



General Assembly

A/68/PV.66
12 December 2013

General Assembly

Sixty-eighth session

66th plenary meeting

Thursday, 12 December 2013, 3 p.m.

New York

President : Mr. Ashe.....

(Antigua and Barbuda)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda items 70 and 71

/...

(b) Assistance to the Palestinian people

Report of the Secretary-General ([A/68/76](#))

Draft resolution (A/68/L.22)

/...

The President : I now call on the representative of Lithuania to introduce draft resolutions A/68/L.22 and A/68/L.24.

Ms. Murmokaitė (Lithuania): It is my pleasure to introduce draft resolution [A/68/L.22](#), entitled “Assistance to the Palestinian people”, submitted by the 28 members of the European Union. The draft resolution was shared with Member States generally. As in previous years, the European Union expects the draft resolution to be adopted by consensus.

The European Union reaffirms its commitment to providing assistance to the Palestinian people. Sustained support from international donors is essential in order to assist the Palestinian State-building efforts, strengthen the Palestinian economy and meet the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people. Today’s draft resolution on assistance to the Palestinian people embodies the wish of the European Union and the international community as a whole to help them.

The draft resolution has several provisions. First, it stresses the importance of the work done by the United Nations and its agencies, notably in providing humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people. Secondly, it urges all international actors to provide economic and social assistance to the Palestinians. Thirdly, it also urges Member States to open their markets to exports of Palestinian products on the most favourable terms. Fourthly, it stresses two points, namely, the importance of the work carried out by the humanitarian personnel and organizations in providing assistance to the Palestinian people, and the importance of free humanitarian access to the Palestinian people.

The European Union thanks the delegations that requested to be included in the list of sponsors of the draft text.

/...

The President : I now give the floor to the observer of the Observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): We meet today to consider the issue of strengthening the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance, including assistance to the Palestinian people, who have suffered many decades of occupation and denial of the exercise of their inalienable rights. The international community has determined that assistance to the Palestinian people is its collective responsibility and a vital element of the efforts to achieve peace and stability in the region.

On behalf of the State of Palestine and the Palestinian people, I express our profound gratitude and appreciation to all peoples, Governments and international organizations that have provided financial support and other assistance through concrete programmes and projects providing significant development support to the Palestinian people. Such support also fosters the people’s resilience in adverse circumstances, providing hope and assurance that they are not alone and that the

world supports them in their quest for a brighter future for their children.

Regrettably, however, the will and efforts of the international community are being undermined by obstacles raised by Israel's ongoing occupation of Palestinian land, including in East Jerusalem, making the achievement of economic stability and sustainable development in occupied Palestine ever more elusive.

Since 1967, the Palestinian economy has been constrained and held hostage by the occupying Power, which has deliberately and continuously denied the Palestinian people access to resources and capacities. The situation has led to the harsh living conditions and ongoing injustice of the occupation under which the Palestinian people have suffered for over 46 years. At the same time, the international community has remained helpless vis-à-vis Israel, which considers itself to be above the law and continues to violate international law, the Charter of the United Nations and countless resolutions with impunity.

Those violations include, inter alia, the targeting, killing and injuring of Palestinian citizens; the arbitrary detention and imprisonment of thousands of Palestinian civilians, including children; the confiscation of lands; the destruction of infrastructure and property, including agricultural land and water wells; the demolition of homes; severe restrictions on the movement of persons and goods; the exploitation of our natural resources; the denial of access of Palestinians to 40 per cent of the lands of the West Bank and 82 per cent of the groundwater. All of this has undermined the Palestinian economy and prospects for reconstruction and development.

I stress that such illegal Israeli policies and practices are not random; rather, they are part and parcel of a systematic and deliberate colonial policy to ensure control over land and natural resources after the forced displacement of the Palestinian population from their cities, towns and villages. We are now witnessing an intensification of those policies and practices, including the confiscation of ever-greater areas of land to build illegal settlements and the construction of the apartheid annexation wall, particularly in occupied East Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley, which constitutes the largest agricultural area in Palestine.

