



DIVISION FOR PALESTINIAN RIGHTS

June 2012
Volume XXXV, Bulletin No. 6

Bulletin on action by the United Nations system and intergovernmental organizations relevant to the question of Palestine

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*The Bulletin can be found in the United Nations Information System
on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL) on the Internet at:
<http://unispal.un.org>*

I. UNITED NATIONS MEETING OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN SUPPORT OF ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE, CONVENES AT UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION IN PARIS

Under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, a one-day United Nations Meeting of Civil Society in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace was held on 1 June 2012 in Paris. The meeting, entitled “Civil society action towards ending the occupation: harnessing the power of youth and women”, featured four workshops that gave civil society groups, including groups from the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel, a platform for empowering youth and women. The Civil Society Meeting followed a two-day United Nations International Meeting that aimed to mobilize international support for youth and women’s initiatives for achieving a peaceful end to the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

At the opening session, the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Abdou Salam Diallo, delivered remarks, the excerpts of which are reproduced below.

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Women make up 50 per cent of the Palestinian population, and people under the age of 25 account for 64 per cent. The figures are striking. These people are the ones who suffer the most under the occupation, from violence, unemployment, lack of opportunities, social pressures and exclusion.

It is therefore a paradox that their capacity to contribute to achieving peace and establishing a sovereign State of Palestine remains, to a large extent, untapped.

This will help you to understand why we have gathered here today to ponder the best way to make use of this tremendous potential for achieving peace while the two-State solution still has a chance to become a reality.

Our discussions will also address ways of empowering women and young people, capacity-building and training, education for peace, the learning of practical skills, entrepreneurship, participation in decision-making, the creation of an open Palestinian society and social media. Our discussions will provide us with the opportunity to share

our experiences and best practices, generate promising ideas and identify pitfalls.

As we mark the twelfth anniversary of the adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security, our Committee, which has always made efforts to take account of the specific situation of women in its activities, must also, on this occasion, highlight the situation of women and their leading role in society.

Reflect, for example, on the fact that Chorouk Morakten and the YaLa young leaders movement have given ordinary citizens in the region the opportunity to gather in a discussion forum to design a future filled with hope. The number of participants in the movement has skyrocketed and its impact has attracted the attention of leading media outlets and high-ranking officials, such as Prince Hassan bin Talal of Jordan and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton of the United States of America.

Moreover, in its resolution 2037 (XX) of 7 December 1965, the General Assembly stated that it bore in mind “the important part being played by young people in every field of human endeavour and the fact that they are destined to guide the fortunes of mankind”.

Recent events in the region have confirmed the wisdom contained in that statement.

Indeed, by using social media in new ways, young people have shown their readiness to become actors and agents of change. The Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, the Secretary-General, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have responded to their call.

And so too has our Committee, which is bringing together youth movement organizers and bloggers, tapping the energy of social media, broadcasting live on the Internet and communicating through Facebook and Twitter.

So, share your questions and ideas with us. Stay connected and keep on sending us your questions by Twitter, preceded by the hashtag #UNPalrights, and spread information to those around you so that together we can initiate a global conversation.

Youth networks have in fact turned out to have a greater aptitude for protest than for

sustainable political action. But rather than serving to spread messages of hate, the Internet can and should further the creation of pathways to peace.

In other words, what we need is people with good practical skills, whether in the professional, organizational or political arena, and people with the ability to think critically.

The winds of change sweeping the region that resulted, in March of last year, in the Palestinian factions coming together to lay the groundwork for a longed-for reconciliation, must be viewed from this perspective.

Thus, it is up to the region's women and young people to become more involved and to do so in a more visible way, refusing to become bystanders to history. Yes, you should not expect the international community, which is struggling to reinvigorate the peace process, to desire peace more zealously than you do yourselves.

On this most hopeful note, may I extend to you my wishes for a constructive and productive discussion.

II. OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL COORDINATOR FOR THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS ISSUES A STATEMENT ON FURTHER SETTLEMENT CONSTRUCTION IN THE WEST BANK.

On 7 June 2012, the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Robert Serry, issued a press release in Jerusalem, the text of which is reproduced below.

