



**DIVISION FOR
PALESTINIAN RIGHTS**

**UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL MEETING
IN SUPPORT OF ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE**

**Food and Agriculture Organization, Rome
22 and 23 March 2007**

Contents

	<u>Paragraphs</u>	<u>Page</u>
I. Introduction.....	1-4	3
II. Opening session	5-31	3
III. Plenary sessions	32-67	10
Plenary I	32-44	10
Plenary II	45-57	12
Plenary III	58-67	15
IV. Closing session	68-72	18

Annexes

I. Final Document	19
II. List of participants	21

I. Introduction

1. The United Nations International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace was held at the Headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations in Rome on 22 and 23 March 2007, under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and in keeping with General Assembly resolutions 61/22 and 61/23.
2. The Committee was represented at the Meeting by a delegation comprising: Paul Badji (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee; Zahir Tanin (Afghanistan), Vice-Chairman of the Committee; Rodrigo Malmierca Díaz (Cuba), Vice-Chairman of the Committee; Victor Camilleri (Malta), Rapporteur of the Committee; and Riyad Mansour (Palestine).
3. The Meeting consisted of an opening session, three plenary sessions and a closing session. Presentations were made by 15 speakers, including Israelis and Palestinians. In addition, representatives of 76 Governments, the Holy See, Palestine, and the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, as well as representatives of 4 intergovernmental organizations, 5 United Nations system entities, 29 civil society organizations, and 8 media outlets participated in the Meeting (see annex II).
4. The Meeting adopted a final document (see annex I).

II. Opening session

5. **Jacques Diouf**, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization, said that the Organization's mission was to ensure food security for all. Without food security, there could be no peace, and there could be no food security without peace. It was thus fitting that FAO was the backdrop for the Meeting. He said that the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights proclaimed the right of all to an adequate standard of living for themselves and their families, which included the right to sufficient food. Without adequate food, people could neither lead healthy and active lives nor care for their children, who, in turn, would be unable to learn how to read and write. The fulfilment of that right was at the heart of the mandate of FAO to ensure a world free from hunger.
6. Against the backdrop of the alarming food security situation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the agency had assessed the priorities for the restoration and revitalization of the agricultural production. Through the joint United Nations needs analysis and the 2007 consolidated appeal process for emergency and relief interventions, FAO was requesting approximately \$5 million. The priorities included ensuring convergence between humanitarian relief and work to address the structural causes of food insecurity. It would provide technical expertise to national and local authorities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and would endeavour to contribute to employment generation in a joint project with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), focusing on the rehabilitation of destroyed agricultural facilities and infrastructure in the Gaza Strip. Currently, FAO was implementing projects and programmes in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip for a total amount of \$6.5 million, covering the development of agricultural production, agricultural marketing, capacity building, technical extension and training, in particular on improved agricultural practices, integrated pest management, irrigation and greenhouse rehabilitation, land reclamation and water resources management, backyard gardening, and cottage industry activities for women.
7. Mr. Diouf said that the Organization's operating capacity had steadily increased since the establishment of a programme coordination unit in East Jerusalem in 2002. FAO was also the lead technical agency for animal health control and prevention of avian influenza. Together with UNDP and

the World Bank, FAO had established the United Nations avian influenza inter-agency framework based on partnerships with the World Health Organization in the animal-human public health interface and with UNDP in relation to the overall programme management. As part of the FAO avian influenza response programme, it worked to strengthen the capacities of the veterinary service in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to detect, confirm and respond to outbreaks of diseases. It also aimed to provide decision-makers and partners with updated, accurate and timely analysis and information on food insecurity and vulnerability of the population in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, therefore contributing to the establishment of a food insecurity and vulnerability information and mapping system. In partnership with the World Food Programme, FAO conducted a food insecurity and vulnerability analysis to identify the food insecurity and develop the right response to the needs.

8. **Ban Ki-moon**, Secretary-General of the United Nations, in a statement read out by his representative to the Meeting, Sergei Ordzhonikidze, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, said that the Meeting was taking place at a critical moment for future efforts to achieve peace in the Middle East. Important developments were taking place among Palestinians, between Palestinians and Israelis, in the region, and internationally. Taken together, these held the potential, if not yet the promise, to overcome a period of violence and despair and replace it with a future of dialogue and hope. The Agreement reached in Mecca had brought relative calm to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and the formation of a Palestinian national unity government was a very significant step forward. He hoped this would also lay the groundwork for a government that would respect existing agreements with Israel and reflect Quartet principles. The international community would be following closely the actions of the new government, and it was hoped that the expectations the Palestinian people and the international community had of it would be fulfilled.

9. He said that serious obstacles remained, threatening to block progress. The humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory continued to worsen. Israeli military operations, continuing settlement activity and severe movement restrictions eroded prospects for socio-economic recovery. The expansion of settlements and construction of the barrier in the West Bank intensified feelings of mistrust, anger and despair, pushing the chances of peace farther away. At the same time, continued rocket attacks at Israel and indiscriminate violence against civilians were totally unjustified, and only reinforced a sense of insecurity among Israelis. For its part, Israel must ensure that it exercised its right to defend itself in accordance with international humanitarian and human rights law, so as not to endanger civilians. It was clear that a parallel commitment by the parties was essential for advancing on key issues. A majority of Israelis and Palestinians supported a negotiated settlement whereby two independent States, Israel and Palestine, would live side by side in peace and security. It was vital that their leaders take concrete actions that showed their commitment to achieving that goal, by word and deed. The United Nations, for its part, would remain fully engaged in efforts to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), the Arab Peace Initiative and the principle of land for peace.

10. Mr. Ordzhonikidze, in his own words, said that the Meeting reflected the United Nations firm commitment to and support for peace in the Middle East. It was an opportunity to search for ways to help boost the political dialogue. It was equally an opportunity to highlight the ever-worsening humanitarian situation, and to impress on the international community the urgent need to improve the rapidly deteriorating living conditions. One of the key findings of the report of the High-level Group on the Alliance of Civilizations was that the Israeli-Palestinian issue carried a powerful and symbolic meaning among people far removed from the conflict itself. The situation affected all, and therefore called for the continuous involvement of the entire international community to realize peace and stability. The High-level Group also highlighted the need for a reinvigorated multilateral peace process. Meetings organized under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People formed part of such wider efforts, engaging the broader international community.

11. **Paul Badji**, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, said that the Committee welcomed the recent formation of a new Palestinian Cabinet and hoped the development would allow the international community to restore much-needed economic and humanitarian assistance. The continuation of restrictions on financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority might lead to a collapse of the mechanisms established since the beginning of the Oslo process, including the Palestinian institutions governing the daily lives of over 3.6 million Palestinians in the Occupied Territory. Many years of efforts and tremendous resources had been spent on establishing and consolidating those institutions, which were seen as the foundation of a future Palestinian State. Abandoning them might negate all the earlier achievements and cause a major setback for the ultimate goal of achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting solution of the question of Palestine. Above all, the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people should not be taken hostage to political constraints.

