretary-General completing the framework for the establishment, as requested by the General Assembly, of a register of damage relating to the construction of the barrier in the West Bank, which was important to ensure redressing to the prolonged injustice suffered by the Palestinian people as a result. He reiterated that the objective of the international community's efforts on the question of Palestine was to ensure the full implementation of the Road Map with the establishment of two independent and viable States, Israel and Palestine, living side-by-side within secure, internationally recognized borders. He further stressed that the leaders of 106 nations from Asia and Africa had in April 2005, in Bandung, Indonesia, pledged their support to the Palestinian people and to the creation of a viable and sovereign Palestinian State. This support of countries from the two continents to the Palestinian people was reflected in the new Asian-African strategic partnership plan of action. Among the ideals and principles of the Plan were the promotion of a just, democratic, transparent

and harmonious society and the fostering of fundamental rights and freedoms, which must always include the guarantee of the fundamental rights and freedom of the Palestinian people. That was particularly important as 50 years after the Bandung Conference in 1955 - which inspired the independence movement of countries under their colonial powers - the Palestinian people were still subject to foreign occupation. Indonesia was gratified at the continuing political transformation in Palestine and was hoping that this process remained on course. It called on the international community to prevail upon Israel to honour its commitments to international law and the peace process.

22. The representative of Guyana said that the Caribbean region had traditionally rendered support and solidarity to the cause of the Palestinian people. The Caribbean Community, of which Guyana was an integral member, had spoken up in support of the right of the Palestinian people to establish their own independent State. In this meeting, the Latin American and Caribbean States would have an opportunity to raise their voice to demand that this long suffering people be allowed to live in dignity in such a State. The Government of Guyana, greatly concerned over the Palestinian plight, encouraged the international community to take coherent and forceful steps to restore the political process and to encourage both sides to reach a fair agreement based on diplomacy, cooperation and respect for international law. It unequivocally supported the struggle of the Palestinian people to attain their inalienable rights, including their right to return to their homeland, and to peacefully exist in an independent State. The Secretary-General of the United Nations had already cautioned against the political dangers of confusing the term terrorism with the struggle of the Palestinian people to win their right of national self-determination. Palestinian Authority leaders had condemned suicide bombers both on humanitarian grounds and the disservice they did to the Palestinian cause. The Palestinians suffered from terrorist atrocities perpetrated by fighter jets and tanks but the international community did not pay the same attention. The Government of Guyana noted with great interest peace proposals, the main elements of which included the Israeli withdrawal to the 4 June 1967 armistice line, with an allowance for minor, reciprocal adjustments and security cooperation arrangements in which international forces would play a central role. These proposals had to be achieved by dialogue, and the sooner this process could begin, the better it would be for not only both sides but for the entire Middle East region, since the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people was the key to absolute peace in the Middle East. He noted that the United Nations had a crucial role in protecting the rights of the Palestinian people, while the role of the United Nations system had become increasingly important in addressing the humanitarian needs of the Palestinians, given the deteriorating economic and social conditions confronting them.

III. Plenary sessions

Plenary I

The situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem

23. Speakers in the plenary examined the following sub-themes: Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and parts of the northern West Bank: the situation on the ground and its implications; the humanitarian and socio-economic challenges facing the Palestinian people; and the urgency of strengthening Palestinian Authority institutions.

24. The first scheduled speaker in the plenary, **Riad Malki**, Director-General of Panorama - the Palestinian Center for the Dissemination of Democracy and Community Development and member of the Palestine National Council, had been prevented from leaving the Palestinian Territory by Israeli roadblocks. In a message that he asked to be read to participants, Mr. Malki described his unsuccessful attempts to leave Ramallah to board a plane on his way to Caracas and his deep disappointment with his inability to join other participants after all preparations and all significant efforts made by the United

Nations Secretariat and the Venezuelan Ministry of External Affairs to make his participation possible. He hoped that the episode would help people understand the difficulties which ordinary Palestinians face, but more importantly, the need to end occupation.

25. **Jeff Halper**, Coordinator of the Israeli Committee against House Demolitions, said it was important for Israelis to participate in these conferences and reminded the participants that one of the key slogans of the Israeli peace movement was “We refuse to be enemies”. Polls showed that 70 per cent of Israeli Jews did not want the occupation. Because the Government used terms like security and engendered fear, the Israeli public by and large accepted that there was no solution. Israel needed a Palestinian State, but what Prime Minister Ariel Sharon sought, and what President George W. Bush had agreed to, was a truncated Palestinian mini-State, a Bantustan, a prison-state on 10-15 per cent of the land that relieves Israel of almost four million Palestinians while leaving it firmly in control of the country and its resources. Israeli unilateralism meant only one thing: it had nothing to offer the Palestinians, nothing worth negotiating over. Mr. Halper stated that he came to believe that a genuine two-State solution might already be dead, the victim of Israeli expansionism. The land had been reconfigured so that a viable Palestinian State could not be established. But a two-State solution based on apartheid could not be an acceptable alternative. The Palestinian State in this case would have no industry, no economy, no control of borders, resources or airspace, and no control over cultural and historical sites. In Mr. Halper’s view, it came down to either a just and viable solution now or apartheid.

26. Mr. Halper predicted that the international civil society soon would have to re-evaluate the nature of the struggle for a just peace in the region, shifting efforts from a campaign to end the occupation to an anti-apartheid campaign. However, he saw the balance shifting. Concern over the conflict’s destabilizing effects on Europe and the “moderate” Arab states lent it an urgency in the corridors of power, while for the progressive and activist elements of the international civil society, the conflict had become downright emblematic. Its “in-your-face” challenge to human rights and international law, epitomized by the Wall, was raising the struggle against the occupation to the level of the anti-apartheid struggle.

27. Mr. Halper expressed concern that advocates of a just and viable peace had become stuck at the protest-informational stage of their advocacy efforts and had not yet become an effective lobbying force. In moving towards effective advocacy, they should at least agree on the essential elements that must define any acceptable resolution of the conflict. At a minimum, those elements included national expression for the two peoples; viability of a Palestinian State; a just resolution of the refugee issue; a regional dimension to the conflict; and Israel’s legitimate security concerns. A clear, compelling political vision must be accompanied by an aggressive and well-financed strategy of advocacy, which should include, at a minimum: a fundamental reframing of the conflict, much better organization and funding, and an effective and well-coordinated set of campaigns, focused on the most relevant issues and target populations.

28. Reframing the conflict, in Mr. Halper’s view, rested on a number of key re-conceptualizations: stressing Israel’s position as the strong party in the conflict; the occupation as a pro-active policy and not as a merely defensive responses to Palestinian terrorism. The major elements of what he called Israel’s “matrix of control” – the settlements, the highways, the closures, land expropriation, massive house demolitions and the Wall – could not be explained in terms of security and defence. Ninety-five per cent of the cases of house demolitions had nothing to do with security. Furthermore, reframing should address Israel’s attempt to de-politicize the conflict, to eliminate any political solution that does not suit Israel’s interests. Insisting that the conflict was a political one between two peoples would place the Palestinians on an equal footing. Israel’s claim that it was engaged in an existential fight should be countered by emphasizing the Palestinians’ repeated recognition of Israel within the 1949/1967 boundaries, the peace treaties Israel reached with Egypt and Jordan, as well as the formal and semi-formal ties with most of the

States in the Middle East, North Africa and the Muslim world and, not least, the 2002 Saudi initiative in which the Arab League offered Israel regional integration if it relinquished its occupation.

29. **Edward Peck**, former United States Ambassador and President of Foreign Services International, saw the commendable and difficult task of this conference as focusing the attention of the region and the world on the increasingly obvious necessity of creating a viable, contiguous, secure and sovereign Palestinian State. This would remove an issue which had, was and would continue to generate hatred, violence and bloodshed, threatening stability worldwide. The occupation was a crime against humanity, a violation of every rule for which the United Nations stood, and it had to end. Mr. Peck said he wanted the Palestinians freed from almost 40 years oppression, and he wanted a reduction in the resulting tensions that had led to a world less safe and far less peaceful.