The latest announcements, including adding 300 units in Beit El, deep inside the West Bank, are deeply troubling. The Special Coordinator reiterates his recent warning to the Security Council that “if the parties do not grasp the current opportunity, they should

realize the implication is not merely slowing progress toward a two-state solution. Instead, we could be moving down the path towards a one-state reality, which would also move us further away from regional peace in the spirit of the Arab Peace Initiative”.

III. SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES OCCUPIED SINCE 1967 CALLS FOR THE RELEASE OF TWO PALESTINIAN PRISONERS ON HUNGER STRIKE

On 8 June 2012, the United Nations Office in Geneva issued a press release on remarks made by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 Richard Falk, the text of which is reproduced below.

United Nations Special Rapporteur Richard Falk has expressed deep concern regarding the fate of two Palestinian prisoners, Mahmoud Sarsak and Akram Rikhawi, detained without charges by Israel, and called for their immediate release. Mr. Sarsak is on the 82nd day of his hunger strike and Mr. Rikhawi is on his 58th day.

“These individuals are protesting against their detention without charges and are suffering immensely for it,” said the independent expert designated by the Human Rights Council to monitor and report on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967. “There is no acceptable basis for continuing to hold these persons and Israel will be responsible if any permanent harm results.”

“Mr. Sarsak has lost one third of his body weight and Mr. Rikhawi is suffering from aggravated diabetes and asthma,” Mr. Falk noted. “If Israeli officials cannot present evidence to support charges against these men, then they must be released immediately.”

“Israel must end the appalling and unjust treatment of Palestinian prisoners and the international community needs to raise its voice and take steps to end Israel’s flagrant misuse of administrative detention,” the human rights expert underscored.

In his view, the series of hunger strikes that started last December “has called

attention to Israel’s abusive reliance on administrative detention, but also to conditions that fail to meet legal standards of international humanitarian law for the more than 4,000 Palestinians imprisoned.”

Israel currently has approximately 300 Palestinians detained without charges. “I have requested information regarding each of these persons,” he said, “and I will follow up on each case and address this matter in my forthcoming report to the Human Rights Council,” due on 2 July 2012.

Earlier this year, during his latest mission* to the region, Mr. Falk assessed the Israeli practice of detaining Palestinians without charges. “The Government of Israel calls this ‘administrative detention,’ but it is more honestly termed detention without charges, or arbitrary detention,” the Special Rapporteur said.

Several experts on prison conditions consulted during his February 2012 mission raised concerns regarding physical, verbal and psychological abuse; lack of access to proper medical treatment; medical neglect; widespread use of solitary confinement for extended periods; overcrowding and decrepit cells; and the lack of family visits.

*Check the Special Rapporteur’s end-of-mission statement:
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=11846&LangID=E>

IV. INTERNATIONAL MEDIA SEMINAR ON PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST CONVENES IN GENEVA

On 12 June 2012, the Department of Public Information convened the 2012 International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East at the International Geneva Conference Centre in Geneva. The Seminar focused on the role of the media in covering different aspects of recent events in the Middle East, especially the Arab Spring, and how they relate to the situation with regard to the question of Palestine. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's message to the meeting was delivered by the Acting Head of the Department of Public Information, Maher Nasser. The text of the message is reproduced below (SG/SM/14347, PAL/2152, PI/2037).

I am pleased to send greetings to all the participants in this International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East. I thank the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland for their support in hosting this event.

You gather at a pivotal time in the Middle East and North Africa. The world has witnessed profound changes across the region in the past 18 months, driven by brave and committed citizens, with women and youth in the vanguard.

As journalists, activists, policymakers and representatives of civil society, many of you have played important roles in these historic movements for change. I salute your dedication and courage in promoting transparency, accountability and democracy. I urge you to continue to promote peace and increase mutual understanding between communities, especially Palestinians and Israelis.

While much has been achieved across the region, for too many the suffering continues. The killings in the Syrian Arab Republic have not stopped, despite repeated pledges by all sides. The dangers of full-scale civil war are imminent and real. All violence must end, by the regime and by the armed opposition. Now is the time for the international community to take bold and concerted action.

The regional awakening based on the ideals of freedom, dignity and non-violence cannot be complete without a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Too many Palestinians and Israelis have suffered for too many years.

