



DIVISION FOR
PALESTINIAN RIGHTS

**UNITED NATIONS MEETING OF CIVIL SOCIETY
IN SUPPORT OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE**

**United Nations Office at Vienna
26 March 2010**

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I. Introduction

1. The United Nations Meeting of Civil Society in Support of the Palestinian People was held at the United Nations Office at Vienna on 26 March 2010 under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolutions 64/16 and 64/17. The meeting immediately followed the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People that was held at the same venue on 24 and 25 March 2010.
2. The Committee was represented by a delegation comprising Zahir Tanin (Afghanistan), Head of the Committee Delegation and Vice-Chairman of the Committee; Pedro Núñez Mosquera (Cuba), Vice-Chairman of the Committee; Saviour F. Borg (Malta), Rapporteur of the Committee; Minas Hadjimichael (Cyprus); and Riyad Mansour (Palestine).
3. The meeting was opened by the Head of the Committee Delegation. The morning session of the meeting was chaired by Fritz Edlinger, Secretary-General of the Society for Austro-Arab Relations, and the afternoon session by Hans Koechler, President of the International Progress Organization. The presentations by experts focused on the following themes: “Civil society actions against the separation wall in the Occupied West Bank” and “The importance of upholding international law, including with respect to the International Court of Justice’s advisory opinion regarding the wall.”
4. Presentations were made by eight experts from different regions, including Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The meeting was attended by representatives of 21 civil society organizations from different regions of the world.

II. Opening remarks

5. **Zahir Tanin**, Head of the Committee Delegation and Vice-Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, said that the Committee continued to carry out its programme of cooperation with civil society by providing venues and opportunities for organizations and individuals to exchange views and broaden their international networks in support of the Palestinian people. He commended civil society organizations for their efforts to uphold international legitimacy with respect to the question of Palestine through advocacy and by mobilizing public opinion, and for their initiatives aimed at alleviating the plight of the Palestinian people. He encouraged civil society organizations to broaden their base by involving trade unions and other large organizations, and to harmonize their advocacy efforts at the local, national, regional and international levels.

6. He noted that civil society groups were playing a leading role in highlighting to the world how the separation wall was tearing the fabric of Palestinian life. Last month, more than a thousand Palestinian, Israeli and international activists had come together in the Palestinian village of Bil'in to mark five years of popular struggle against the wall and activists were continuing their protests against the wall despite serious risks. The Committee had been following the arrests and detentions of members of such groups as the Bil'in Popular Committee and the Stop the Wall Campaign. "We are humbled by what members of civil society are sacrificing personally in order to fight against a great injustice," he said.

7. Mr. Tanin said the Committee had denounced the continuing construction of the wall, and noted that more than five years after the International Court of Justice had issued its advisory opinion confirming the illegality of the wall's construction on Palestinian land, that ruling remained unheeded. The advisory provided all international actors, including civil society organizations, with a powerful tool with which to pursue peace efforts at all levels and strengthen the movement in support of a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine.

III. Panel discussions

8. **Fritz Edlinger**, Secretary-General of the Society for Austro-Arab Relations in Vienna, moderated the first panel discussion entitled "Civil society actions against the separation wall in the Occupied West Bank". Sub-themes included an update on the situation with regard to the wall's construction; the role of civil society in raising public awareness about its effects on the Occupied Palestinian Territory; and current civil society activities.

9. The discussion opened with a screening of *Walled Horizons*, a documentary prepared to mark five years since the issuance of the International Court of Justice's advisory opinion regarding the wall. The film was narrated by Roger Waters, a founding member of Pink Floyd and famous for the song "The Wall." The film depicted the damaging impact of the separation wall on both rural and urban Palestinians. It featured Palestinians affected by the wall, as well as interviews with Israeli security officials responsible for planning its route.

10. **Ray Dolphin**, Humanitarian Affairs Officer, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Jerusalem, said that, since its inception, the wall had had four official routes. He noted that, in 2003, the route had incorporated more Palestinian land under Israeli control than the current one, adding that the original plan had also envisaged a wall down the Jordan Valley, which had been dropped later on. In 2004, the wall had travelled dramatically into the southern West Bank, and in 2005, it had followed the Green Line in the Hebron area. He noted that a large area around Jerusalem had been affected by the wall, cutting the city off from the West Bank.