30. Everyone recognized that ending the occupation would be neither easy nor quick, and Mr. Peck pointed out two closely interconnected obstacles. The first was Israeli democracy, because quite often, if not most of the time, a committed, active minority would secure its desired objectives in the face of an opposing majority which did not have an equivalent level of interest and action, while the majority was often accurately described as silent. Israel's continued occupation of Palestinian territory was a compelling example. Reliable polls told that a majority of Israelis wanted an end to violence and bloodshed, and were willing to accept a real Palestinian State as their peaceful neighbour to achieve the objective. But there were enough hard-line, committed believers in Israel's absolute right to build settlements wherever and whenever it wanted, as well as total faith in the many benefits of doing so, that they could outweigh and outvote the rest of the electorate. A further illustration was the continued lack of normal relations between the United States and Cuba, despite the inclination of an overwhelming majority of the electorate. We call it democracies participative, but some people participate more than others. It looked like nothing but truly massive political or economic pressure would alter Israel's policies to a significant degree, but it also looked like no meaningful pressure could be generated, given that the Governments capable of applying it were also democracies. The second obstacle was Palestinian militancy, which was providing Israel with a public relations weapon that it very effectively used to justify further repressive actions. But the two sides of the violence equation were far from equal. The Israeli Government's actions were official, intentional government actions. In contrast, Palestinians as individuals or as clandestine groups carried out their acts in violation of the policies of their leaders. To ignore the causes of the militancy was a far more serious error than attempts to glorify them, since failure to consider what was causing the attacks virtually guaranteed their continuation. So far Israel, and much of the rest of the world, was unable or unwilling to look at the causes of Palestinian violence straight in the eye: "It's the occupation, stupid". Demanding that all armed attacks against its citizens must cease before Israel takes any of the steps required by the current Road Map - as was the case with all of its predecessors - was certain to ensure that nothing would happen. Nevertheless, said Mr. Peck, what the rest of the world saw as a liberation movement, and the Israelis called terrorism, whatever its causes, was an obstacle to peace.

31. Mr. Peck continued that Israel could not expect to live in peace and security among her neighbours while savaging the helpless Palestinians. The occupation must be ended, and the settlements removed before there could be any hope for peaceful coexistence. He said he did not believe that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon ever had any intention of seeking a viable Palestinian State but would prefer small Palestinian communities with sovereignty but no authority. There was a sharp difference between sovereignty symbolized by a flag and authority symbolized by a gun. He found it interesting that the majority of the speakers in the opening session had not used the word occupation. Yet the basic issue was ending the occupation. There was a tendency to use euphemisms. It was not a conflict, he said, it was an occupation. The Palestinians had never had a tank, an airplane or an army. There were no negotiations. Negotiations were between two parties. The occupied could not negotiate with the occupiers. He said the

Gaza Strip today was the largest fresh air prison. There was no disengagement. The so-called disengagement had been negotiated between the Israelis themselves. In the United States, one did not read about the things that went on in the West Bank. One could ignore the situation, but at a price.

32. **Jorge Rondón Uzcátegui**, former Ambassador of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to Iraq and to Jordan, said the Palestinians had suffered for a long time because of the takeover of their land. A total of 40 per cent of them became refugees, where they were still considered second or third-rate citizens after having lived in these countries for many years. The Middle East, a region characterized by the confluence of culture, history and oil reserves, was changing at break-neck speed. There were some very interesting scenarios unfolding, doors opening and doors closing, sometimes irrespective of the plans that Israelis or Palestinians might have. There were avenues for a just solution unfolding for both peoples. The second intifada, that asymmetrical conflict, led to an opening for a negotiated solution, based on recognizing the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, to exercising their sovereignty and developing according to their own. In parallel, the Israeli people had the right to live in peace with secure borders.

33. Venezuela had always fought for a just and lasting solution which was not different from what the United Nations had proposed within the General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. But those resolutions had not been realized because one of the parties had refused to implement them. The people of Venezuela were happy to host this meeting on its soil, the first of this kind. But there were rumours that certain countries, under the pretext of reducing United Nations spending, were trying to cut back spending on Palestinian programmes, he said. Those programmes should be upheld and strengthened.

34. He went on to say that no negotiation should ignore the problem of the refugees, because they had an inalienable right to return to their land and, if possible, to retrieve their property. That was a human tragedy of great scope, and the international community should remain involved and make sure that this aspect was clearly and extensively covered in the negotiations. The statement delivered earlier by Jeff Halper should alert the participants that a fair and just peace had to be achieved for both parties.

35. **Jóse Arbex Jr.**, Professor of international journalism, Catholic University of São Paulo and journalist, said the consolidation of any nation State demanded more than the simple delimitation of a territory upon which some bureaucratic structures could be built; it demanded a national project, a certain perspective about the common future, a certain consensus on values built by cultural tradition, a certain identity. But it was impossible to build any national identity under foreign occupation other than the one forged by hate, denial of the other, terrible humiliation, the feeling of usurpation. In the case of Palestine, the situation got much more complicated, because there the foreign invader had the objective of denying the existence of a people. The attacks by Palestinian human bombs then offered a measure of the despair of a population collectively punished by the simple fact of existing. Nobody intended, however, to defend any attack against innocent people, nor to proclaim the legitimacy of the death of civilians. But he found tragicomic the demand by the Israeli Government to the Palestinian Authority to impede such attacks, because their most effective incentive was precisely the repression exercised by the foreign power. Nothing would be really solved as long as Israeli settlers and troops stayed in the West Bank.

36. Nobody should be optimistic about the recent Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, because the Palestinian people were even further, not closer, to their sovereign and independent State: the withdrawal did not assure them the sovereignty on the territory; it was decided in an unilateral way by Israel; there was no indication that the construction of the annexationist Wall of Shame would be interrupted; there was no sign that Israel intended to remove its settlements from the West Bank and may even use the Gaza withdrawal as an excuse to reinforce those settlements; and there was no agreement on the destiny of East Jerusalem.

37. Mr. Arbex stressed that, above all, the establishment of a Palestinian State in the area went against United States foreign policy driven by the geo-strategic need to directly control the oil reserves of the Middle East, now that its own reserves were almost exhausted. In that general picture, it was quite obvious that Palestine must not ever emerge as an authentic autonomous, sovereign, democratic and secular State, not because Palestinians posed any immediate threat to Israel, and even less to the United States, but because it would send the wrong message to all the peoples of the Middle East and Central Asia. Such a perspective, of course, is also of no interest to those who, inside Israel, profit from the situation of permanent war against the Palestinians. The conflict, in brief, is fed by geo-strategic, financial, military and economical interests and not by supposed hostility between the two peoples. The Israeli people were also a victim of the same game. In the Middle East, he said, there was no war between the Jews and Palestinians. They were both the victims of imperialism. In the Middle East, as in Central Asia, it was a quest for the control of natural oil reserves that was behind United States policy, he continued. Israel's loyal cooperation was vital to that policy. The struggle of the Palestinian people constituted a major challenge. It was a symbol of tireless heroism and an example for all those struggling against imperialism.

38. **Pedro Brieger**, sociologist and journalist on international affairs, noted a feeling of desperation expressed at the meeting. When he had visited young refugees in Lebanon, they believed that they had no future. There was, however, something new. With the advent of the Internet, they had contact with people in their own lands giving them a new perspective.

39. He said the immense majority of Latin American journalists covered the Palestinian conflict from Israel. Seeing was not understanding, it depends on where you were looking from. Important Latin American news papers with journalists in the area based them in Israel. The largest paper in Argentina had one correspondent, an Israeli Jew, covering the issue. He and others like the correspondent for CNN looked at the situation from the point of view of the Israelis. Moreover, the holocaust was used as a kind of blackmail with the media and any criticism of Israel was considered anti-Semitism. For example, a website called "Bad News" listed how the media defamed Israel. Last year it gave a prize to the most anti-Israeli journalist in Latin America.

40. Further describing the situation in the media, the language used disdainfully about Palestinians would never be used in reference to Jews, he said. He quoted a statement by Carlos Escude calling for Israel to detonate a small bomb in Gaza. One would never make that statement in discussing the Israelis. The view of the Jewish community in Argentina was that the media was anti-Israeli when in fact it was pro-Israeli. The perception prevailed that the Palestinians attacked and the Israelis just responded to provocation. The Israeli bombardments were never called terrorist bombings. There should be a debate in the media and a definition of terrorist acts. He recalled that partisans in the Second World War were called terrorists. He asked whether bombing civilian populations was a terrorist act. If so, it should be defined as such. The public was not always aware of the manipulations that went on with regard to coverage.