Along with the other members of the Quartet, I am concerned at the fragility of the situation on the ground and I urge the parties to overcome the current obstacles and resume direct, bilateral negotiations without delay or preconditions.

I welcome the Palestinian Authority's achievements in building the necessary institutions of governance and note in particular the significant progress on security in the West Bank. I reiterate the Quartet's call on the Palestinian Authority to continue to make every effort to improve law and order, fight violent extremism and end incitement.

At the same time, the parties should avoid unilateral actions that undermine trust. The expansion of settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is contrary to international law and Israel's road map commitments. I underscore the Quartet's concern over settler violence and incitement in the West Bank and repeat its calls upon Israel to take effective measures, including bringing the perpetrators of such acts to justice.

The situation in Gaza remains unsustainable. I continue to stress the need for the free and secure movement of people, construction materials and other goods, and for the implementation of all aspects of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). While Israel has made some efforts, more is needed.

The United Nations will remain engaged in helping the parties to forge a way forward. We must create the conditions for meaningful negotiations that will resolve the core permanent status issues, including

Jerusalem, borders, refugees and security, and an end to the occupation that began in 1967. This should lead to the emergence of a sovereign, independent, contiguous and viable State of Palestine living side-by-side in peace and security with Israel. Only then will we be able to move towards the broader goal of comprehensive regional peace in the Middle East. Thank you for coming together in this cause. Please accept my best wishes for a successful gathering.

V. UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS AND EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR AMOS ISSUES A STATEMENT ON GAZA AND THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

On 13 June, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Valery Amos, issued a statement on the situation in the Gaza Strip, the text of which is reproduced below:

The blockade of Gaza, now entering its sixth year, has had a devastating impact on the lives and livelihoods of the 1.6 million Palestinians who reside there. More than 80 per cent of families are dependent on humanitarian aid and Gaza remains the subject of severe restrictions on imports, exports and the movement of people by land, air and sea.

This amounts to a collective punishment of all those living in Gaza and is a denial of basic human rights in contravention of international law.

While some steps have been taken to ease its impact, it is vital that the blockade be lifted immediately, so that essential services and infrastructure can be maintained. The opportunity to develop a sustainable economy would also reduce dependence on humanitarian assistance.

The rights of all civilians, Palestinian and Israeli, must be protected and respected at all times, within the framework of international law. All have a right to live free from the fear of indiscriminate violence and to live in peace, security and dignity.

VI. THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION AND 50 INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS ISSUE A STATEMENT ON FIVE YEARS OF BLOCKADE: A POLITICAL DETERMINANT OF HEALTH IN THE GAZA STRIP

The World Health Organization (WHO), joined by 50 international organizations, issued a statement on the five-year blockade in the Gaza Strip, the text of which is reproduced below.

The blockade on the Gaza Strip, imposed in June 2007, has affected the functioning and development of the Palestinian health care system in a number of ways: restrictions on importation of medical supplies, equipment and spare parts; limitations on movement of patients and health staff; interruptions of power supply and impurities of water supply; insecurity; and the permit regime limiting access of Palestinians to health services, as well as of the professional development of staff.

The Palestinian health-care system is an integrated whole, covering the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. The Palestinian Authority, based in Ramallah, supplies medicines and disposables for the Gaza Strip and pays the salaries of most

health staff. East Jerusalem hospitals are the main specialized centres for patients from the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Health staff need to travel between the West Bank and Gaza Strip for training and to provide care. The health system cannot function effectively when the Gaza Strip is subject to a blockade and cut off from the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

WHO has joined 50 international organizations in issuing the statement below.

For over five years in the Gaza Strip, more than 1.6 million people have been under blockade in violation of international law. More than half of these people are children. We the undersigned say with one voice “End the blockade now”.

VII. ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS BRIEFS THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST, INCLUDING THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION

On 19 June 2012, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Oscar Fernandez-Taranco briefed the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. Excerpts of the briefing are reproduced below (S/PV.6788):

Last month, we reported that there had been a series of quiet and informal meetings between the parties characterized by positive engagement and the constructive handling of several potentially destabilizing events on the ground. At that time, Special Coordinator Robert Serry warned that the situation remained uncertain and fragile, highlighting the need for mutual confidence-building measures in order to sustain the talks. We are worried that that has not

happened thus far and that the earlier positive environment brought about by quiet engagement between the parties appears to be challenged. The latest announcements related to settlements are an added setback.