11. He said that the current route, approved in 2006, was about 60 per cent complete, with around 10 per cent under construction. About 9.5 per cent of the West Bank would be effectively annexed to Israel, and although officials claimed that the route was not political, it took in the major settlement blocks in the West Bank, which Israel had said it wished to keep. Palestinian communities closely connected to Jerusalem had been physically separated from the city, he said, adding that the six hospitals designated for the West Bank and located in East Jerusalem were now cut off from people who needed them. Muslims and Christians were also cut off from their places of worship in East Jerusalem, he noted.

12. The wall would isolate most of the agricultural land in Bethlehem, Mr. Dolphin continued. About 10,000 Palestinians living in closed communities between the wall and the Green Line were required to have permanent residence permits just to live on their own land. Recalling that the land between the Green Line and the wall had been declared as closed military zones, or “seam zones”, he said that in order to reach their farmland, farmers now had to obtain permits to pass through gates or checkpoints. Only 20 per cent of the farmers in 52 villages of the northern West Bank, or 3 per cent of the population, were getting permits to access their land, with the result that those communities were no longer agricultural. That had a major impact on livelihoods, he stressed, pointing out that of the 10 checkpoints and 62 gates designated for farmers, only 11 gates were open on a daily basis. Since access was increasingly denied, farmers were now refusing to apply for permits, he said. Noting the wall’s devastating impact on hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, farmers in particular, he emphasized that the wall should be dismantled and reparations paid.

13. Following Mr. Dolphin’s presentation, participants then watched a screening of *Refuse to Die in Silence*, produced by Shai Carmeli Pollak, which included scenes from another movie, *Bil’in Habibti*. It portrayed the creative and non-violent struggle of the people of Bil’in against the construction of the wall. It also showed reactions of the Israel Defense Forces to the demonstrations, with one demonstrator being shot and killed at the end of the documentary.

14. **Mohammed A.M. Khatib**, Coordinator, Bil’in Popular Committee against the Wall, said the present situation was no longer acceptable and the local community had taken the initiative to resist. Each Friday, in the West Bank village of Bil’in and other places, demonstrators came together because “we cannot wait for the occupation to become stronger,” he said, adding that the demonstrations were non-violent, as only non-violent resistance could draw the necessary attention. Israelis and people from other countries had joined them, he noted, pointing out that the resistance was, after all, not against the Israelis as a people but against the occupation.

15. Emphasizing that he had always lived under the occupation, he said he did not know the meaning of life without it, but did not want his own children to live the same way. He noted that the struggle, which had started locally, was now more organized, with a coordination committee for non-violent resistance having been established to offer

legal support, media advice and advocacy. Now that the resistance movement had become more effective, Israel was trying to break it through increased violence and arrests.

16. **Jonathan Pollak**, Media Coordinator, Popular Struggle Coordination Committee, Tel Aviv, noted that significant elements of Palestinian civil society were choosing daily to carry out a grass roots resistance and unarmed confrontation against the occupiers, describing the situation as a David versus Goliath one. Saying that the international media had recently begun referring to the coordinated peace efforts as “the white intifada,” he added that, because the Israel Defense Forces spoke only the language of violence, the white intifada had become stained with the blood of demonstrators.

17. In recent months, the Israeli authorities had launched a concerted and politically motivated assault on the Palestinian popular movement, with hundreds of arrests and ever increasing violence on the ground, he said. In that context, he noted that Bil'in had been declared a closed military zone every Friday for half a year. He also noted that the previous speaker, Mohammed A.M. Khatib, had been arrested in the middle of the night for incitement and rock-throwing, charges based on falsified evidence. Many others had been jailed based on evidence from so-called witnesses, who had been intimidated during interrogation.

18. Mr. Pollak spoke of the resistance movement's use of the media, as a strategy for making the occupation unmanageable, and he provided accounts of exposing the occupation's lies. For example, when Israeli soldiers had recently shot two teenagers in the village of Iraq Burin, the Israel Defense Forces publicly claimed that the two had been “lawfully” shot with rubber bullets. The resistance movement, however, had presented X-rays to the media, proving the use of live ammunition. With the media as a witness, the resistance was also able to expose the Israel Defense Forces as violent and ridiculous, as they viciously cracked down on unarmed demonstrators.

19. **Said Yaqin Dawoud**, Coordinator, Palestinian National Committee against the Wall, and Lecturer at Al-Quds Open University, Jerusalem, paid tribute to Rachel Corrie, the American student who had been killed in Gaza in 2003 after placing herself in front of a bulldozer to prevent the destruction of a house. There were still many good people who stood up to the occupation, he said, welcoming the fact that some Israelis were standing with the demonstrators in Bil'in. He also thanked European and other countries that had protested against the ethnic cleansing underway in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

20. He said that the occupation forces were now engaging in the crime of destroying villages, in a massive campaign of settlement construction aimed at creating a fait accompli and preventing the emergence of an independent Palestinian State.