Plenary II

International efforts at achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine

41. In the plenary, the sub-themes put the focus on: supporting the efforts of the Quartet and other actors; maintaining international legitimacy in efforts at achieving Israeli-Palestinian peace; and the permanent responsibility of the United Nations.

42. **Diana Buttu**, adviser to the President of the Palestinian Authority, said that it was disheartening to see the construction of the wall and that nothing was happening on the ground to stop it. Some diplomats had told her that the Gaza disengagement was the best step to peace. The checkpoint she had to pass to get to her home, listening to an F-16 hovering over that home, several homes being bombed that evening and knowing that Palestinian fisherman could not go to sea, pointed to the irony of calling the disengagement a good step. A major problem was that the international community had never faced the problem dealing with both colonization and occupation at the same time. Disengagement was considered a positive step because it brought to a close one issue – colonization – in a small part of the country. It did not end occupation. One of the reasons that the international community could not address both issues at the same time was the mixing of the two processes. There had been a corresponding shift in the application of international law, she said. Rather than being firmly on the side of the rights of the Palestinian people, it leaned more towards balance. There was a structural problem with international law in the sense that it was the powerful parties who actually make up the laws. Ms. Buttu stressed that while she understood that law was not created in a vacuum, she was still alarmed by a shift which would have detrimental consequences for Palestinians in the future. For that reason she did not want to see the treasure of the United Nations resolutions being eroded.

43. Turning to the situation on the ground, Ms. Buttu said the Israeli Government used the so-called disengagement to try and cover up all of the settlement activity that was now taking place in the West Bank. She described growth of the settlements and bypass roads there, as well as the system of restriction on Palestinian movement, and in particular the Wall, which was not built on the 1967 border. She used as an example the town of Qalqilya, which sat atop a major water aquifer, and used to be the most productive area, a major provider of agricultural produce for the entire West Bank. Palestinians who wanted to travel only six kilometres to their fields needed a permit. Because of the permits, Palestinians in towns like Qalqilya could not have access to their own fields. Israeli law said if land was not farmed for three years, Israel could confiscate it. Preventing farmers from reaching their land was the first step in expropriating the land. The United States did not consider the Qalqilya section of the wall controversial. Describing the wall, she said it was either eight-meter-high solid concrete or barbed wire and surrounded by trenches, military access roads and electric wires. Anything in its path was demolished. The wall went not only around the settlements as they were today, but also around planned expansion areas for those settlements. It was the perfect example of the impact of colonization and occupation. Colonization was an attempt to place Israelis in the Palestinian territory and confine Palestinians to as little an area as possible while taking as much of their land as possible. Despite the protests of the international community and the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, nothing was being done to stop its construction. When the wall was completed, more than 80 per cent of the settlements would stay where they were. The remaining 20 per cent would be on the other side of the wall but those settlers were demanding that they be included inside the wall.

44. However, not all was lost yet. It was time for the international community to step forward and act to stop the process. There was a number of tools to address the issue. Part of the problem with the passivity of the international community was the fact that it placed all efforts and all determination behind one document, something called the Road Map. She said it was a flawed document that assumed that there was no occupation or colonization and that there was equality between the parties, ignoring the huge power imbalance between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The only way to resolve the issue was to correct that power imbalance, and the only way to do that was putting in place measures to stop the Israeli colonization and its military occupation rather than applaud Israeli for taking tiny steps that ultimately do nothing to free Palestinians from Israeli military control.

45. **Raymundo Kabchi**, Professor in the Pedro Gual Institute of Higher Diplomatic Studies, said he was concerned about the ideas that had produced the Wall of Shame. He asked what other historical

tyrants like Hitler could have done differently. What could one do to make others aware of the situation? He sought a reaction from the participants by posing a scenario in which one might denounce Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims for having forcefully occupied foreign territories in southern Lebanon, the Golan Heights, built the Wall of Shame at the expense of human rights, committed genocide in Sabra and Shatila; massacred and destroyed helpless people in Fallujah and other cities and deliberately erased vestiges of civilizations that used to flourish in the area. Continuing, he listed a number of violations of international law and human rights that had been met with impunity and asked what would happen if they were perpetrated by Palestinian, Arab or Muslim terrorists.

46. He said that in 1947, the United Nations had adopted a resolution for two States on one land. In less than five minutes the civilized world, excluding the Asian, African and Arab countries, recognized the State of Israel. In subsequent years, none of the resolutions calling for the reversal of the occupation had been implemented. The reverse was true for resolutions adopted against any Arab or Muslim countries. Two different standards, based on the country involved, were used to measure the extent to which resolutions were implemented. Calling for compliance with and implementation of the resolutions for the Palestinians, he said emptying the resolutions of their content of peace and justice turns them into an empty shell.

47. Regarding the right to return, he said, Palestinians who did not wish to return should be compensated. A lasting peace could not succeed if it was not built on justice. The Road Map was being shredded, though in any case, it was not worth much as the Quartet had never done anything to have it implemented. The Wall of Shame had split families and homes and the international community had not lifted a finger. The victims were presented as perpetrators. Those who said they upheld the values of humanity were in fact the perpetrators and the violators of human rights.

48. **Edy Kaufman**, co-Chair of the Center for Research and Cooperation in Jerusalem, said that analyzing historic processes revealed periods of continuity and change. Now was a time of change. The question was whether it was taking place at the level of leadership or of public opinion. Leadership could make the difference in Israel now where Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and his opponent Amir Peretz were in favour of the processes underway. One hoped that in the case of Mr. Peretz there would be no change in his ideology despite the change in the Labour party. Changes in public opinion were also important. In the past election, the floating vote had reached an unprecedented high of 10 per cent. The final competition would be between Mr. Sharon and Mr. Peretz. What happened in the next few months could decide the future policy towards the Palestinian people.

49. He said the vote would reflect which issue concerned Israelis most: religion and State, war and peace or ethnic identity. If the subject of security and peace prevailed, voters would most likely follow the leaders. Paradoxically, while everyone was talking about security, a majority on both sides, 70 per cent, accepted the idea of mutual recognition of the State of Palestine, a two-State approach not based on coexistence but on separation. After Camp David, 75 per cent of the people had thought there was a chance for peace. Now, while there was a will for peace, only a small minority thought there would be peace in this generation. In an election where peace would be the main issue, the large floating vote would tend to go to the strongest leader. Currently, that would be Mr. Sharon. In the past, violence before the election had changed the outcome of the vote.

50. With regard to public opinion, he said the broad view supported a more egalitarian society. The majority supported Amir Peretz on social issues but only 10 per cent would vote for him. Based on his own background, Mr. Peretz could connect with the subject of poverty and link the social divides with investment in the settlements, thereby gaining votes. The poor, intellectual leaders, marginal populations, Arabs and the young would support him. The fact that the present leaders were octogenarians was in his

favour. Still, to win he would have to have Mr. Sharon's support. If he played his cards right and there was no violence, there was a chance for change. Mr. Sharon believed that military power was the deciding factor, and if he won, he might want to change the demography and the topography of the land. He believed that in the next 40 years, the Palestinians would resign themselves to the border at the wall. However, without East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian State there was no chance for peace.

51. **Idalmis Brooks Beltrán**, researcher at the Centre for African and Middle East Studies in Havana, recalled the Madrid conference of 1991 that was a turning point, when after years of confrontation, the antagonists had finally sat down at the same table to discuss a peaceful solution to their long-running conflict. But the peace process had run into difficulties and with the Al-Aqsa intifada provoked by Ariel Sharon, it had reached a dead end. The Latin American countries had supported United Nations resolutions in an effort to find a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. In order to increase solidarity with the Palestinian people, there had been an increase in contacts between the two regions.

52. She said it was important to disseminate an objective awareness of the reality of the situation in the region. The distorted representation presented by the media never referred to the smooth process of Israeli political repression, which was based on its military potential to unleash violence. She called for a linkage between academics and institutions of both regions to transmit unbiased information. Academics should develop a method to include information about the Arab-Israeli situation in educational institutions. They must publicize the outcome of the conflict from the point of view of its social cost.