Despite all of the obstructions and constraints, we have worked over the past decades in earnest and with dedication, hand in hand with the international community, to develop our national institutions, which now function as State institutions, as has been certified by all concerned. We have formulated policies based on modern scientific fundamentals, leading to significant achievements in various economic and social sectors, in implementation of our national plan for reform and development. Such achievements have been made possible in large part by significant international assistance and the will of the Palestinian people, who continue to strive for freedom, independence and a life of dignity, as do all the peoples of the world.

Today, our joint effort is facing a difficult challenge that truly threatens the accomplishments made so far. According to the recent report of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development regarding the economic development of the occupied Palestinian Territory, gross domestic product (GDP) decreased by 6 per cent, after rising by 10 per cent in the years 2010 and 2011. The unemployment rate has climbed sharply to 28 per cent, resulting in an increase in the poverty rate. The structural problems generated by economic development have been exacerbated by the multiple severe restrictions imposed by Israel on the movement of persons and goods and on access to and the confiscation of land for the purpose of the construction and expansion of Israeli settlements, which has intensified in the past few months.

The number of settlers illegally transferred by the occupying Power to the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, has increased to over 540,000 living in 150 settlements and in more than 100 settlement outposts. The number of Israeli military checkpoints and other obstacles to movement rose to 540, leading to the isolation of Palestinians in numerous Bantustans, their separation from domestic and international markets, and the deepening inability of Palestinian producers to access production materials.

The industrial sector also suffers from the soaring cost of land arising from the artificial shortages created by Israeli practices that prevent any access by Palestinians to over 65 per cent of the land of the West Bank and deprive them of necessary infrastructure, thereby limiting the competitiveness of the industrial sector. Additionally, Israel continues to deny Palestinian farmers access to more than 35 per cent of the area of the Gaza Strip.

The difficulties faced by the Palestinian telecommunications and information technology sector is yet another example of the Israeli occupation's impact on the Palestinian economy. They prevent Palestinian mobile-phone companies from building transmission towers in more than 65 per cent of the occupied Palestinian territory, forcing them to contract with Israeli companies, which leads to inflation and undermines the ability of the Palestinian companies to compete.

Israel, the occupying Power, also continues its illegal and inhumane blockade of the Gaza Strip, preventing the normal and free movement of persons and goods, including the obstruction of imports and the near-total obstruction of exports. The Gaza Strip's share of the Palestinian economy has decreased to 25 per cent and its GDP has fallen by up to 40 per cent. Israel also continues to prevent Palestinian fishermen from accessing over 85 per cent of their fishing waters, which has aggravated living conditions in Gaza, where more than 44 per cent of the population suffers from food insecurity. In addition, the Israeli blockade continues to obstruct the implementation of the necessary infrastructure and water and sanitation projects. This not only undermines development efforts, but also leads to the creation of a catastrophic reality on the ground and aggravates the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip.

The high rates of poverty and unemployment, especially among young people, put the Palestinian Government in the awkward situation of facing new financial difficulties as a result of the growing and inevitable need for Government employment and social spending. As a result of the deepening poverty, at least 1.5 million Palestinians face food insecurity, with serious potential health consequences and other socioeconomic effects. According to 2013 figures from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, the poverty rate would have been 18 per cent higher than the announced rate of 26 per cent were it not for the social assistance provided by the Palestinian Government to the poorest segments of our population.

In addition to those challenges, there is the current crisis of the accumulation of Government debt to the private sector, which amounts to \$570 million. This is compounding the crisis in the private sector, which is already being stifled by Israeli practices and the subsequent and growing inability to create job opportunities. The ultimate result is a gap in financing for the general budget amounting to \$700 million in 2013. Furthermore, aid flows are declining and signs of instability are on the rise at the political and economic levels. In the light of the situation under the ongoing Israeli occupation, international assistance to the Palestinian people is absolutely necessary to halt the deterioration of the economic and living conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory.