12. Major international peace efforts, such as the Quartet Road Map, should now be revisited and adjusted. The convening of an international peace conference on the Middle East could provide a positive impetus needed to achieve that goal, in particular by incorporating indispensable regional arrangements, as well as other initiatives, including the Arab Peace Initiative, to establish peace in the region as a whole. All such initiatives should be accompanied by realistic and implementable timelines. The Committee also believed that national parliaments and inter-parliamentary organizations played an important role in shaping public opinion, formulating policy guidelines and upholding international legitimacy in support of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Committee was of the view that the experience and political influence of lawmakers and their organizations could be instrumental in consolidating the democratic process and institution-building in the territory under the Palestinian Authority, strengthening political dialogue between the parties, and in applying principles of international law to efforts at resolving the conflict.

13. Mr. Badji said his Committee's position was that the United Nations should maintain its permanent responsibility for the question of Palestine until it was resolved in all its aspects. It would work together with all concerned in pursuit of that objective. The Committee also considered it paramount that the parties themselves and all international actors be guided in their initiatives and actions by principles and norms of international law. The Committee's position was that the continuing occupation of the Palestinian Territory, now in its fortieth year, remained the root cause of the conflict. There was an urgent need for a negotiated solution that would end the occupation, ensure the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights and provide security for the State of Israel. This settlement must be based on international law and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) and other relevant United Nations resolutions. It was crucial that the parties refrained from any unilateral measures that would undermine efforts to achieve a final peace settlement. It was also important for the parties to agree on the final outcome of the peace settlement, namely, ending the Israeli occupation and establishing an independent Palestinian State, living in peace and security with Israel and other neighbours. Such an agreement would allow Israel and the Palestinians, with the support of the world community, to come to an understanding on parallel mutual steps for its implementation.

14. **Qais Abdel-Karim**, Member of the Palestinian Legislative Council and the representative of Palestine, said that for nearly 60 years, the Palestinian people had been a stateless people, with the majority of them living as refugees. For 40 years, the Palestinian people had suffered under the oppressive and belligerent Israeli military occupation, the longest in modern history. Under the Israeli occupation, the Palestinian people continued to suffer the daily, widespread and grave violation of all of their human rights, further dispossession and loss of their land, and constant humiliation and assaults on their dignity as a people. In grave breach of international law, the occupying Power continued to carry out military attacks against civilians, killing and injuring Palestinian men, women and children, destroy Palestinian homes, properties and agricultural lands, construct, expand and fortify illegal settlements and the separation wall throughout the West Bank, detain and imprison over 10,000 Palestinians, including

women and children, and impose all means of collective punishment upon the Palestinian people, including severe restrictions on freedom of movement of persons and goods throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, as well as to and from the outside world.

15. The Palestinian side was ready to resume a genuine peace process and undertake final status negotiations immediately towards an accelerated resolution of the prolonged conflict and the achievement of the peace and justice that Palestinians had long strived for. He said that Palestinians continued to view the European Union as a friend and as a key member of the Quartet, which had a very important role to play in the peace process and in providing support and assistance to the Palestinian people. Recent European ideas and proposals, including the call for an international peace conference and for dispatching United Nations forces to separate the Palestinian and Israeli sides and reduce tensions, were all constructive ideas that should be promoted.

16. The representative of Cuba, speaking in his capacity as the Chairman of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (NAM), said that there would be no just, peaceful and lasting solution to the question of Palestine unless it was based on the principle of territory for peace, including the establishment of an independent Palestinian State on all the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, coexisting in peace and security with Israel and the rest of the neighbours. Israel must immediately cease its aggression against the Palestinian civilian population and withdraw its troops without delay from the Gaza Strip to the positions occupied before June 2006. Israel must abide by its obligations and responsibilities under the Fourth Geneva Convention, and put an end to the illegitimate and illegal occupation of and practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including the construction of the separation wall aimed at confiscating and annexing Palestinian land and property and modifying the demographic and geographic character of the Palestinian Territory. Policy based on unilateral acts would never solve the conflict, and acts to create facts on the ground, including the construction of the wall and settlements, only contributed to exacerbating resentment and increasing distrust.

17. The Movement supported the peace process based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 425 (1978), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) and the principle of territory for peace. The peace process should immediately be revitalized. The current situation did not benefit anyone, including people in Israel, who suffered the consequences of their Government's policy. NAM reaffirmed the permanent responsibility of the United Nations, including the Security Council, for the question of Palestine. On 13 March 2007, NAM had sent a formal request to the Council that it send a mission to the Middle East, including Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Such a visit could contribute to improving the deteriorated credibility of the organ in the region, to demonstrating that it actually cared about the issue, and to creating the necessary conditions to re-launch the peace process. He reiterated the steadfast commitment of NAM to a just and peaceful solution to the conflict, and the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and sovereignty of an independent Palestinian State based on the borders previous to 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital. NAM would continue to support in all possible ways the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on all the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid Conference, the principle of territory for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map.

18. The representative of Tunisia expressed concern over events in the Occupied Palestinian Territory due to Israel's continued aggression against the Palestinian people, as well as its recent excavation work near the area of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Tunisia had always reiterated the Palestinian people's right to protect the Muslim holy sites and protested against Israel's attempts to Judaize those places. It expressed its active solidarity with the Palestinian people and believed in their legitimate cause and struggle to recover their rights, including the right to an independent State. The President of Tunisia appealed to the international community to make every effort to protect the Palestinian people. A supporter of the peace process and a believer in dialogue and negotiation, as well as international legitimacy, Tunisia called on

the international community, especially the Quartet and the Security Council, to shoulder its responsibility to secure peaceful settlement and bring about Israel's compliance with international law and regulations. Peace and security could not be achieved without Israel's full withdrawal from all the occupied Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan and parts of southern Lebanon, in accordance with international law.

19. The representative of Malaysia said that the international community's inability to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the single most important reason for the instability in the Middle East and disquiet in the Muslim world. Israel's continued occupation of Palestinian land and settlement construction, as well as the recent excavation near the Al-Aqsa Mosque, were not only direct violations of international law, but were also retrogressive steps to peace in the region. The international community must act impartially and with equal firmness on both sides to enforce the 1967 borders. Much of the resistance, militancy and terrorism in the Middle East would begin to subside if the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was resolved.

20. Malaysia called on the Security Council to urge Israel to return to the peace process and implement the Road Map. It believed that any initiative related to the peace process should involve Muslim representation, such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), to ensure a balanced, comprehensive and fair solution. As the Chair of the 10th OIC Summit, Malaysia called on the OIC member States to contribute financially to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people. On its part, Malaysia had contributed \$16 million to the Palestinian Authority to supplement its budgetary expenses.