21. He called the separation wall an “apartheid wall,” saying that it had arisen from the Israeli policy of establishing a purely Jewish State free of Arabs. More than 500 Palestinian villages had been destroyed in 1948, he said. He also noted that large parts of

the West Bank's Area C, which produced food and absorbed 70 per cent of the work force, was now behind the wall, a fact that he called "a strategic death for the West Bank and the future Palestinian State."

22. The second panel discussion had as its theme "The importance of upholding international law, including with respect to the International Court of Justice's advisory opinion regarding the wall," and was moderated by **Hans Koechler**, President of the International Progress Organization in Vienna. Its sub-themes included "Political and legislative advocacy -- reaching decision-makers and politicians," and "Participation in international campaigns against the wall."

23. Mr. Koechler said the big problem, as far as international law was concerned, was the gap between legal norms and the situation on the ground. The norms were clear, as confirmed by the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. The basic elements of that opinion were that: the construction of the wall was contrary to international law; Israel was obligated to terminate that construction, dismantle it and repeal all legislative acts relating to it; Israel was under obligation to pay reparations for all damage caused by the wall; all States were under the obligation not to recognize any consequences of the wall's construction, and not to aid such construction; and the United Nations should consider what further action was required to end the construction. It was therefore appropriate for the United Nations to organize meetings such as the present one, he said.

24. Implementation of the law was, unfortunately, left to international politics because international law was not self-enforcing, he continued. Only two avenues were open in terms of enforcement: compulsory measures under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, which were impossible to use as long as one permanent member of the Security Council cast a negative vote; and economic and other measures against Israel by those States that had ratified the Geneva Conventions. He said the realistic action was to exercise political pressure, which was the predicament in which the United Nations and the international community found themselves. It was therefore appropriate for civil society to step in, especially in countries that were permanent members of the Security Council, he said.

25. **Wesam Ahmad**, Advocacy Officer, Al-Haq—Law in the Service of Man, Ramallah, noted that, in 1967 already, Israeli officials had been urging the emigration of Arabs and working towards increasing the Jewish population in East Jerusalem. The separation wall was thus only one aspect of a long-standing Israeli plan. To counter the claim that the wall was being built for security reasons, he showed videos of Palestinians easily climbing over the barrier, and stressed that the wall's true purpose was the annexation of territory, transfer of the Palestinian population and demographic manipulation. Through additional video footage, he showed how the wall impacted the daily life of one family, one village and East Jerusalem as a whole, describing the clips as examples of passive forcible transfer -- creating a situation that forced people to leave, which was prohibited under the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

26. Emphasizing that Palestinians must ensure that their rights were not subject to negotiation, he noted that they did not turn to the Israeli judicial system as they saw it as one of the pillars of the occupation. Another avenue of action was to challenge third States and private corporations over their relations with Israel. Counterproductive actions, on the other hand, included permitting Israel to join the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) or holding a Union of European Football Association (UEFA) meeting in Tel Aviv. Those recent actions suggested to the Israeli people that life was normal, he said.

27. **Phil Shiner**, Supervisor, Public Interest Lawyers, United Kingdom, said the advisory opinion was “extremely helpful” as it identified three different norms that Israel had breached. Peremptory or *jus cogens* norms were actions recognized in international law that no State was ever permitted to commit, such as genocide, slavery and denial of the right to self-determination. The advisory opinion was clear that Israel was in breach of international law and set out the obligations of third States. Customary international law was part of the United Kingdom’s common law and the jurisdiction of other European States, he said, noting that he had unsuccessfully brought forth two cases in which the United Kingdom had been in violation of international law by permitting the sale of arms to Israel, which had then used them in the Gaza offensive. Civil society should identify European Union States in which legal actions could be brought with respect to such actions, he said.

28. Mr. Shiner added that the European Union-Israel Association Agreement was also in breach of the *jus cogens* norms, since it stipulated that relations between parties must be based on respect for human rights and democratic principles. That clause required that parties respect customary international law and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, which prohibits the forcible acquisition of territory.