53. In Cuban academic societies, she said, an effort was made to provide an objective view, as well as support for the inalienable rights and the search for a negotiated solution. They hoped to provide an assessment of the domestic situation and to disseminate information about the Palestinian population. They worked with media to provide information. The Cuban Government had promoted a number of resolutions to support the Palestinians. There was a need to mobilize world public opinion in the direction of solidarity with the Palestinian people and to demand that the United Nations bring about compliance with its resolution. The international community must also demand an end to violent action and call for peace negotiations to be resumed within the United Nations and under United Nations auspices. It must support any proposal to bring an end to violence in the Middle East.

54. **Xavier Abu Eid**, Vice-President of the General Union of Palestine Students in Santiago, said the need to achieve peace was an imperative. Different initiatives had attempted to bring together the parties to the conflict but they had not changed the status of the Palestinians as an occupied people. Palestinians were not only unequal to Israel in economic terms but Israel was also supported by the veto power of the United States. Today the situation in the Palestinian territory was not much different from what had happened in apartheid South Africa, but the international community had not reacted in the same way as it had to the situation in South Africa. The idea of normalizing relations with Israel had been hailed as a first step, but United Nations resolutions seemed to not affect Israel at all. With the lack of the coerciveness in the General Assembly, the situation in the Palestinian territory was worsening day by day. The legitimacy of the international community depended entirely on the capacity of its main organization, the symbol of multilateralism which is the United Nations, to see its resolutions implemented. The Quartet needed to be empowered. The attitude of the Quartet was completely passive. There had been no punishment for violations. The conflict was not between equal parties. There was never talk of disarming Israeli settlers on Palestinian territory. Since the Oslo agreement, there had been a lot of talk about the security of Israeli civilians, but Palestinian security was never dealt with despite many Palestinians being killed and homes being destroyed. Peace could not be created out of nothing but on the basis of concrete deeds. The international community was asking the Palestinians to accept a fait accompli. The tragedy of the refugees worsened every day. The situation of injustice was clear. Israel, which considered itself a democracy, considered a Jew who resided elsewhere to be more a citizen than

an Arab citizen who lived in Israel. He said it was a question of building bridges that united rather than walls that divided. It was time to put an end to all kinds of discrimination: political, racial and religious.

55. The rich Jewish cultural tradition could not see itself represented in an occupation army that governed over Palestinian ghettos, but rather by an example of coexistence and respect for human rights, rights that had been savagely violated during the Holocaust. However, as the work of UNICEF had shown, Palestinian children did not have a dream of a good life, they dreamt of confronting tanks, of being martyrs. This was the result of military occupation that had shown no respect even for the smallest of Palestinians. President Mahmoud Abbas had called for negotiations on the status of education. The response was unilateral actions of building the prison of Gaza, and the separation wall in the West Bank, which meant that before sitting down to negotiate with Palestinians, the Government of Israel wanted to create a *fait accompli*; in other words, to arrive at a situation with as few Palestinians as possible and Israel the largest size possible. Such a policy was destroying any idea of a two-State solution, and the Quartet had to stem it. The international community had proved itself quite capable of sending peace missions and international observers, and such options should not be disregarded in the Palestinian case. To strengthen the role of the United Nations and the Quartet to achieve peace based on a two-State solution, the occupying Power, Israel, must be compelled to comply with the resolutions and decisions of the United Nations and its agencies, which it pledged to fulfil when it became a Member State in 1949. More than 50 years later, the Palestinians are just an observer in the United Nations trying to see those promises fulfilled.

56. **Victor de Currea-Lugo**, expert in international law and book author, referred to his recently published book *“Palestina: entre la trampa del muro y el fracaso del derecho”* (*“Palestine, between the trap of the wall and the failure of the law”*), and said its title showed that he was less than optimistic about the state of international law, as the constant disregard for it in the Occupied Palestinian Territory made one admit that the United Nations had failed to discharge its responsibility. Moreover, both Israeli and international law had failed to bring justice to the Palestinian people, human rights had been traded off during successive peace agreements and processes, and non-governmental organizations, under the influence of donor Governments, had moved from human rights advocacy to humanitarian assistance.

57. Mr. de Currea-Lugo said Israel denied the rights of the Palestinian people through three different strategies: (a) by refusing the applicability of international law in Palestine; (b) by creating a body of rules to legalize the lack of rights of the Palestinians; and (c) by guaranteeing systematic impunity to those responsible for violations of the Palestinians’ rights. The first strategy did not merit discussion, as the applicability of international law had been repeatedly confirmed in many ways, including by Security Council resolutions. In the second, practices deemed illegal by international law had been approved by the Israeli legal system, as in the cases of the wall and its route; interrogations, where the Israeli judicial system had accepted “moderate physical pressure” on detainees; and house demolitions that had been justified by “imperative military reasons”. Similarly, the Israeli Basic Law proclaimed Jerusalem the capital of Israel. The Israeli legal system considered administrative detention legal, which breached international human rights law; it had even been applied to children. Lastly, all Israeli settlements were illegal according to international law, but the Israeli judicial system considered most of them legal. The third strategy, that of impunity, resulted from a clear policy of the Government.

58. Mr. de Currea-Lugo said international law as reaffirmed by the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice not only bound Israel but also other Governments and, especially, United Nations Member States. There were 191 State parties to the Geneva Conventions and none had reacted to put an end to grave violations of international law, according to its duties. However, the wall was only the latest in a long line of misdeeds on the ground that provided evidence of not only systematic impunity but also clear defiance on the part of Israel of the United Nations system. He expressed the hope that

international justice would go beyond the Advisory Opinion. For some Governments, the adoption of a United Nations resolution against Israel was a sufficient contribution to the Palestinian cause. The worst problem of international law had been illustrated by Thomas Hobbes, who had said that “conventions, without the sword, are just words”, while another derived from the tendency to negotiate away from international law or to negotiate international law itself.

59. He also pointed out that the only way to end the grave violations of international humanitarian law was to end occupation, although it was not itself required by that law. Calling the human rights situation of the Palestinians a disaster, he wondered why human rights and international law had been excluded from almost all the proposals and agreements. If the overt denial and constant violation of the Palestinians’ rights by Israel remained internationally accepted, it would become very difficult to speak of human rights as universal principles and be able to contribute to justice on the ground. The recently proposed creation of a register of damages caused by the wall, while indeed a recommendation of the International Court of Justice, showed that the United Nations avoided the most important issue: the immediate application of the other recommendations contained in the resolution that established the register of damages. Concluding his presentation, Mr. de Currea-Lugo said that, first, no agreement or accord, even signed by the Palestinian Authority, even supported by the international community or the United Nations, could suppress or disregard international law or the Palestinians’ rights; second, the international community must play a bigger role, based on international rules and institutions, such as the International Court of Justice; and third, all High Contracting Parties of the Geneva Conventions, including Israel, had the duty to ensure the implementation of international humanitarian law in all circumstances. Since the occupation was illegal, all the States signatories of the Geneva Conventions had the responsibility to intervene.

Plenary III **Support by Latin American and Caribbean countries for the realization by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights**

60. Speakers in the plenary examined the following sub-themes: promoting support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people through the United Nations system; action by Latin American and Caribbean States within the Non-Aligned Movement, the Organization of American States, the Caribbean Community and other intergovernmental mechanisms; and civil society initiatives in the region.

61. **Omaira Zabib**, Professor of Latin American political science at the University of the Andes and correspondent for the magazine *De Verdad de Miguel*, Merida, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, said that out of nine million Palestinians, five million lived outside the Occupied Palestinian Territory. There were four permanent refugee camps in the Gaza Strip. Displaced refugees had a special status with the United Nations and were recognized by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The houses built were temporary because the hope was that the people would return to their homes. At first the agency contributed food aid, which was later expanded to include health care and education. In most Lebanese refugee camps, higher education was provided through scholarships in only two universities: the Patrice Lumumba University in the Russian Federation and Havana University Cuba. Refugees in Lebanon had no civil rights and could not leave the area of the 12 camps there. There were drastic reductions in UNRWA services to the camps. Cutbacks in those resources followed the signing of the Oslo Agreement in 1993.