21. The representative of the African Union said that the Union and its predecessor, the Organization of African Unity, had a long-standing interest in the Middle East, particularly in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The issue was a constant agenda item at various ministerial and summit meetings of the Union. The Executive Council of the African Union had adopted a number of resolutions on the question of Palestine at its session held in Addis Ababa on 25 and 26 January 2007, in which the Council had reiterated its continued and full support to and solidarity with the Palestinian people in their just and legitimate struggle under the leadership of the PLO, their sole and legitimate representative in the exercise of their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination, the right to return to their land and recover their properties, and the right to an independent State on their soil; reaffirmed its support for a peaceful solution of the conflict, in accordance with the principles of international law, Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map in order to establish an independent Palestinian State along the 1967 borders based on a two-State solution; called upon the United Nations to send a fact-finding investigation mission to collect data on Israeli practices; expressed its strong condemnation against the ongoing Israeli activities, such as the destruction of Palestinian infrastructure; called on the international community and the Quartet to continue the efforts to rescue the peace process; and urged the Israeli Government to put an end to its occupation of the Syrian Golan and all Arab territories in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

22. The representative of Saudi Arabia said that there was a need for serious dialogue among cultures and civilizations in order to build bridges of understanding and to achieve a proper level of coexistence. Islam had laid down foundations and principles of dialogue among religions and adherents emanating from four pillars: acceptance of differences and diversity; non-imposition of religion; cooperation in piety and devotedness; the prohibition of aggression and the confinement of war. Those principles were still valid and constituted a valuable background for future dialogue among the three religions. Jews, Christians and Muslims had lived together in total harmony until the process had become plagued with violence, chaos, occupation and terrorist activities that had taken many forms, including State terrorism, a practice directed at the Palestinian people. Defending international legitimacy was a tool to support establishing an expedient environment for dialogue and to embed the values of tolerance and peace. However, the continuation of the occupation of the Palestinian Territory, now in the fortieth year,

remained the main cause of the conflict. Therefore, there was a dire need to find a solution through negotiations that would lead to ending the occupation in accordance with international law and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) and other related United Nations resolutions.

23. Preserving the heritage and culture of peoples and the sanctity of their places stemmed from the conviction that safeguarding such assets was evidence of recognition that there were cultures and civilizations that must not be harmed. Such assets constituted sources of acquaintance and knowledge of cultures and civilizations. However, Israel, through a number of steps, aimed to eradicate and change the cultural and demographic character of occupied East Jerusalem. Saudi Arabia condemned all illegitimate Israeli acts that threatened the city, plunder its identity and conceal its Arab-Islamic character. It recalled the 16 Security Council resolutions declaring that those Israeli measures were void and had no legal effects. Saudi Arabia called on the international community to confront those provocative Israeli acts contrary to international legitimacy.

24. The representative of Brazil said that his country was fully committed to the creation of a free, democratic and economically viable Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security with Israel, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions. With a view to participating in the Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts in a more active way, as well as to stressing support to the creation of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State, the Brazilian Government had taken various initiatives since 2003, among which had been the appointment of an ambassador-at-large to the Middle East; the opening of a representative office in Ramallah; participation in the Stockholm conference on humanitarian support to the Occupied Palestinian Territory; and the willingness it had conveyed at the highest level to the parties directly involved to offer its collaboration to the resumption of the peace process, possibly through the establishment of a group of "Friends of the Quartet," in which Brazil was ready to take part.

25. The representative of Pakistan said that a comprehensive, just and lasting solution based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003), the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map was urgently needed. In the context of the increasing and multiple threats to peace and security in the Middle East, President Musharraf had recently visited several Islamic countries to consult their leaders on ways to address and overcome the threats arising from the Palestinian problem and issues over the Golan Heights, as well as the phenomena of violent resistance against injustices suffered by the Muslim world. A core group of Muslim countries had been constituted to evolve a comprehensive approach to the multiple crises besieging the Middle East and provide fresh impetus to resolving the long-standing Arab-Israeli conflict. The President had explained that new initiative to the leaders of Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the Syria Arab Republic, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Malaysia, Indonesia and the United Arab Emirates. It was to be hoped that a group of leading Muslim countries would soon meet at a high level to bring their collective weight to bear in favour of a just and fair solution to the Palestinian question and other problems afflicting the Middle East.

26. The representative of the Syrian Arab Republic said that Israeli occupying forces were flouting international law and regulations by confiscating lands, killing innocents, destroying infrastructure, expanding settlements and desecrating the holy places. Israel was acting in a barbaric way against democratically-elected lawmakers and refused to recognize members of the Palestinian national unity government. It was still continuing its practices under the pretext of self-defence and the war against international terrorism, while flouting United Nations resolutions, namely those calling on Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories. Israel was adamant in pursuing its policies aimed at imposing faits accomplis, and it was converting the West Bank and the Gaza Strip into two large prisons, where the necessary requirements for a dignified and decent life were non-existent. Israel was also imposing oppressive laws and policies against Syrian citizens in the occupied Golan. The Syrian Arab Republic was of the view that a just, comprehensive and lasting peace could still be achieved by compelling Israel

to implement Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 478 (1980), and reactivating the peace process.

27. The representative of Morocco said that King Mohammed VI, as the Chair of the Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, had repeatedly stressed the need to find a lasting solution to the Palestinian question that would allow the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, on the basis of international agreements, the Arab Peace Initiative and the principle of land for peace. Morocco stressed the importance of safeguarding the Islamic holy sites and ensuring that they were protected against the threats being posed by Israel.

28. The representative of the Holy See said that Pope Benedict XVI himself had recently addressed a letter to the Catholics living in the Middle East, in which he said, “In the present circumstances, marked little by light and too much by darkness, it is a cause of consolation and hope for me to know that the Christian communities in the Middle East, whose intense suffering I am well aware of, continue to be vital and active communities, resolute in bearing witness to their faith with their specific identity in the societies in which they are situated. They wish to contribute in a constructive manner to the urgent needs of their respective societies and the whole region.”

29. He said that in the letter, the Pope set out in concrete detail how the constructive contribution should take place: “Patient and humble dialogue, achieved through listening to each other and being intent upon understanding someone else’s situation, has already born positive results in many countries previously devastated by violence and revenge. A little more trust in the compassion of others, especially those suffering, cannot but bear efficacious results. ... I appeal to those who hold positions of responsibility in guiding events to cultivate that sensitivity, attentiveness and closeness which surpasses schemes and strategies so that they can build societies that are more peaceful and just, truly respectful of every human being.”

30. The representative of Italy said that it had been rightly stressed that the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict was at the core of tensions in the Middle East. It had become a symbol, if not a factor, of difficulties and tensions in the dialogue between cultures and civilizations, which were often exploited with different agendas in mind. As a European and Mediterranean country, Italy had put its heart in the search for peace in the Middle East and had been advocating for a long time the goal of two States living side by side in independence, dignity, security and prosperity.

31. A negotiated peace would take courage, vision and a readiness to compromise, but it must be possible when polls showed that that was what both peoples wanted. The efforts aimed at re-launching the peace process were at a critical juncture and there were new challenges, but there were also new opportunities. In order to move forward, it was important to give the peace efforts a credible political horizon beyond the short-time crisis management and humanitarian assistance, give both peoples a clear sense of benefits that peace would entail, and move from a process to a prospective agreement. While retaining the sequential and performance-based approach of the Road Map, the process could certainly be speeded up, aiming at a final status rather than temporary or provisional solutions. A phased and sequential approach could best be applied to implementation of a final status, rather than burdening the negotiating process with conditionality. A good example was the Northern Ireland peace process. Peace between Israelis and Palestinians would bring about an era of dialogue, reconciliation, mutual respect and cooperation that would benefit all peoples in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Italy stood ready to work towards that goal.