29. **Jamal Zakout**, Special Adviser to the Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority and Head of the Civil Society and Media Unit in the Office of the Prime Minister, said third States had a responsibility under the advisory opinion, and civil society organizations should follow any cases brought to court. However, the international community and the United Nations had lost credibility in the eyes of ordinary Palestinian citizens, who saw that despite all international efforts to end the occupation, they were still denied access to their lands and livelihoods and the Israeli blockade on Gaza was still in effect. The credibility of the international community and international law must be restored, he said, noting that the Palestinians were otherwise unable to hold Israel accountable. The Palestinian Authority would use any possible means to prevent further deterioration and to provide the minimum assistance to its people, he said.

30. At the domestic level, different parties had special responsibilities, he said, recalling that the Palestinian Authority had held discussions with civil society organizations, during which some 200 projects had been suggested. In addition to asking third parties for help, the Palestinians must do everything they could by themselves in order to design a programme of resistance, he said. The act of building a house was a

form of resistance, just like boycotting products from settlements. The international community and civil society could also play a role in creating a situation whereby the Security Council could take action.

31. **Rabab Khairy**, Coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa, *Centre national de coopération au développement*, Belgium, said that the purpose of the Russell Tribunal on Palestine initiative, set up some five years after the issuance of the advisory opinion, was to show the international community's complicity in perpetuating the violations of Palestinian human rights. The Tribunal acted as the court of the people, a Tribunal of conscience aimed at mobilizing society, she said. It consisted of eminent persons, including former United Nations Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, and would hold a number of international sessions. The first, which had already taken place in Barcelona, had examined the relationship between Israel and European Union member States.

32. Reporting on the Tribunal's findings, she said the European Union and its member States had been found to be in breach of several provisions of international law regarding their cooperation with Israel, including active assistance in exporting weapons used in the Gaza offensive. If the European Union and its member States failed to impose the necessary actions against Israel, the Tribunal would count on European Union citizens to bring the necessary pressure, she said.

IV. Closing remarks

33. **Riyad Mansour**, Permanent Observer of Palestine at the United Nations, said: "I am honoured and humbled to be in the company of fighters in the field who fight on a daily basis against the wall and the occupation." Civil society and the Palestinian Authority complemented each other, he continued, stressing that ending the occupation was a collective endeavour requiring the necessary actions from each and every person. There was a need to find ways to convince the 25 European countries that had not yet done so to recognize the State of Palestine, he stressed.

34. He invited participants to do their part by researching the many issues contained in the advisory opinion, noting that help was needed to handle some 60,000 claims for damage caused by the construction of the wall. All actions, small or big, contributed to the Palestinian struggle, he said, adding that some activists were being killed and others sent to prison, while still others were advancing the ruling in the diplomatic arena. It all added collectively to the struggle that would eventually allow the Palestinian people to start building their society one day. "Always concentrate on what unifies us and not what divides us," he emphasized.

35. **Saviour F. Borg**, Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, told participants: "We've learned about your tireless advocacy work, your relentless protests, and your invocations of international law." The messages heard today would be presented to Committee members and, through them, to the wider United Nations membership. He assured participants that the Committee stood

behind their efforts and encouraged them to keep working towards a just and lasting peace. “The Palestinian people have suffered too much and for too long. All of us in every capacity - Governments, the United Nations and civil society - must each play our own role to bring justice back to the Palestinian people,” he stressed.

Annex**List of participants**Speakers

Mr. Wesam Ahmad	Advocacy Officer, Al-Haq – Law in the Service of Man Ramallah
Mr. Said Yaqin Dawoud	Coordinator, Palestinian National Committee against the Wall Lecturer, Al-Quds Open University Jerusalem
Mr. Ray Dolphin	Humanitarian Affairs Officer United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Jerusalem
Ms. Rabab Khairy	Coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa <i>Centre national de coopération au développement</i> (National Centre for Development Cooperation) Brussels
Mr. Mohammad A.M. Khatib	Coordinator, Bil'in Popular Committee against the Wall West Bank
Mr. Jonathan Pollak	Media Coordinator, Popular Struggle Coordination Committee Tel Aviv
Mr. Phil Shiner	Supervisor, Public Interest Lawyers Birmingham, United Kingdom
Mr. Jamal Zakout	Special Adviser to the Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority and Head of the Civil Society and Media Unit in the Office of the Prime Minister Ramallah

Moderators

Mr. Fritz Edlinger	Secretary-General, Society for Austro-Arab Relations Vienna
Mr. Hans Koechler	President, International Progress Organization Vienna

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

Mr. Zahir Tanin
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations
Vice-Chairman of the Committee

Mr. Pedro Núñez Mosquera
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Cuba to the United Nations
Vice-Chairman of the Committee

Mr. Saviour F. Borg
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Malta to the United Nations
Rapporteur of the Committee