62. The camps were organized into people’s committees that communicated with each other. Camps in the centre of Lebanon had begun to build concrete houses. There was a large difference in the quality of houses in the various camps. Refugees in Lebanon also faced the problem of what to do with their dead, since they could not bury them outside the camps. Conditions in the schools were bad and many of

the children had left school. Most of the street children in Lebanon were Palestinians. Regarding humanitarian conditions, she said that after 1994, all economic assistance had been lost. Meanwhile, refugees returning from foreign universities were not allowed to work in their profession. They were only allowed to work in construction and agriculture during the harvest.

63. She said the Aswat community consisted of Palestinians who were expelled from Jordan and were not recognized by anyone. They had to falsify their children's names so that they could attend the local schools. The refugees faced obstacles to employment, inadequate housing and insufficient schools. There was a high rate of women who were the sole supporters of their families. Palestinians were putting pressure on UNRWA to change the educational situation, to promote the building of new schools and to ask external donors for resources to build preschools. The Agency was also being asked to increase its presence among the refugees. Palestinians were asking the international community to provide economic and social assistance to refugees.

64. **Arlene Clemesha**, board member of the Arab Cultural Centre and Professor at the University of São Paulo, said Latin Americans were very interested in the Palestinian question and worried about it because it was not a subject that only concerned the Palestinian people, but posed a big problem to the world community of nations, which could only exist based upon the right of all peoples to their own sovereign national State and their right to live with dignity. She also pointed out a certain analogy between the long process of destitution of the Palestinian people during the construction and expansion of the State of Israel, with the process of colonization of Latin America by the Europeans and, more recently, with the manner in which multinational corporations had taken control of the natural wealth of Latin American countries, to the detriment of the rights of the original people. These activities tended to lack coordination and continuity, but were improving. The new phenomenon were groups dedicated to challenging falsehoods propagated by the media. For example, after Edward Said's death in 2003, *Folha de São Paulo* published an article to discredit him. It prompted a very strong movement, which held public meetings and collected signatures, leading to the creation of the Institute for Arab Culture.

65. The two-day summit of South American and Arab countries in May 2005, while intending to strengthen economic bonds and increase trade, had been from the beginning linked to the accomplishment of a political and cultural agenda. The Brasilia Declaration called for the Israeli withdrawal from all of the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the establishment of a Palestinian State based on the 1967 borders. The resolution caused some scandal in the mainstream press, but had the effect of breaking the general silence on the issue and civil society had gained an important basis to develop its work.

66. Subsequently, she said, civil society groups together with governmental organs held a national conference on racial equality. The Government of Brazil held a weak position on the question of Palestine, despite the fact that an estimated 10 per cent of its population was of Arab descent. At the conference, Palestinians worked with the black movement, Indians and other groups, and a single resolution was adopted on the Palestinian question. While the resolution was very basic, it was a platform from which to begin work. The conference also approved the creation of a commission to monitor information relative to the violation of human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

67. She said there should be a greater effort to bring more pressure to bear on Governments to take action and not to accept the occupation. In July 2005, the Brazilian National University Teachers' Union Association of Brazilian Professors approved a motion in support of Palestinian civil society, in the wake of an appeal by 160 Palestinian and other civil society organizations for a world wide campaign for boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel until it complies with international law and universal principles of human rights. The appeal was made on 9 July 2005, the first anniversary of the Advisory Opinion by the International Court of Justice. There had been a quantum leap in Brazilian public opinion

which was now better informed and realized that action from the Governments in the region was needed. Among simple symbolic actions that could be demanded from Governments were the elimination of discriminatory visa procedures and the movement of the consulate from Ramallah to East Jerusalem. Civil society activities must be coordinated so they could support each other throughout Latin America. The campaign for such support was not just something that was being discussed; it was beginning to happen.

68. **Lourdes Cervantes Vásquez**, Head of the Political Department of the Organization of Solidarity among the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America, Havana, noted that the all-female panel in the session was symbolic of how sensitive women of the world were to the heroic cause of the Palestinian people. She said putting an end to the tragedy of the Palestinian people required complete implementation of international law. The State of Israel established on Palestinian territory refused to comply with the resolutions of the organization that had created it and recognized it, defying no less than 64 resolutions of the Security Council and more than a hundred resolutions adopted by other bodies of the United Nations. Other draft resolutions had been vetoed by the United States. One had to realize that the establishment of an independent Palestinian State within the 1967 borders with its capital in East Jerusalem could not be disconnected from the realities of the day. One dangerous development was the replacement of multilateralism with hegemonic unilateralism by the United States. There was a new kind of legality involving political vendettas threatened by the powerful countries, headed by the United States. Disregard by Israel of the illegal nature of the shameful separation wall was further evidence of its disdain for the will of the international community and for international law. In the case of the question of Palestine, unilateralism was synonymous with genocide.

69. She stressed the importance of increasing knowledge about the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and said that the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights had been the victim of unjust questioning and distorting statements. She also stressed that the suffering of the Palestinian people had not come from the border conflict, although the territorial issue was important, but from the occupation by an invading power. It was a conflict characterized by an abysmal imbalance in military power. International humanitarian law unquestionably applied to the conflict but was flouted with impunity by Israel. Its actions included elimination of people, murder and arrest of its leaders. She called attention to the heroic resistance of the Palestinian people, including five million of them living in exile. The recent evacuation of 8,000 Israeli settlers was a step in the direction of fulfilling the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, but it was only the beginning and not the end of unconditional withdrawal of Israel from all occupied territories.

70. Ms. Vásquez said that all the initiatives and capacities to support the Palestinians must be increased. There was much to be done to prevent any further progress in Israel's attempt to eradicate the Palestinian people, who were only defending their right to exist and to remain in their homeland. Her organization supported the civil society plan of action adopted by civil society in July at a conference organized by the Committee in Paris, she reaffirmed that they would spare no effort until the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people were achieved.

71. **Tilda Rabi**, board member of the Arab Movement for Human Rights, Buenos Aires, said that in 1995, when the Committee sponsored its meeting in Brazil, she had felt that the Palestinian State was on its way to becoming a reality. Today, she had to recognize that it was a kind of Pax Romana. She had spent some time communicating with Jewish groups, visiting synagogues and addressing Jewish bodies. The bombing in Buenos Aires had changed the climate for some time, but now she was again working with both Jewish and non-Jewish organizations. In one meeting she had expressed the view that Jews, as members of a community that had demanded the creation of their own State, were obligated to support another group. The same organizations claimed to represent Israeli human rights organizations. Their

response to her suggestion was negative and she was told that she was offending the audience with her attitude. The excessive brandishing of the Holocaust was acceptable for them but not for others. What about the Palestinian diaspora, she asked.

72. She went on to say that the Jewish community was afraid to look at the situation. They did not want to accept the reality of what was happening. The Argentinean society had shown solidarity but there was stigma placed on the Arab. The general perception was unclear. The apartheid wall had been ignored. In Argentina, only one congressman had recalled the first anniversary of the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice in Parliament. The Jewish effort was directed at influencing intellectuals and politicians in Latin American countries. It was a mistake to say that all we had to do was reach the media. That was based on an assumption that the Latin American majority was interested in the Palestinian situation.

73. She said that people who depended on getting information from the media were subjected to descriptions of the region that were perceived as mythical, exotic and alien. Some elements could be of help to reverse the situation. In addition to many Arab and Palestinian organizations, there were many non-governmental organizations with a politically aware and intellectual audience. Politics, law and culture criss-crossed on the issue. Some countries had moved from expressing sympathy to much greater commitment, but that was not enough. What was needed was to stop the building of the wall or impose international sanctions, as had been the case with South Africa.

74. **Doris Musalem**, Professor of the Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana of Mexico, stressed the importance of public opinion and recalled that force of public opinion brought the Viet Nam war to an end. Public opinion in the United States was the most important with regard to the question of Palestine. She recalled also how in the mid-1990s, at the time of the euphoric talk about the peace process, Noam Chomsky said that instead of progress, there had been regression owing to Israeli violations of the agreements. They made it appear that we were in a process of peace, but the so-called peace processes resulted in further Israeli expansion. His comments at that time had certain bearing on the present situation with the disengagement. Noam Chomsky also said that Palestinians must go to the American public opinion and tell them exactly what the fight was about, explain that they were fighting to establish an independent State.