III. Plenary sessions

Plenary I

Peace in the Middle East: a key to the advancement of the dialogue between cultures and civilizations

32. **Sheikh Taysir Al-Tamimi**, Supreme Judge of Sharia Courts in Palestine and Head of the Supreme Council for Preserving Islamic Holy Sites, said that Islam was in favour of multi-religious belonging and believed in ethnic and religious diversity. Muslims believed in Islam as well as previous religions and messengers of God. Islam urged human beings to cooperate and engage in dialogue regardless of ethnic, religious or social origin. Muslims believed in the need for dialogue between civilizations and did not adopt the idea of a clash of civilizations. Those in the Palestinian Territory and the Islamic world at large were neither the enemies of Jews nor of Israel, for Islam called upon Muslims to live in cooperation with others. Islam was a religion of love and recognized other religions, and attaching criticism to Islam and associating it with terrorism was a mere reflection of someone trying to fabricate an enemy.

33. Sheikh Al-Tamimi said that Israel did not comply with the principles of peace. Although the Oslo peace accords had given three quarters of the land of historic Palestine to Israel, it had failed to adhere to the agreements. There were widespread violations of human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory as the whole world watched. The racial discrimination practiced by Israel against the Palestinian people was unprecedented. Israel had turned Palestinian villages and cities into large prisons, and the Palestinians could not move from one place to another without being subjected to humiliation and even killing. The construction of the separation wall had led to confiscation of large Palestinian areas and thus made it impossible for the Palestinians to realize their hope for an independent State. The wall had divided members of one family, and had separated teachers from their students and students from their schools.

34. In addition, Israel had carried out “civilizational massacres” in Jerusalem, the cradle of the three monotheistic religions, which should be the epitome of cooperation among them. Today the Palestinians, whether they were Muslims or Christians, had limited access to Jerusalem to go to the Al-Aqsa Mosque or the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Israel was trying to create a demographic unbalance in Jerusalem in favour of the Jewish residents: it was imposing higher taxes to Palestinian residents in the city, prohibited building new homes for Palestinians, and had created settlements within and around the city, separating it from the rest of Palestinian land. Muslims believed in plurality and diversity and did not negate the Israeli presence, but could not possibly accept the annihilation of the city’s Arab character. Israel had carried out excavations and dug a number of tunnels under the Al-Aqsa Mosque since 1967, threatening the stability of its foundation. The international community had done nothing to protect the city, which had been designated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a world heritage site.

35. **Fr. Giuseppe Marco Malagola**, delegation of Terra Santa in Rome, speaking on behalf of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, said that all the obstacles and obstructions that prevented a thoroughly free and sincere dialogue had to be gotten rid of. People had to purify their memories and be brave enough to forgive each other and admit and recognize mistakes. Otherwise, there was no hope for true peace in the future. In order to come to an agreement between various partners, it was necessary to achieve an honest and sincere will to talk because whenever a religion was capable of expressing its best, it must naturally tend towards dialogue.

36. Without the courage to talk openly with an enemy in the long run, it could lead to an ultimate refusal of reconciliation. One should think more realistically, look ahead and understand that it was with an enemy that he/she must work things out. One had to put aside the destructive theory that only the

strongest will prevailed. In the absence of justice and equity, dialogue was nothing but a farce. It must be insisted firmly that violence, from whatever side it came from, must cease. One should not feel bound to live in the never-ending conflict. It was time to ensure peace, all together and united around the same goal: building the State of Palestine living in peace and security with the State of Israel.

37. An inter-religious model of dialogue and reconciliation would be Francis of Assisi. The historical background of Francis of Assisi had been just the same as today – it was a time of crusades, conflicts, contrast of civilization between the East and the West. Francis of Assisi had carried out something quite courageous: he had travelled across the sea and gone to Egypt to meet the Chief of the Muslim army to talk about reconciliation. The Sultan, Malek el Kamel, had been so impressed by such a meek and defenceless friar that the two had started talking and become friends.

38. **Rabbi Chaim Cohen**, Member of the Board of Directors of Rabbis for Human Rights in Jerusalem, said that the first key to the advancement of the dialogue between cultures and civilizations could be found in the words of Rabbi Hillel in 32 BC, a revered sage in Jerusalem: “What is hateful to you, don’t do unto your neighbour.” The second key was to be open, honest, fair, truthful and trustworthy, and graceful to oneself and to each other. The third key was to commit oneself to a refusal to inflict injury on others, to non-violence and to a respect for all life. The Hebrew word for violence, Alimut, shared a common root with Elem, muteness. In the Jewish tradition, one of the causes of violence was that people did not have other outlets to give voice to their pain and frustration. When one did not have freedom of speech, one became silent and mute. When one was mute and silent, when no one seemed to listen to his/her pain, he/she sometimes found other outlets to express the pain to try to bring attention to his/her plight. And those outlets were all too often violent ones.

39. The fourth key to the advancement of the dialogue between cultures and civilizations was willingness for self-sacrifice. In Judaism, one should be willing to practice physical prudence and spiritual austerity. One should be willing to shoulder any sacrifice in the cause of true peace and morally equivalent justice. The fifth key was to undertake a “paradigm shift,” a shift in the way one perceived and defined the conflict. One must undertake a new and emerging way of looking at reality, and a new and emerging way to envision the future. Many old reality maps were no longer relevant. Reality maps were treasured so often that they served to perpetuate conflicts instead of resolving them. One was often stuck in seeing things as they had been, instead of envisioning things as they could be. One was all too often stuck in reality maps of what person of what faith community could live in which valley, and where to draw the line or build the barrier to divide, and often forgot that all shared the God given natural resources of the Holy Land, together as one.

40. **Bernard Sabella**, Member of the Palestinian Legislative Council and the representative of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, said that citing figures, highlighting unique sanctities and providing conflicting narrative histories of Jerusalem were really insistence that one’s narrative superseded others’ narratives. One of the principal challenges in today’s Jerusalem was not to prove property or to insist on ownership, but it was rather to acknowledge that property and ownership were not a hindrance to a joint vision of a shared Jerusalem where all religious communities and the two national groups felt that the city was theirs without infringing on the rights of others to the city. Certainly, the preservation and respect of the Status Quo of the Holy Places, free access to places of worship and the insurances of each of the communities’ national, religious and communal presence and heritage remained a high priority to all in Jerusalem.

41. While each of the three religious communities and each of the two national groups could elaborate their own particular religious and political visions, these visions should and must be complementary rather than separate and unrelated. No one could truly project a heavenly image of Jerusalem while the earthly Jerusalem continued to be embroiled in all sorts of inter-communal dissensions; political

divisions; majority and minority inequities and the carving out of Arab East Jerusalem out of its natural demographic, economic, social and geographic environment. The challenge at hand was how to reach a position of accepting the others' visions and narratives and how to use both respective unique histories and religions in order to reconstruct a city that was close to our respective ideals of the heavenly Jerusalem and that was not in contradiction with each other.

42. Mr. Sabella said that the argument that the barrier was there to provide security for the Israelis from suicide bombers and other acts of violence was one that did not approach the root causes of violence, nor was it amenable to agreeing that real security was not through separation and barrier building, but rather through extending genuine and sincere efforts at working towards a peaceful settlement of the conflict – a peaceful settlement that would ensure mutual recognition and acknowledgement of respective rights and that would highlight the mutual obligations to keep the peace of Jerusalem and of Palestine and Israel as well. Claims and counterclaims and all the measures taken to ensure their authenticity by creating facts, unearthing ground or constructing new shrines and settlements would not be able to ensure peace of the city. With no peace in the city, there would be no clear vision of a heavenly Jerusalem to any of the city's religious communities.