Mr. Minas A. Hadjimichael
Ambassador and Permanent Representative the Republic of Cyprus to the United Nations

Mr. Riyad Mansour
Ambassador and Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations

Governments

Austria	Ms. Maria Anna Kloss Austrian Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Belarus	Mr. Vadim Pisarevich, Counsellor Mr. Oleg Shloma, First Secretary Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office at Vienna
Belgium	Ms. Sibille de Cartier, Counsellor Mr. Nicolas Stoops, Assistant Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office at Vienna
China	Ms. Chen Peijie, Counsellor Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office at Vienna
Dominican Republic	Ms. Michelle Cohen, Ambassador Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office at Vienna
Greece	Mr. Petros Panagiotopoulos, First Counsellor Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office at Vienna

Malaysia	Mr. Ismail Salam, Chargé d'affaires, a.i. Ms. Osmawani Osman, First Secretary Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office at Vienna
Morocco	Mr. Omar Zniber, Permanent Representative to to the United Nations Office at Vienna Mr. Hassan Laouaouda, Minister Plenipotentiary Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office at Vienna
Namibia	Ms. Aino Stella Kuume, First Secretary Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office at Vienna
Spain	Mr. Miguel Alonso, Counsellor Ms. Tamara Zabala, Counsellor Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office at Vienna
Switzerland	Mr. Alberto Groff, Counsellor Ms. Caterina Albisetti, Trainee Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office at Vienna
Syrian Arab Republic	Mr. Bashar Safiey Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office at Vienna
Turkey	Mr. Sedat Önal, Deputy Director-General for Middle East Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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	Dr. Zuheir Elwazer, Ambassador Mr. Hazem Shabat, Alternate Permanent Observer Ms. Safa Shabat, Advisor Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the UNOV Mr. Ali Al-Jarbawi, Minister of Planning and Administrative Development, Palestinian Authority, Ramallah
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Intergovernmental organizations

African Union	Ms. Khadija R. Masri, Permanent Observer in Geneva
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United Nations organs, agencies and bodies

Economic and Social Western Asia Commission for Western Asia	Mr. Tarik Alami Chief, Emerging and Conflict Issues Section Beirut
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights	Mr. Kevin Turner Middle East and North Africa Section Field Operations and Technical Cooperation Division Geneva

Civil society organizations

Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization	Mr. Jamal Zakout, Adviser to the Prime Minister Dr. Salam Fayyad Cairo
Al-Quds University	Mr. Mahmoud Eljafari, Dean and Professor of Economics, Faculty of Economics and Business Jerusalem
Center for Encounters and Active Non-Violence and Radio Freies Salzkammergut	Mr. Matthias Reichl Vienna
Early Childhood Resource Center	Mr. Nabil Sublaban, General Director Jerusalem
European Jews for a Just Peace/Women in Black	Ms. Paula Abrams-Hourani, Founding Member Vienna
Harvard Kennedy School	Mr. Husam Zomlot, Research Fellow, Belfer Center Cambridge, Massachusetts
International Progress Organization	Mr. Hans Koechler, President Vienna
Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute	Ms. Ghania Malhis, Chairman of the Board of Trustees Ramallah
The Palestinian Return Centre	Mr. Arafet Boujemaa, Office Manager Mr. Nasim Ahmed, Researcher Mr. Adel Abdullah Mr. Hani Abdulrahim London

Palestinians without Frontiers	Mr. Mahmoud H. Eljammali, Chairman Mr. Serri M. H. Arafat, Managing Editor Gaza
Palestinian Youth Network	Mr. Saif Abukeshek, General Coordinator Madrid
Society for Austro-Arab Relations	Mr. Fritz Edlinger, Secretary-General Vienna
Universal Peace Federation	Mr. J. Reuben Silverbird
Webster College	Mr. Anthony Lowstedt, Media professor
Women in Black	Ms. Waltraud Schauer Ms. Elisabeth Hebenstreit Ms. Brigitte Neubacher Dr. Angela Waldegg Vienna

Media

Adnkronos International News Agency	Mr. Mahmoud Kilani, Reporter Vienna
Arab Press	Mr. Amir Bayati Vienna
ORF 1	Ms. Teresa Arrieta
Press TV	Ms. Eva Manasieva, International Correspondent Vienna
Press TV/Inter MEDIA	Mr. Edwin Heckenbichler Cameraman/Producer Vienna
Women journalists and conflict in the Mediterranean	Ms. Kawther Salam, Reporter Mr. Ramin Darakhschani, Assistant Barcelona