75. Turning to the specific case of Mexico, Ms. Musalem said the media were the most decisive element in the perception of society about any given event. Information was coming primarily from North American and European media and was accepted by Latin American media, without any reprocessing of their own. In the case of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, information continued to be presented in a manner that was distorted, biased and out of context, to the detriment of the Palestinian cause. But there was a greater openness in the media because of greater competition and choice. That resulted in a change in the public perception of the Palestinian problem, which was becoming closer to reality, and triggered greater support by civil society for Palestinian rights. Individual initiatives had also taken place involving artists, film makers and other individuals. In particular, Ms. Musalem singled out the documentary "The Colour of Olives" by the Mexican director Carolina Rivas. Also, the Coordinadora de Solidaridad con Palestina, a committee that organized activities in Mexico in defence of the Palestinian people, had been established. Most of its events were extensively covered by the Mexican press, and it had become an important presence in the media, influencing public opinion. There was also a small group of academics dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict who lectured on the issue in a number of public and private universities.

76. She said civil society also expressed itself in many other endeavours that supported the Palestinians. Different organizations of civil society and individuals alike must work collectively with

other organizations in defence of human rights. In other words, the question of Palestine must not be raised as an isolated issue; it must be increasingly and systematically mainstreamed into the work of all organizations. She called for more conferences and debates to promote a national and international network, as well as films. The above-mentioned committee proposed a national and international network on the issue, with a website and national and international meetings at least every two years; an electronic and paper magazine publicizing the issue of Palestine; and fundraising activities to support groups in the Palestinian territory that cared for the victims of occupation. Another proposal was for direct contact with the Palestinian people through visits to the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

IV. Closing session

77. **Victor Camilleri**, Rapporteur of the Committee, introduced the final document of the Latin American and Caribbean Meeting (see annex I).

78. **Ilenia Medina**, Director of Multilateral Affairs at the Ministry of External Relations of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, said her Government was glad to see the final document contribute to the international discussion of the question of Palestine. She was happy to see so many wonderful presentations by women. The Venezuelan Foreign Ministry was more committed than ever to the topic. Venezuela had recently joined the Committee as an observer and was grateful that the committee had accepted the Government's offer to host the meeting. In preparation for the meeting, the Venezuelan side had raised a topic that was very important and in some ways characterized the region's profile, and that was the people's rights; in this case, Palestinian people's rights. She had seen how the topic was discussed, in particular how Palestinian women, children and elderly were faring, how their fate was being followed, and what their future was as individuals and as part of the people. Ms. Medina was gratified to see how the issue was incorporated into the agenda and hoped the item would remain on the Committee's agenda. Putting a human face on the tragedy was important. She noted that the social items covered by that day's speakers covered the domain of the media, and she hoped they could be examined in greater depth in the context of the public forum on 15 December 2005. Ms. Medina conveyed to the Chairman of the Committee a letter from the Vice-Minister Maria Pilar and reiterated Venezuela's determination to work on bringing other Member States into the Committee.

79. **Riyad Mansour**, Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, said the final document would serve as a guiding document to those who were in the midst of the struggle for a Palestinian State. It would help to encourage other Governments in Latin America and the Caribbean to join the Committee. The Palestinian struggle had gone on too long but it did not look like it would end soon. Palestinians needed and appreciated the support, which ensured that they were not alone in the struggle. It would give them the additional strength they needed to be successful at the end of the day.

80. **Paul Badji**, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in closing the meeting said that during the past two days the speakers had updated participants on the evolving situation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including the consequences of the recent Israeli disengagement, discussed the international efforts to push the political process forward, including action by Latin American and Caribbean States within the Non-Aligned Movement, the Organization of American States, the Caribbean Community and other intergovernmental mechanisms. He thanked all those who had participated in the meeting and all those who made the event possible.

V. Public Forum in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace

81. The United Nations Public Forum in Support of the Israeli-Palestinian People was held in Caracas on 15 December 2005 under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. It followed the United Nations Latin American and Caribbean Meeting on the Question of Palestine, which was held on 13 and 14 December at the same venue. The Forum was attended by the experts from the Latin American and Caribbean Meeting, two additional Venezuelan speakers, as well as representatives of civil society, observers from other Governments, academics and individuals. Resfel Pino Alvarez, representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Cuba, moderated the Forum. The presentations were followed by a discussion between the experts and the audience. The Chairman of the Committee, Ambassador Paul Badji, opened the Forum. He recalled that the participants in the Latin American Meeting had reviewed the complex situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, assessed peace prospects and considered ways to improve them. The Latin American and Caribbean perspective, and the historical perspective in particular, had enriched the proceedings.

82. The role of civil society featured prominently in the discussions of the various aspects of the problem, indicative of how important its role had become in world affairs. In international efforts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the position and actions of civil society were especially prominent. With the parties in the conflict so obviously unequal, the power of international public opinion in support of the just Palestinian cause was extremely important for Palestinians in their quest for peace and independence.

83. The role of civil society and its unique capacity were demonstrated in efforts such as the People's Voice and the Geneva initiatives. They generated wide support and genuine interest, because they sought to bring the parties together in a peaceful resolution of the conflict and not to drive them further apart. The presence of the International Solidarity Movement on the ground had had an immense impact due to its non-violent nature. Peaceful protests and legal actions against the wall built by Israel in the West Bank are successful in challenging this dangerous development and in mobilizing public opinion against it. Another example could be seen in the recent call by Israelis and Palestinians for non-violent resistance to the occupation. The Forum would demonstrate, once again, the moral authority enjoyed by civil society.

84. **Dia Nader**, Ambassador-designate of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the Arab Republic of Syria, said that she was a citizen of the world who had always sided with just causes and would continue to fight for a better world with a far more just society. Venezuela President Hugo Chavez had clearly set out his country's foreign policy based on peaceful negotiation, non-interference in the affairs of other countries, respect for the right of self-determination of other people and conformance to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

85. She added that the United Nations urgently needed certain reforms, including the expansion of the Security Council, and the immediate elimination of the veto. If the Organization continued along the current path it would be renouncing its original model. The basic reason that no fair solution had been found to the Palestinian problem was precisely because of the United States veto. On 35 occasions, the United States had vetoed resolutions that appealed to Israel to stop building settlements. On the occasions that the United States had not vetoed a resolution that was unfavourable to Israel, Israel simply failed to comply with it.

86. Ms. Nader referred to the earlier presentation by Jeff Halper, Coordinator of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolition, in which he had said that the Israeli Government always followed the strategy

of “facts on the ground” and stressed that Israel had the right to exist but should abide by international law. She said that Israeli and United States interests controlled the media which did not contribute to solving the question of Palestine. Although the Israeli army savagely repressed the population in the Occupied Territory and the south of Lebanon, the media produced another version. The Forum should follow up on media manipulation. She was monitoring the media.

87. **Fadi Kallab**, Honourary Consul of Lebanon in Valencia, remarked that he was presenting his personal views. The conceptual framework of the Meeting had facilitated an updated view of the Arab/Israel conflict. It was important to determine why current political maneuverings had not led to peace but were merely a proliferation of national and multinational policies that did not yield results. The conflict that had arisen in the Mediterranean area was today a globalized one from which no nation could feel separate. Today it was no longer an argument that could be resolved between the parties themselves. Without interfering with the rights of all people to self-determination, there was an international opinion that was binding to the parties. The United Nations had always attempted to solve conflicts, this one in particular. Now there was a proactive public opinion that was being heard in places as diverse as Mar del Plata and Hong Kong, and would increasingly be echoed throughout the international community. It was extremely important for it to be heard in forums like this one.

88. Mr. Kallab noted that the interpretation of United Nations resolutions were not always what the creators had intended. There was a distortion of what had been explicitly set forth in the resolution. Such distortions should be a topic of discussion so that the world would be aware that it was a new interpretation. The cause of the Palestinian people was considered a legitimate and unquestionable struggle. The media interpretation, however, made people view the Palestinian struggle as a form of terrorism. Although the negotiations in the framework of the Road Map seemed to be showing progress, Palestinian and international leaders had different perceptions.