43. **Staffan de Mistura**, Director of the United Nations System Staff College in Turin, said that, rather than speak on behalf of a religion, he wished to speak on behalf of the ideal represented by the United Nations, which was the Alliance of Civilizations, a special initiative established by former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan and co-sponsored by Spain and Turkey. Under the initiative, Mr. Annan had established a High-Level Group of 20 eminent persons coming from different religions and backgrounds to generate a report analysing the rise of polarization and extremism and produce a set of recommendations to counter those phenomena. Of the two parts of which the report consisted, the first part was an analysis of the global context, whereby certain political steps were prerequisites to any substantial and lasting improvement in relations between Muslim and Western societies.

44. The second part of the report reflected the High-Level Group's view that the tense cultural differences had spread beyond the political level and reached the hearts and minds of the general population, and the High-level Group had presented recommendations to counter that problem in different thematic areas: education, youth, migration and the media. The High-Level Group had acknowledged that contemporary realities shifted the views of millions of peoples, and those realities were linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the violence in Afghanistan and the increasing violent conflict in Iraq. Regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the High-Level Group had indicated that achieving a just and sustainable solution required courage and a bold vision of the future on the part of Israelis, Palestinians and all countries capable of influencing the situation. The Group had also expressed its firm belief that progress rested on the recognition of both the Palestinian and Jewish national aspirations and on the establishment of two fully sovereign and independent States living side by side in peace and security. There was hence a need today, apart from praying together, for a reinvigorated multilateral peace process.

Plenary II

The role of parliaments in promoting dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians

45. **Richard Burden**, Member of the House of Commons of the United Kingdom, said that he chaired the Britain-Palestine All Party Parliamentary Group – a network of over 100 Members of the United Kingdom Parliament from different parties trying to promote a just peace between Israel and the Palestinian people. He was also a member of the International Development Committee (IDC) in the House of Commons, which monitored and tried to hold to account the United Kingdom Department for International Development, including United Kingdom aid and assistance programmes to the Palestinians.

The IDC had recently completed an inquiry into the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Not only had the findings of that report drawn attention to the devastating effect that the occupation continued to have on the lives of ordinary Palestinians, they had also drawn conclusions that fundamentally challenged the boycott of the Palestinian Authority by the United Kingdom, the European Union and the Quartet as being damaging from a development view point, and even counterproductive to achieving the stated aims of the international community.

46. Mr. Burden said he believed that national parliaments had a key role to play in upholding human rights and international law, whether that meant condemning suicide bombings in Israel, whether it meant opposing the illegal expansion of settlements or the expropriation of Palestinian territory to construct the separation wall, or whether it meant condemning abductions by either side – of Israeli soldiers or democratically elected members of the Palestinian Legislative Council. Parliamentarians needed to press their own governments to fulfil their responsibilities and to tell them where they were going wrong. Parliamentarians could be more effective in doing that if they successfully pooled information and coordinated activities across different parliaments and different institutions. Also, because parliamentarians were independent of governments, they could do more to help directly promote dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians in a way that governments themselves could not. They should highlight injustices, exposing double standards and opposing unfair preconditions to talks, be straight with their friends in the Middle East and encourage them to show the flexibility and courage to take the hard decisions that were necessary to bring the peace that both Israelis and Palestinians deserved.

47. **Shamil Sultanov**, Member of the Committee on International Affairs in the State Duma of the Russian Federation, said that he was pessimistic about the prospects for a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, not only because the Israeli-Palestinian relations were strained, but also taking into account the regional and global context. It was doubtful that there would be Israeli-Palestinian peace in the near future, and the need now was to concentrate on increasing support for the heroic Palestinian people.

48. Mr. Sultanov said that a special parliamentary group in the Duma, the Russian-Islamic World Strategic Dialogue, aimed to mobilize decision-making groups and public opinion based on the belief that the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people – the right to self-determination without external interference, the right to national independence and sovereignty, and the right to return to their homes and property – corresponded to the long-term strategic interest of Russia. He said that the Palestinian problem was a key question not only for the Arab countries, but for the whole Muslim world, and that relations with Muslim countries were increasingly important for Russia, as President Vladimir Putin had declared that the country was not only a Christian country, but also part of the Muslim world.

49. **Nadia Hilou**, Member of the Knesset (Labour – Meimad), said that until the early 1970s Arab Knesset members had been unable to make any sort of contribution to an Israeli-Palestinian dialogue because such a dialogue had not existed. Today, they were viewed by Palestinian brethren as potential facilitators of dialogue, and it was regrettable that the Israeli Government did not utilize their good offices to promote the peace process. The contribution the Knesset had made to dialogue over the years had depended not only on the general political atmosphere, but also on its speakers. For example, in July 1999, the Speaker of the Fifteenth Knesset, Avraham Burg, had invited the then Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council, Ahmed Qureia, to visit the Knesset. This had not been more than a gesture of symbolic value, but it had been important because it had sent out a message of good will. Mr. Burg had used every opportunity to encourage and participate in dialogues with Palestinian leaders, including such dialogues within the framework of the Inter-Parliamentary Union. This was an example that all Knesset speakers should follow.

50. Ms. Hilou said that informal dialogues were much more productive than formal ones, every word of which was recorded and reported by the media. The reason for the extraordinary breakthrough of the Oslo process had been that the talks had been held quietly without any outside interference. Under those circumstances, a real dialogue had taken place and real progress had been made. There was a major role that members of parliament could play in promoting peace and understanding by participating in such informal meetings. It was in such meetings that the true dialogue could take place, on the basis of which true peace could then be achieved by the respective leaders.

51. **Abdullah Abdullah**, Head of the Political Committee of the Palestinian Legislative Council, said that in 1986 the Inter-Parliamentary Union had adopted a resolution to form a committee concerned with convening an international peace conference on the Middle East. The committee had later developed to become the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly. He said that there was no doubt that the peace process was in stalemate. The major obstacle to the advancement of peace was the Israeli policy since the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin to destroy any chance of peace making in the region. If any Israeli Government was concerned about peace, it must stop any policy or practice that contradicted peacemaking, including confiscating land, expanding settlements, isolating the Palestinian Territory and cutting it into "Bantustans" aimed at obstructing the formation of a viable and contiguous Palestinian State. Also, there must be steps to pave the way for confidence-building measures. After so much separation resulting from war and bloodshed, there was a need to bridge divisions, which could be done only by not dehumanizing, demonizing and humiliating the Palestinian people. The West Bank, 20 per cent of which was occupied by illegal settlements, contained 545 checkpoints, in addition to "flying checkpoints." They were only meant to pressurize Palestinians psychologically, which was part of Israel's strategic policy aimed at transferring the Palestinians without the use of force.