As we speak, there are ongoing intensive efforts to avoid a renewed deadlock. It is in that spirit that Quartet envoys met in Brussels on 15 June. The envoys agreed that there was an urgent need for the parties to continue to pursue the present efforts

towards resumed dialogue and substantive negotiations and that it was time for them to take the necessary steps towards that goal.

On 6 June, Prime Minister Netanyahu announced the construction of approximately 850 settlement units in several West Bank settlements. The timing coincided with efforts to reach agreement with settlers to relocate five housing units in the settlement of Beit El. The units were built on private Palestinian land and are due to be relocated no later than 1 July, following an Israeli High Court decision. Let me reiterate that all settlement construction in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, whether on private land or elsewhere, is in violation of international law and Israel's road map commitments, and it makes the two-State solution all the more difficult to achieve.

On 17 June, near Hebron, an Israeli truck driver allegedly shot and killed two Palestinians after having been attacked himself and injured. Clashes between Israeli settlers and Palestinians continued in the West Bank during the reporting period. Palestinian attacks on Israelis in the West Bank resulted in three Israelis being injured, including a child.

Settler attacks on Palestinians near Hebron on 5 and 11 June resulted in several students and a farmer being injured. Early this morning, a mosque near Ramallah was spray painted and set on fire. The attack is linked to the Israeli decision to evacuate the Ulpana outpost, adjacent to the settlement of Beit El. We note that the Government of Israel has condemned that desecration and vowed to use all means necessary to find the perpetrators and bring them to justice. The United Nations condemns that flagrant act against a Muslim holy site and calls upon the Government of Israel to protect Palestinian individuals and property.

Additionally, 24 Palestinian structures, including seven residences, were demolished in the West Bank, leading to the displacement of 28 Palestinians, including 14 children. On 12 June, a final demolition order was issued against 51 structures in the village of Susiya, near Hebron, which, if implemented, could lead to considerable displacement of affected Palestinian inhabitants and result in the destruction of international assistance projects in the village.

Palestinian security forces have continued working to maintain law and order in the West Bank, for which the Palestinian security forces need to be adequately equipped. Palestinian security forces defused a number of unexploded devices and returned to Israel a number of Israeli citizens, including a soldier, who had entered the West Bank. A Palestinian security operation aimed at restoring order in Jenin following the death of its Governor in May was extended to Nablus in early June. Around 50 suspects have been detained. The recent opening of state-of-the-art police training and corrections/rehabilitation facilities in Jericho provides further evidence of Palestinian progress in advancing their governance and rule of law agenda. Support from the international community remains essential if continued progress is to be ensured.

The Israel Defense Forces conducted 189 operations in the occupied West Bank, during which 114 Palestinians were injured, including one child, while 79 Palestinians were arrested, mostly in connection with protests marking the anniversary of the 1967 war. Demonstrations also continued against the barrier, which deviates from the Green Line in contravention of the advisory opinion (see A/ES-10/273) of the International Court of Justice.

Despite the agreement reached on 14 May that ended the hunger strike of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli custody, and amid reports that some additional Palestinians have been put in administrative detention, two prisoners are reported not to have ended their hunger strikes. On a positive note, Mahmoud Al-Sarsak, who started his strike on 19 March, ended his hunger strike yesterday, after an agreement was reached for his release to Gaza on 10 July. Family visits from Gaza are scheduled to resume shortly and, on 31 May, Israel transferred the remains of 91 Palestinian militants to the Palestinian Authority. We continue to call for the agreement to be implemented in full by all sides and for the urgent resolution of the ongoing hunger strikes on humanitarian grounds.

Efforts to promote Palestinian reconciliation continued, following the most recent 20 May reconciliation agreement. Fatah and Hamas delegations met in Cairo on 6, 7 and 15 June to discuss candidates for a transitional technocratic Government to be headed by President Abbas. President Abbas insists that any new Government must follow his political programme and abide by Palestinian Liberation Organization commitments. The Palestinian Central Elections Commission resumed operations in Gaza, with full cooperation from the de facto authorities, and plans to register voters in Gaza between 3 and 14 July.