89. In the ensuing discussions, experts from the Latin American and Caribbean Meeting took the floor. **Victor de Currea-Lugo**, expert in International Law, Lund, Sweden, stressed three main points: the victimization of Jews; Israeli denial of the occupation of the Palestinian territory; and the fake steps taken towards peace. With reference to the first point, Ariel Sharon’s strategy continued to fuel fear among the Jewish population. The anguish of the Israeli population against global anti-Semitism was real. The denial of the occupation was illustrated by the reference to the Promised Land saying they could not be occupiers on a land that belonged to them by divine will. As an example for the deceiving steps for peace, he cited the release of 120 prisoners, when their order of detention was to expire within a few days. Moreover, of those 120 being released, there were no political prisoners who were being detained illegally. The following week, Israel had taken 300 additional Palestinian prisoners, but that did not make the news.

90. **Jeff Halper**, Coordinator, Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, Jerusalem said that all his work had been to make Israel accountable for its actions. Countries should try to weed out chauvinism and racist aspects of their ideology and replace them with human rights, pluralism and other important values. At the same time, it should be understood that Israel was a struggling country. Not everyone agreed with Ariel Sharon or was racist. The vast majority did not approve the occupation. The Jews themselves were not a racist people. Most of the Jews were not Zionists. It was important not to apply stereotypes.

91. He continued that Israel was not a western democracy. Its model came out of Eastern Europe and was based on tribal nationalism that could not tolerate other minorities in its territory. Jews have lived for thousand of years in Russia but they had never been considered Russians, they were never part of the tribe. Now that the Jews had their own tribe, they did not recognize the existence of the Palestinian

people. Israel was not the only country that had a destructive form of racist nationalism. Israeli State policy was based on Zionist ideology. Israel was in some ways like South Africa. The European South Africans, even though many did not approve of apartheid, would never have overthrown the apartheid regime. International pressure was the key.

92. He and other Israelis were trying to fight the demonization of the Arabs. At the same time, Palestinian supporters must relate to Israel as a real country. References to Zionism and other stereotypes did not help. The focus should be on the principles of international law. Israel must be warned that it could not be part of the international community if it did not end the occupation and abide by international law. The issues could not be addressed ideologically. The language of international law and human rights should be reinforced.

93. **Edy Kaufman**, co-Chair, Centre for Research and Cooperation, Jerusalem, stressed that one must look to the future. Colleagues working with Palestinians in Israel were pained that all their efforts could deteriorate into an argument of who came first. There should be two States which reflected the will of the Palestinian people and the Israeli people. It did not help to go back to the cold war polemics. It was not enough for the leaders to make peace among themselves; peace had to be built at the grassroots level. He noted that half of the peace treaties since the Second World War had not been fully implemented. There was a lot of contact between Israeli and Palestinian academics working closely together. They sometimes tried to reach up to Government level and sometimes down to the people. Following the Madrid Conference, the two parties could not even sit together in Washington because Israel would not accept Palestinians who came from the PLO. The ultimate coming together of the two parties in Oslo started with the meetings of two academics. When discussions rose to the diplomatic level, however, civil society was sidelined. Civil society did not lobby enough to press their point of view. He called for a spirit of self-criticism and introspection. It was important to talk to leaders and convince them to act differently.

94. **Xavier Abu Eid**, Vice-President, General Union of Palestinian Students, Santiago, said that the main problem was the occupation itself. The most important thing was that the occupying power had violated the Fourth Geneva Convention. He opined that often it was not just the press that did not use the right words. The Secretary-General of the United Nations never said that Israel was the occupying Power. There should be a Latin American network of awareness and there should be joint projects to follow the Meeting. There could be no peace unless the issue of settlements was resolved. Latin America bore a certain responsibility. A few Latin American countries had their embassies in Jerusalem. Those embassies should be withdrawn so as not to legitimize the occupation.

95. It was important for governmental and civil society delegations to go to the Occupied Palestinian Territory and get a first-hand view of the situation. Despite the flouting by Israel of United Nations resolutions and international law, there were countries that supported the Palestinians but had free trade treaties with Israel. In particular, the European Union supported Palestinians financially but still dealt with Israel. He emphasized international law and United Nations resolutions that were always trampled were useless.

96. **Pedro Brieger**, sociologist and journalist on international affairs, Buenos Aires, stressed that it was necessary to work as a network and not in separate compartments. Technology made it possible to have access to the available information. The United Nations should set up a website with all the information. The material – articles, videos, films and books – could be in one place. Often, journalists needed to look for specific information. Efforts should be made to work with the Hispanic population in the United States and to bridge the gap between the Palestinians and the Hispanics. He also suggested

coordinating travel to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, that would attract the Latin American public. He deplored that most Western journalists did not speak Arabic.

97. He continued that the statements of the President of Iran were not helpful. The Holocaust should not be questioned. There was no doubt what had happened. On the other hand, the actions of the Israeli Government were unethical in the way the Government had used that history to gain support for their persecution of the Palestinians.

98. **Doris Mussalem**, Professor and Head of Research in the Department of Policy and Culture at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Mexico City, recalled that Israel was a colonizing power that violated international law and it should not send its representatives to countries all over the world to speak of peace. The differences between the two major Israeli parties were merely procedural. Those committed to peace should start by acknowledging that the Israeli parties were the same. The Labour Party was complicit and had encouraged the Government of Mr. Sharon on the pretext that Palestinian terrorism had to be eliminated. The difference was that Israel, through its capacity of communication and strategic capacity, had succeeded in legitimizing its actions. The Israeli State had to allow the Palestinian State to be created on all the Occupied Territory. The Israeli plan was to annex some 60 per cent of Palestinian territory. It was important that the Palestinian question be brought up again at the United Nations.

99. **Diana Buttu**, Adviser to the President of the Palestinian Authority, said that it should be recognized that Israel had not been isolated from the international spectrum. The European Union continued to maintain a trade association with Israel. It was wrong that, as a consequence, products from the Occupied Palestinian Territory were entering the Union with duty-free status. The United Nations should explore the possibility of isolating Israel in the international forum. The Committee should work towards protecting the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people through websites and examining the means to highlight and condemn Israeli actions that violate international law.

100. She continued that there were many good ideas for improving the work of the Committee. The Committee would never cease to work until Israel was brought to compliance and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people were achieved. There were ideas about how to force the occupying Power to comply and complete its withdrawal. Participants could agree to an action programme. Nothing could prevent non-governmental organizations from mounting pressure to bring Israelis to court to face crimes against humanity. Those organizations could also mount campaigns to immobilize companies that were participating in the construction of the wall. They should look for practical steps. If a company was involved in illegal acts, non-governmental organizations should mobilize against them with a boycott in their own country, as had been done in the case of South Africa.

Annex I

Caracas Declaration

1. The United Nations Latin American and Caribbean Meeting on the Question of Palestine was held in Caracas, on 13 and 14 December 2005, under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian people. Its theme was “Achieving the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people: the key to peace in the Middle East”. Participants in the Meeting included international experts, representatives of Governments, Palestine, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations entities, parliaments, civil society and the media.

2. The Meeting was convened by the Committee with a view to sensitizing international public opinion, particularly in Latin America and the Caribbean, to the situation of the Palestinian people living under Israeli occupation, the need to assist the Israelis and Palestinians to return to a meaningful political dialogue, and the importance of reaching a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine. The participants reviewed the situation on the ground, discussed international efforts in searching for a settlement of the question of Palestine and the support of Latin American and Caribbean countries in this endeavour.

3. In this context, an extensive debate was held on the agenda item proposed by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, entitled “Humanitarian and socio-economic challenges faced by the Palestinian people”, with a view to giving greater human visibility to the Palestinian cause. The point is to make international organizations much more aware of the totally defenceless position of Palestinian children, women and men in the Occupied Territory, in that they have been deprived of their human rights, in particular their social rights, and therefore their right to lead a dignified life. From this perspective, the participants agreed to call on the international community and the various United Nations organs and bodies to work together more closely to solve the serious problems of education, health, housing, land cultivation and lack of jobs, among other things, that adversely affect the Palestinian people in the Occupied Territory. Likewise, they agreed to keep the issue on the agenda of regional meetings as well as of the Committee.