52. Mr. Abdullah said that a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict required an end to the occupation of the Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. Israel, however, had taken no steps in that direction and instead was sending its soldiers daily into villages and refugee camps to destroy homes and carry out assassinations and abductions, while demanding that the Palestinians renounce violence. The Palestinians had succeeded in forming a national unity government, which adhered to all agreements signed by the previous governments and by the PLO. Israel, together with other countries, was saying that the unity government fell short of recognizing Israel, while Israel had prevented its President from addressing the Palestinian Legislative Council for fear of legitimizing the institution. The Palestinians were ready to recognize Israel or reiterate recognition if Israel recognized the Palestinians' right to a State of their own in the territory occupied in 1967. Israel claimed that the Palestinian side must respect previous agreements, while it ignored those agreements by not stopping settlement activities and by even expanding them.

53. **Ismail Vadi**, Member of the National Assembly of the Parliament of South Africa, said that in July 2001, the Assembly had dispatched a multi-party delegation on a fact-finding mission to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The delegation had published an extensive report on its findings and debated the matter in the House. Intermittently, Members of Parliament had passed motions on the growing crisis, made statements and held debates on the issue in both Houses of the Parliament. Many had participated in civil society initiatives and popular campaigns in support of the Palestinian people and against the war in the Middle East. The Portfolio and Select Committees on Foreign Affairs/International Relations had from time to time called in representatives of the Palestinian and Israeli embassies in South Africa to secure briefings on developments.

54. Both South Africa's Parliament and Government had hosted delegations of public representatives from Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory to share South Africa's own experiences of peaceful transition to a democratic social order. President Mbeki had hosted a "presidential retreat" in Cape Town in January 2002 for Israelis and Palestinians, joined by participants from the South African Parliament.

The informal environment was conducive to sharing experiences and exploring creatively how to support initiatives towards the creation of a favourable environment to restart peace negotiations, sharing the South African experience in negotiations, peacemaking and transition to democracy, and supporting and strengthening the peace camps on both sides. The points raised from the South African experience had been: the conflict could not be resolved through violence and military means; the maintenance of effective channels of communications at all times and under all circumstances was a vital requirement for the peace process; the legitimate representative of each side was a partner in the process and the peace camps on both sides needed to strengthen each other; there was a need to take into consideration the fears and concerns of the other side and to engage seriously with them; negotiations should not be approached from the perspective of a winner or a loser, and it was in each party's self-interest that its interlocutor was satisfied by any agreement reached; and the process should at no point be held hostage to extremists or their actions.

55. He said that parliaments and public representatives could more stringently oversee the actions of their own executives and insist on the forceful application and adherence to international humanitarian law, human rights norms and standards, and peace agreements between Israel and the Palestinians. Parliaments could also budget for humanitarian aid for victims of human rights abuses, forced occupation and refugees. They could insist that justice was administered in the event of war crimes and human rights abuses in the conflict. A parliament, as an expression of the national will and voice of a nation, could play a vital role in mobilizing public opinion on the need for a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, actively support initiatives in that regard in regional institutions and civil society, and promote awareness on aspects of international humanitarian law, international resolutions, peace agreements and human rights. Equally important was the role that parliamentarians could play in encouraging peace and dialogue among constituencies in their home countries as well as among the protagonists to the conflict.

56. **Ran Cohen**, Member of the Knesset (Meretz), said that when he had founded the Israeli New Left immediately after the 1967 war and called for a two-State solution, less than 1 per cent of Israel's Jewish population had supported it. Now more than 70 per cent of them and more than 70 per cent of Palestinians believed in a two-State solution, and there was therefore no reason to be pessimistic. A two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders and shared Jerusalem was the only way to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, since both sides had tried everything else, including destroying each other, without even coming close to a solution. The Palestine refugee problem must be solved as part of the peace agreement, without which there could be no solution to the conflict.

57. Mr. Cohen said that the occupation was damaging not only for Palestinians, but also for Israelis. It was impossible to occupy others, granting them only the bare minimum of civil rights, and remain democratic. At the same time, terrorism was damaging to both peoples. Terrorist acts had led to the effective end of the peace process and the weakening of the peace camp. It was important to reduce the power both of terrorism and of the occupation, and when that succeeded, movements from within could grow on both sides towards the promotion of the peace process. The international community, on the other hand, could provide assistance by helping Israeli and Palestinian parliamentarians to meet abroad for talks aimed at promoting peace efforts.

Plenary III **Restoring momentum to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process** **and forging a vision of a final settlement**

58. **Yair Hirschfeld**, Director-General of the Economic Cooperation Foundation and Senior Lecturer in the History of the Middle East at the University of Haifa, said that any Israeli Government trying to

negotiate with the Palestinian counterpart and come to a permanent status agreement needed the Palestinian side to fulfil all three Quartet conditions. There was no Israeli Government that could seriously negotiate peace when there was violence on the ground because there would be no internal legitimacy to move ahead and make the necessary steps to make peace possible. Also, there would be no two-State solution without the recognition of Israel's right to exist as an integral part of the structure of the Middle East.

59. Mr. Hirschfeld said that one of the ways out of the difficulties would be to combine the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative. If that was achieved, the legitimacy of the deal would be carried not only by President Abbas, but also by most of the Arab countries, if not all, and it would be easier for Israel to come to an agreement if it could sign it with all the Arab world at the outcome of the negotiations. He said that dialogue was about identifying a common goal and a possible outcome and taking care of the political needs of the other side to make it happen. The aim of his presentation was to say that the Israeli side would like to base a dialogue with the Palestinian side on an understanding that Palestinians wanted to make peace with Israel in accordance with the Arab peace plan and on a territorial agreement based on the borders of 4 June 1967. For that to be achieved, the Palestinian side had to understand what was needed by the Israeli side.

60. **Qais Abdel-Karim**, Member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, said that there was a need for political will on both sides to the conflict to start serious negotiations without any preconditions, which had caused the peace process to lose momentum. Israel must put an end to settlement activities and to the humiliation of Palestinians, but the Palestinian side had never set that as a precondition to start negotiations. Obviously, the Palestinian Authority was held accountable for the slight deviation from international agreements, but the same standard must also be applied to the Israeli side.

61. The Palestinian side was ready to listen to, and discuss at a negotiating table, the needs and aspirations of the Israeli side, including its security needs. However, it was never acceptable for Israel to say that Palestinians should forgo a 10-kilometre strip along the Jordan River or to accept the presence of military bases on the highest peaks of the West Bank for the sake of Israel's security, when it had a peace agreement with Jordan and when Iraq no longer presented a threat. Those bases were only part of an attempt to maintain Israeli hegemony over the Palestinians. Palestinians, who were subjected to oppression and intimidation, should not be required to forego their rights even before entering the negotiation room. If Israel believed, for example, that the question of Palestine refugees should be settled within a future Palestinian State, it could be considered as Israel's own view of the question, but the Palestinian people would commit themselves to international law and regulations, such as General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

62. **Staffan de Mistura**, Director of the United Nations System Staff College in Turin, said that the United Nations had been active in the region over the last 50 years. The United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process had been in the region since 1994, and in 1999, the Secretary-General had designated the Special Coordinator also as his Personal Representative to the Palestinian Authority. In 2006, the post of the Deputy Special Coordinator had been created, who also acted as the United Nations Coordinator for Humanitarian and Development Activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In addition, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) had been in the region for 60 years, providing services to more than 4.3 million Palestinians on the ground.