We reiterate our gratitude to all the donors and countries that continue to extend generous support to the State of Palestine in the education, health, agriculture, industry and other sectors, and to the many United Nations programmes lending vital support to our people, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which continues to provide essential assistance to Palestinian refugees. In that regard, we emphasize the importance of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, which was signed in August 2013, in coordinating and enhancing development support to the Palestinian people and strengthening institutional capacity in line with Palestinian national priorities. Moreover, we reiterate our appreciation for the efforts of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians to ensure and coordinate necessary support to Palestine, and we recognize all other regional and international mechanisms in that regard.

We stress that reductions in assistance would directly and detrimentally affect the living conditions of the Palestinian people, and that such assistance will remain insufficient as long as Israel's occupation and violations persist. They create a threshold that such assistance will never be able to surmount. The only remedy for all this is to end the Israeli occupation and colonial settlement scheme and to enable the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights, including their rights to self-determination, freedom, independence and genuine sovereignty over the entire territory of the State of Palestine occupied since 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Allow me to conclude with the words of the late former President of the Republic of South Africa, Nelson Mandela. You, Mr. President, and the Secretary-General represented all of us at his memorial service a few days ago. On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on 4 December 1997, Mandela, the symbol of international freedom and struggle, said: *(spoke in English)* "The United Nations took a strong stand against apartheid and, over the years, an international consensus was built, which helped to bring an end to this iniquitous system. But we know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians."

/...

Mr. Maksimych (Russian Federation) *(spoke in Russian)*: ...

/...

Russia has traditionally been an active participant in global efforts in the area of humanitarian assistance to afflicted countries, and we have continued to increase our contribution to international efforts to mitigate the impact of humanitarian disasters and catastrophes. In 2013 our country provided humanitarian aid and assistance amounting to about \$45 million, both on a bilateral basis and within the framework of United Nations emergency relief appeals, to countries such as Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Somalia, Syria and the Philippines, as well as to the Palestinian Authority and others.

/...

Mr. Roet (Israel): ...

/...

... Farmers in Senegal, India and China, young women in South Sudan, cardiac patients in Gaza and Iraq have all received vital assistance from Israeli specialists.

/...

The greatest hurdle to humanitarian goodwill is the politicization of relief efforts, and unfortunately that is particularly true in the Middle East. It is regrettable that one delegation today chose to ignore the growing needs around the world and instead focus on political accusations against my country. Contrary to what we heard earlier and to what has been said in other United Nations forums, Israel has a genuine interest in the well-being of its neighbours. Every month, trucks carrying hundreds of thousands of tons of goods — including food, medical equipment and construction materials — pass from Israel into the Gaza Strip. Last week alone, 1,052 trucks carrying over 22,000 tons of goods entered Gaza. As we speak, as of today Israel is notifying United Nations relief organizations of special procedures put in place to urgently facilitate the transportation of humanitarian aid, and in particular cooking gas, into the Gaza Strip to help those affected by recent flooding in the area.

Yet, in exchange for goods and goodwill, Israel is repaid with rockets and terror tunnels. Not long ago, the Israel Defense Forces discovered a 2-kilometre tunnel originating in Gaza and ending just outside an Israeli community. The tunnel was built by Hamas using 500 tons of cement. We can just imagine the number of schools, hospitals and homes that could have been built and the tangible benefits that were sacrificed in the pursuit of hostility.

Unfortunately, it has become clear that those who oppose peace have identified a win-win strategy. First, they victimize Israel by attacking on all fronts. Then, when necessary security measures are taken, they play the victim by crying out about a lack of humanitarian aid. Israel, however, is committed to making peace with the Palestinians. For this reason, we are seriously and genuinely engaged in peace talks, and recognize that any meaningful resolution requires both sides to make painful concessions.

It may be snowing in Israel today, but that is no excuse to freeze time in this Hall. The international community must resist the temptation to overlook Israel's humanitarian relief efforts. It is time to stop pointing fingers and laying blame only at Israel's doorstep.