4. The Meeting was held amidst renewed hopes for a resumption in the stalled peace process following recent positive political developments, as well as concerns over renewed violence on the ground. The participants viewed the Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip and parts of the northern West Bank, completed in September 2005, as a positive first step that could re-ignite negotiations within the framework of the Road Map aimed at bringing about the establishment of an independent, viable and territorially contiguous Palestinian State, living side-by-side with Israel in peace and security. The participants called for the implementation of the understandings reached at Sharm el-Sheikh, especially returning to the situation in the West Bank before September 2000 and the freeing of Palestinian prisoners. The participants noted the recent agreement on movement and access reached between the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority on control over movement of people and goods between the Gaza Strip and Egypt as well as between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, calling for its timely and full implementation. The participants called for the expeditious resolution of all unresolved issues in the Gaza Strip, including the clearing of the rubble, the opening of the airport and the construction of a seaport, and for Israel to fulfil its obligations as an occupying Power under international humanitarian law.

5. The participants welcomed the Palestinian Authority’s continued efforts at building democratic institutions, as well as introducing comprehensive reform of the security services. They supported the Palestinian people’s holding of municipal elections in 2005 and their determination to hold legislative elections scheduled for 25 January 2006. The participants called on Israel, the occupying Power, to stop

interfering with the election process and to assist the Palestinian side and grant freedom of movement to candidates and voters during the campaign and voting period, including in East Jerusalem, and to allow Palestinian prisoners in Israel to participate. Noting the importance of parliamentary elections for Palestinian reform, the participants called on the international community to help the Palestinians in holding free, open and fair elections.

6. The participants condemned the recent resumption by Israel, the occupying Power, of military incursions and extrajudicial killings that threaten to unravel the fragile truce agreed to by Palestinian groups, provoke feelings of hatred and despair, and undo what progress has already been achieved. At the same time, the participants condemned all attacks by militants against civilians in Israel. These undermine prospects of building trust and confidence between the parties.

7. The participants strongly condemned the continuing construction of the wall and the expansion of settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, in defiance of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. The participants were greatly dismayed at the continued settlement activities in the West Bank, particularly the plan to connect to East Jerusalem the largest settlement of “Ma’aleh Adumim”. In the view of the participants, the combination of the continued settlement activity and the building of the wall was creating new and significant facts on the ground, making a two-State solution extremely difficult to attain.

8. The participants expressed the view that the long-standing conflict would have no final solution without the achievement of the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights defined by the General Assembly in 1974 as the right to self-determination without external interference, the right to national independence and sovereignty, and the right of Palestinians to return to their homes and property, from which they had been displaced and uprooted, on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions.

9. The participants commended the international donor assistance to the Palestinian people and emphasized its continued critical importance, especially at this post-disengagement period when timely aid was the key factor to rebuilding the devastated economy and alleviating the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. They called on Israel to lift all measures that deny the Palestinian people access to essential services and markets.

10. The participants expressed support for efforts at helping the parties move towards achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Their position was that those efforts should be pursued in keeping with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), the principle of a permanent two-State solution to the conflict, based on the 1967 borders, the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the right of all States to live in peace and security.

11. The participants reaffirmed the permanent responsibility of the United Nations with respect to the question of Palestine, until it is resolved in conformity with relevant United Nations resolutions and norms of international law, and until the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are fully realized in all aspects.

12. The participants called on the Latin American and Caribbean States members of the Committee to redouble their efforts to promote the incorporation of other countries of the region as members or observers, with a view to strengthening the Committee's efforts to achieve peace and respect for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

13. The participants in the Meeting welcomed the Brasília Declaration, adopted on 11 May 2005 at the South American and Arab Countries Summit, which had reaffirmed the need to reach a just, durable and comprehensive peace in the Middle East on the basis of the principle of land for peace and relevant United Nations resolutions, as well as the Madrid framework and the Arab Peace Initiative that ensured the realization of security for all countries in the region. The Declaration had also highlighted the necessity of the full implementation of the Road Map and the materialization of the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people.

14. The participants welcomed the pledge of Governments of Latin American and Caribbean, intergovernmental organizations and civil society representatives to exert all efforts to support the peace process and its successful conclusion. They noted that Latin American and Caribbean States, having had a long experience in their struggle for self-determination, independence and national sovereignty, should continue their moral, political and material support to the Palestinian people.

15. The participants voiced their appreciation for the active and constructive role played by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, an Observer in the Committee, in support of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the region. The participants expressed their deep gratitude to the Government of Venezuela for hosting the Meeting and to the Ministry for External Relations for the assistance and support extended to the Committee and the United Nations Secretariat in its preparation.

Caracas, 14 December 2005

Annex II

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Speakers

Mr. Xavier Abu Eid	Vice-President, General Union of Palestine Students Santiago
Mr. José Arbex Jr.	Journalist, human rights activist São Paulo, Brazil
Ms. Idalmis Brooks Beltrán	Researcher, Centre for African and Middle East Studies Havana
Mr. Pedro Brieger	Sociologist, journalist on international affairs Buenos Aires
Ms. Diana Buttu	Adviser to the President of the Palestinian Authority Ramallah
Ms. Arlene Clemesha	Board member, Arab Cultural Centre Professor, University of São Paulo São Paulo, Brazil
Mr. Victor de Currea-Lugo	Writer, expert in international law Lund, Sweden
Mr. Jeff Halper	Coordinator, Israeli Committee against House Demolitions Jerusalem
Mr. Raymundo Kabchi	Professor, Pedro Gual Institute of Higher Diplomatic Studies Caracas
Mr. Fadi Kallab	Honourary Consul of Lebanon in Valencia Valencia, Venezuela
Mr. Edy Kaufman	Co-Chair, Centre for Research and Cooperation Jerusalem
Ms. Doris Musalem	Professor, Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana of Mexico Mexico City
Ms. Dia Nader	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador-designate of Venezuela to the Syrian Arab Republic Caracas

Mr. Edward Peck	Former United States Ambassador President, Foreign Services International Washington, D.C.
Ms. Tilda Rabi	Board Member, Arab Movement for Human Rights Buenos Aires
Mr. Jorge Rondón Uzcátegui	Former Ambassador of Venezuela to Iraq and Jordan Caracas
Ms. Lourdes Cervantes Vásquez	Head of Political Department, Organization of Solidarity among the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America Havana
Ms. Omaira Zabib	Professor of Latin American political science, University of the Andes Journalist for the magazine <i>De Verdad de Miguel</i> Merida, Venezuela

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

H.E. Mr. Paul Badji	Permanent Representative of Senegal to the United Nations Chairman of the Committee
H.E. Mr. Victor Camilleri	Permanent Representative of Malta to the United Nations Rapporteur of the Committee
H.E. Mr. Germán Sánchez Otero	Ambassador of Cuba to Venezuela
H.E. Mr. Riyad Mansour	Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations

Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations

Mr. David McLachlan-Karr	Resident Representative, United Nations Development Programme Caracas
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Governments

Algeria, China, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, France, Guyana, Honduras, Haiti, Indonesia, Jamaica, Kuwait, Malaysia, Morocco, Panama, Peru, Qatar, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, South Africa, Syrian Arab Republic, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

Entities having received a standing invitation to participate as observers
in the sessions and the Work of the General Assembly and
maintaining permanent observer missions at Headquarters

Palestine

United Nations organs, agencies and bodies

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
United Nations Development Program (UNDP)
United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO)

Civil Society Organizations

Arab Cultural Center (São Paulo)
Arab Movement for Human Rights (Buenos Aires)
Centre for African and Middle East Studies (Havana)
Centre for Research and Cooperation (Jerusalem)
Foreign Services International (Washington, D.C.)
General Union of Palestine Students (Santiago)
Israeli Committee against House Demolitions (Jerusalem)
Neturei Karta International
Organization of Solidarity among the Peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America (Havana)

Media

Agencia Boliviana de Noticias
Agencia Prensa Latina de Noticias
El Mundo Arabe
El Diario
Filmovan
Itar-Tass Agency
La Prensa Arabe/Español en Venezuela y America Latina
Radio Nacional de Cuba
Radio Nacional de Venezuela
Telesur (Los Ruices)
Television Cubana
Torre La Previsora
Nomtarde (Diario)
Periodista
Yuke Mundial
Venezuelan Televisión
Vive TV