63. **Ziad Asali**, President of the American Task Force on Palestine, in Washington, D.C., stressed that Middle East policy in the United States was a bipartisan issue, and those who thought that policy would change with the departure of the present administration were missing a crucial point. It was a real possibility that, without reconciliation reached on the basis of a two-State solution, the national struggle

between Palestinians and Israelis would metamorphose into a religious war, pitting Muslims and Jews against each other with Christians siding with the Jews.

64. The challenge was to reconcile the two peoples in the same land, and the only possible and reasonable outcome was a two-State solution. Seventy per cent of people in the United States, as well as 70 per cent of American Jews, were in favour of the two-State solution, as were similar proportions among Palestinians and Israelis. However, that had never translated into political decision-making, and it was imperative to translate that majority into a political programme. The United States had for decades defined defending Israel as its national interest. With the looming threat of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its proxies in the area, there was an existential threat to Israel that had never existed before by the force of Palestinians alone. To face that threat, it was in the national interest of the United States to have a Palestinian State to put an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It equally was in the national interest of Israel, and that argument had to be advanced inside Israel. There was an unusual political landscape that had been created by the Iraq war, and that had made it possible for Arabs and Israelis to think of a new threat, the Islamic Republic of Iran. It was impossible to make any kind of coalition or alliance against the Islamic Republic of Iran without the question of Palestine being resolved.

65. The Road Map, though still existing on paper and being supported by the international community, was not enough to transform concepts of a two-State solution to mechanisms. It was possible to fashion a model for combining the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative into a viable mechanism. He disagreed with those claiming that it was possible for Israelis and Palestinians to negotiate alone, because the degree of the imbalance of power between the two was “scandalous.” It was the interest of several Arab countries to weigh in on the side of Palestinians in order to have an Arab-Israeli agreement, rather than a Palestinian-Israeli agreement. It was important to accept the obvious fact that people were divided on the issue, but it was the old paradigm to think that the issue was Israelis versus Palestinians. Rather, the issue was those for a two-State solution versus those against it, and each group contained Israelis and Palestinians, Jews and Arabs, Americans, Europeans, and all others. It was time to cross the religious, ethnic and racial barriers, and to establish a link of people all over the world who supported a two-State solution. It was no longer enough to blame the other side, which had been done repeatedly in the past. Important were real-life politics, which were about power.

66. **Luisa Morgantini**, Italian Member of the European Parliament, said that it was extremely important to show that so many Palestinians and Israelis outside their Governments were working together, including those who had lost their children to Palestinian suicide attacks or Israeli military operations, saying, “No to revenge and yes to recognition”. Those were the people who were giving hope of the possibility to make peace. While Israelis might fear riding a bus, Palestinians too, especially children, were scared of the soldiers they saw on the streets every day. The fear was reciprocal. The culture should be changed on both sides to one of recognition and understanding. One of the mistakes the international community had made was to take a hands-off approach to the peace process.

67. There was no such thing as military occupation that was humane and moral, and any military occupation destroyed not only the lives of people, but also the morality of the occupier and, sometimes, of the occupied. It was a crime for the Israeli military to kill innocent civilians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, as it was for the Palestinians terrorists to attack civilians inside Israel. The only possible way to bring about peace was to destroy the military mentality possessed by many on both sides. The international community was responsible for the lack of solution. It should have the courage to say that 40 years of occupation was enough, and it was capable of it. There was a special role that could be played by the European Union, which had been founded based on the principles of peace, justice and international legality.

IV. Closing session

68. **Riyad Mansour**, Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, expressed appreciation to the Italian Government and the Holy See, as well as their missions to the United Nations in New York, for the valuable contributions to the successful holding of the Meeting. He also expressed the hope that more European countries would work with the Committee as its members in order to advance the objective of Israeli-Palestinian peace. One of the purposes of the Meeting, held in a European city, had been to determine Europe's responsibility for advancing the peace process, which was a task not only for the Palestinians and Israelis.

69. It was not fair that the chief religious Palestinian Muslim leader had to seek permission to pray in Jerusalem, while former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon had been able to go to the Al-Aqsa Mosque accompanied by 3,000 soldiers. Jerusalem was not only for Palestinians or Israelis, but for everyone. It was not fair that the Palestinians, who lived under occupation, were alone responsible for keeping Jerusalem open or that the occupying Power dealt with Jerusalem unilaterally. The Vatican had enormous moral power. Europeans had great political, financial and moral power. There were many things that could be done by Europeans in order to ensure that Jerusalem would not continue to be surrounded by walls and settlements and to not allow attempts to eliminate the Arab and Christian characters of the city.

70. Europeans had written the Fourth Geneva Convention, which had been a great contribution to humanity. With the establishment of the Convention, the international community had come to an agreement on how countries engaged in war should behave. Europeans should not allow that very powerful human rights instrument be thrown into the garbage heap of history. Europeans were needed as a viable third party and could help just by saying that if Palestinians fired rockets to kill innocent Israeli civilians, they should be brought to account, and if the Israeli army killed Palestinian civilians, it should be brought to account. That was the only practical way to stop the cycle of accusations. Palestinians were willing to accept unconditionally any European proposal to devise a mechanism to ensure respect for the Fourth Geneva Convention.

71. **Paul Badji**, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, said that the Meeting had reaffirmed that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was one of the major causes of the rift between Muslim and Western societies. Therefore, as long as the conflict was not resolved in a just, dignified, comprehensive and sustainable manner, neither would peace and stability be brought to various corners of the world. Most importantly, without an end to the 40-year occupation, it would be impossible to settle the conflict. A workable and fair solution should be found, that should be firmly anchored in relevant United Nations resolutions and principles of international law.

72. The Committee reiterated the continuing importance of developing closer cooperation with parliaments and representatives of inter-parliamentary bodies in order to encourage a broad discourse within national parliaments and among all strata of society on ways of supporting peace in the Middle East. The Committee would continue to involve parliamentarians, including Knesset and Palestinian Legislative Council members, and representatives of inter-parliamentary organizations in international conferences and meetings organized under its auspices. The Meeting had reiterated the continuing importance of the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative, which should not be considered merely as political statements. The international community must strive for the realization of those initiatives, but the implementation depended mostly on the will and determination of the parties themselves. The United Nations should maintain a permanent responsibility for the question of Palestine until it was resolved in all its aspects. For its part, the Committee would continue to promote the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people through a wide scope of activities, including the holding of international meetings and conferences, in order to raise international awareness of the question of Palestine.