Earlier, we heard a defeatist attitude in this Hall, telling us of a ceiling of development for Palestinians. There is no such ceiling. There is no ceiling to ability. There is no ceiling to entrepreneurship. There is no ceiling to assisting your own people. It seems that there is only a ceiling to courageous action and leadership. While ending the Palestinian-Israeli conflict will surely play a major part in improving the lives of Palestinians and Israelis alike, it is also time to ask the Palestinians to be accountable for their actions and to promote a culture of education for peace.

The State of Israel recognizes that making peace requires courage. It is time for courageous Palestinian leaders to build their people up instead of tearing Israel down. It is time for the Palestinian leadership to stand up and take responsibility. John F. Kennedy once said that there are risks and costs to action, but they are far less than the long-range risks of comfortable inaction.

I would like to conclude by paying tribute to all the humanitarian workers and United Nations personnel who lost their lives in the service of those in need. Let us always be inspired by their compassion, dedication and kindness, and may their memory remain a blessing.

/...

Mr. Haniff (Malaysia): ...

/...

Mr. Tommo Monthe (Cameroon), Vice-President, took the Chair.

/...

Let me now turn to the report of the Secretary-General on assistance to the Palestinian people (A/68/76). I wish to reaffirm Malaysia's commitment to providing assistance to the Palestinian people to meet their needs. Malaysia reiterates its support for the important work done by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in assisting the Palestinian people in the occupied territories. The regular budget of UNRWA is crucial in order to enable the Agency to implement its activities effectively.

Malaysia is concerned about the reported budget shortfall of \$353.3 million, as that alarming financial situation has adversely affected the Agency's ability to carry out its tasks in its various fields of operations, especially in the areas of education, health, social services, youth engagement, microfinance, and infrastructure and camp improvement for 5 million Palestinian refugees. Malaysia supports the continuous efforts of the Agency to mobilize contributions from the international community. In that regard, my delegation notes that UNRWA continues to examine closely its programmes, priorities and needs, and to explore further options to widen the donor base. Concerned that the level of response has stagnated, Malaysia appeals to Member States to continue to support the work of UNRWA by enhancing their contributions to the Agency, as it is crucial to the well-being of the Palestinian refugees.

Malaysia has been a strong supporter of the Palestinian cause, and in that regard we have continuously supported the work of UNRWA. My delegation is pleased with the excellent relations between the Government of Malaysia and UNRWA. We warmly welcomed the visit of the Commissioner-General to Malaysia in September, which was a testament to the fact that Malaysia and UNRWA share the common goal of upholding the welfare of Palestinian refugees. In 2012, Malaysia contributed \$1.2 million to UNRWA in response to the Agency's appeal. This year, we are pleased to pledge a contribution of \$250,000 to UNRWA to assist the Agency in helping the Palestinian refugees affected by the dire situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. Malaysia believes in the continuous efforts of the United Nations towards the realization of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

/...

Ms. Alsaleh (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank you, Sir, for giving me the floor in exercise of our right to reply to the contents of the statement by the representative of the occupying Power, Israel.

The representative of Israel should not forget that he represents an occupying Power that has occupied the land of another people and that has perpetrated the worst forms of terrorism and oppression against that very people, as attested by the fact that the United Nations adopts dozens of resolutions every year condemning that occupation and those practices. Before speaking of the humanitarian situation in this or that country, the representatives of Israel should educate themselves a little about the extent of the crimes they have perpetrated for so many years against the Palestinians, Syrians and Lebanese.

The reference by the representative of the occupying Power to the assistance provided by Israel to the Syrian people is a pack of lies devoid of any truth, except for the fact that Israel has furnished medical and non-medical assistance to members of terrorist groups that are targeting Syria from the separation zone in the Syrian occupied Golan. Worse yet, after providing treatment and other forms of succour to terrorists, Israel has returned them to Syrian territories through the separation zone in the Golan. Such actions pose a threat to the international forces in the Golan area and represent a violation of the Disengagement Agreement, since the terrorists are thereby able to continue perpetrating their crimes and killing Syrians on Syrian land.

It would have been more appropriate for the representative of Israel, and indeed for Israel itself, to cease all forms of aggression and terrorism in occupied Arab lands before expressing such concern and horror about what is taking place in the world.

/...

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-506. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.