Annex I

FINAL DOCUMENT

1. The United Nations International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace was held at the headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization in Rome, on 22 and 23 March 2007, under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. Participants in the Meeting included international experts, representatives of Governments, Palestine, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations system entities, parliaments, civil society and the media.
2. The Meeting was convened by the Committee with a view to supporting and promoting international efforts aimed at achieving peace between Israelis and Palestinians, focusing the attention of the world community on the question of Palestine, and emphasizing the importance and urgency of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through ending the occupation, and the establishment of an independent State of Palestine based on the pre-1967 borders, living side by side with Israel in peace and security. In three plenary sessions, the participants discussed the significance of peace in the Middle East for the advancement of the dialogue between cultures and civilizations; the role of parliaments in promoting dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians; and the urgency of restoring momentum to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and forging a vision of a final settlement.
3. The Meeting was held at a time when the Mecca agreement and the resulting national unity government, having succeeded in moderating the internal Palestinian situation, raised hopes that the long-stalled peace process would soon resume. The participants welcomed the formation of a Palestinian government of national unity, and expressed the hope that this development would allow the international community to restore the much-needed economic and humanitarian assistance and help move the political process forward. Participants also expressed the view that the international community had an obligation to support the new Government without preconditions and lift the aid restrictions imposed on it. They called on the parties, regional actors and the Quartet to intensify efforts that would result in appreciable progress in the Middle East peace process. In that regard, the participants noted the emerging international consensus in favour of the political process addressing, without further delay, the permanent status issues, rather than provisional or interim arrangements.
4. The participants emphasized that the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict was a threat to international peace and security and was increasingly becoming a key symbol of a perceived rift between the Western and the Islamic societies. The participants further stressed that the lack of progress in Middle East peacemaking and, most notably, in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had exacerbated feelings of frustration and mutual mistrust that was fueling extremism on a local, regional and world scale. They also felt that it was often based on distorted interpretations of religious motives, aimed at transforming a political problem into a cultural and religious divide, and at disrupting the dialogue and interchange across cultures and civilizations. On a broader level, the participants emphasized that the voice and influence of religious leaders in efforts aimed at overcoming differences, misconceptions and misunderstandings between Western and Islamic societies was key to promoting the dialogue between cultures and civilizations. The participants were convinced that a solution to this conflict would greatly contribute to fostering such a dialogue.
5. The participants discussed in detail the important role played by national parliaments and inter-parliamentary organizations in promoting a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine. They viewed the experience and political influence of lawmakers and their organizations as instrumental in informing public opinion and setting policy guidelines, as well as in strengthening international law, democratic process and institution-building. They also encouraged new initiatives to

bring together Israeli and Palestinian parliamentarians. Participants called for the immediate and unconditional release of all Palestinian parliamentarians currently in Israeli prisons. As the participants saw the need for formulating a regional approach to resolving the question of Palestine, the role of regional organizations took a particular prominence. They supported the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the Barcelona process as important initiatives aimed at strengthening dialogue for peace and stability in the wider region.

6. The participants expressed the hope that the parties would overcome the remaining differences in their quest for a final settlement, and noted the firm basis for such a settlement provided by the relevant resolutions of the United Nations bodies, the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference of 1991 and its principles, the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative of the League of Arab States and the Road Map. The growing prominence of diverse international and regional actors and initiatives was discussed at length, with particular attention accorded to the role of Europe. The participants also supported calls for convening an international peace conference on the Middle East.

7. The participants reaffirmed the permanent responsibility of the United Nations with regard to the question of Palestine until it was resolved in all aspects in a satisfactory manner in accordance with international law and legitimacy.

Annex II

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Speakers

Mr. Abdullah Abdullah	Head of the Political Committee of the Palestinian Legislative Council, Ramallah
Mr. Ziad Asali	President, American Task Force on Palestine Washington, D.C.
Mr. Qais Abdel-Karim	Member of the Palestinian Legislative Council Ramallah
Sheikh Taysir Al-Tamimi	The Supreme Judge of Sharia Courts in Palestine Head of Supreme Council of Preserving Islamic Holy Sites
Mr. Richard Burden	Member of Parliament, House of Commons of the United Kingdom London
Rabbi Chaim A. Cohen	Member of the Board of Directors of Rabbis for Human Rights Jerusalem
Mr. Ran Cohen	Member of the Knesset (Meretz) Tel Aviv
Ms. Nadia Hilou	Member of the Knesset (Labour - Meimad) Tel Aviv
Mr. Yair Hirschfeld	Director-General of the Economic Cooperation Foundation, Senior Lecturer in the history of the Middle East, University of Haifa Fellow in Middle East Peace and Security, James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy, Rice University Houston, Texas
Fr. Giuseppe Marco Malagola	Delegation of Terra Santa in Rome
Mr. Staffan de Mistura	Director, United Nations System Staff College Turin
Ms. Luisa Morgantini	Italian Member of the European Parliament Brussels

Mr. Bernard Sabella	Member of the Palestinian Legislative Council Representative of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, representing His Beatitude Msgr. Michel Sabbah, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem
Mr. Shamil Sultanov	Member of the State Duma of the Russian Federation Member of the State Duma's Committee on International Affairs Moscow
Mr. Ismail Vadi	Member of the National Assembly of the Parliament of South Africa Cape Town

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

Mr. Paul Badji	Permanent Representative of Senegal to the United Nations Chairman of the Committee
Mr. Rodrigo Malmierca Díaz	Permanent Representative of Cuba to the United Nations Vice-Chairman of the Committee
Mr. Zahir Tanin	Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations Vice-Chairman of the Committee
Mr. Victor Camilleri	Permanent Representative of Malta to the United Nations Rapporteur of the Committee
Mr. Riyad Mansour	Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations Member

Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations

Mr. Sergei Ordzhonikidze	Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva
--------------------------	---

Governments

Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cape Verde, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Ecuador, El Salvador, Egypt, France, Greece, Guatemala, Honduras, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Lithuania, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Malta, Mexico, Morocco, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Viet Nam, Yemen

Non-member State having received a standing invitation to participate
as observer in the sessions and the work of the General Assembly
and maintaining permanent observer mission at Headquarters

Holy See

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

Intergovernmental organizations

African Union
European Community
League of Arab States
Organization of the Islamic Conference

Other entities having received a standing invitation to participate as observers in the sessions
and the work of the General Assembly and maintaining permanent offices at Headquarters

Sovereign Military Order of Malta

United Nations organs, agencies and bodies

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
 United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI)
 United Nations Office at Geneva
 United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
 World Food Programme (WFP)

Civil society organizations

ARCI – Social Promotion Association
 Associazione di Cooperazione des Sviluppo
 Associazione Federative Femminista Internazionali (AFFI)
 Associazione Nazionale Italia-Palestina
 Associazione per la Pace
 Boston Coalition for Palestinian Rights
 Centro Documentazione Pace
 Comunit à Palestinese – Roma
 Council for the Advancement of Arab-British Understanding (CAABU)
 Donne in Nero (Women in Black)
 European Coordination of Committees and Associations for Palestine
 Federazione delle Chiese Evangeliche in Italia
 Federazione Impiegati Operai Metallurgici (FIOM-CGIL)
 French Platform of NGOs for Palestine
 Giuristi Democratici (Italia)
 Irish Caritas (Trocaire)
 Israeli Committee against House Demolitions
 Italian Coordination of Local Authorities for Peace and Human Rights
 Medical Aid for Palestinians
 National Association of Muslim American Women (NAMAOW)
 No Chains ONLUS
 Nord-Sud XXI
 Palestinian Businesswomen's Association
 Palestine Return Centre
 Partito della Rifondazione Comunista
 Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
 Prospettive Mediterranee
 Rete "Ebrei contro l'occupazione"
 US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation

Media

AG Area
Agencia EFE
Agenzia La Presse
AGI
Al Arabiya
Associated Press
ANSA Eco-Energia
Emblema
News Press in Blue
Il Velino
La Tribune de Genève
Liberazione
Rome Reports TV News
Mediaset TG5
Radio Vaticana
Reuters
Rinascita
WAFA – Roma