In Gaza, the relative calm that had prevailed since April was disrupted on 1 June, when an Islamic Jihad-affiliated militant breached the southern Gaza border and opened fire on a group of Israeli soldiers, killing one before being killed himself. That incident was followed by several exchanges of fire until 6 June. Violence resumed on 17 and 18 June, when rockets were fired from Gaza into Israel, while Israeli air strikes resulted in four

Palestinian militants killed and several Palestinians injured, including a woman and her child.

Overall, for the reporting period, a total of 15 rockets and 27 mortar shells were fired from Gaza into Israel, while Israel Defense Forces conducted seven incursions and 14 air strikes into Gaza, resulting in 9 Palestinian militants killed, 9 Palestinian militants injured and 15 Palestinian civilians injured. Two Palestinians were also killed in tunnel-related incidents. We continue to condemn all indiscriminate rocket attacks from Gaza into Israel, which must stop. We also urge Israel to show maximum restraint.

We are also concerned about serious security incidents over the weekend in the vicinity of the Israeli-Egyptian border. Two rockets were shot from the Sinai into southern Israel on 16 June, one landing in the proximity of the Israeli town of Mitzpe Ramon and the other in the Ovda area, both approximately 30 kilometres from the border. No damage or injuries were reported. In the early morning of 18 June, at least three militants attacked Israeli workers constructing the security fence at the Israeli/Egyptian border near the locality of Kadesh-barnea. One Israeli worker was killed and two were injured. Israel Defense Forces deployed in the area, exchanged fire with the militants, and two militants were killed.

With the closure entering its sixth year, the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) and Gaza's recovery and long-term economic growth remain fundamental objectives of the United Nations. As reported in previous briefings, some significant progress was made towards that goal, but much more needs to be done. For United Nations agencies to continue to play a major role in the international efforts towards that end, further Israeli approvals of

outstanding United Nations projects are required. The United Nations continues to urge Israel to allow the unrestricted import of key building materials and particularly aggregate, iron bar and cement, which continue to be illegally imported through tunnels with Egypt.

Gaza continues to face an electricity shortage and, despite the gradual transfer of Qatari-supplied fuel from Egypt, the fuel that is reaching the Gaza power plant cannot produce more than 30 megawatts (MW) of the plant's current 90-MW potential. That, together with a decline in fuel procured from Israeli suppliers, means that the energy situation in Gaza remains bleak. The United Nations will continue to monitor the situation with the aim of helping to restore a sustainable level of energy supply.

Overall, the Palestinian economy is showing signs of slowing. Real gross domestic product (GDP) grew by only 2 per cent in the last quarter of 2011, with GDP growth slightly higher in the West Bank than in the Gaza Strip. Among the most significant challenges is unemployment, which increased by 3 percentage points in the first quarter of this year. Unemployment is now 24 per cent across the occupied Palestinian territory. Again, it is higher in Gaza than in the West Bank, and young people are particularly affected by the lack of employment opportunities.

Despite those challenges, the Palestinian Authority continues to realize progress in building the institutions of a future

Palestinian State, including its ability to collect economic and other data. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics achieved an important milestone when it subscribed to the International Monetary Fund's Special Data Dissemination Standard for the dissemination of economic and financial statistics. That important step should enable better decision-making within both the public and private sectors and, in so doing, should contribute to the pursuit of sound macroeconomic policies by the Palestinian Authority.

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Given such dramatic regional developments, progress on the Israeli-Palestinian track is of even greater urgency and would have an important positive impact on the region.

Let me reassure the Council that the Secretary-General, together with our Quartet partners, will continue to stress the necessity of renewing dialogue and making real progress towards the two-State solution, which is long overdue and, as the Special Coordinator warned in his briefing last month, increasingly at risk. We thus strongly encourage them to urgently consider taking the necessary constructive steps that would allow them to renew the meetings between their negotiators and work towards resumed direct negotiations. Goodwill gestures will go a long way towards removing the lack of trust. Only a direct and meaningful dialogue can help restore the belief in a negotiated peace.

VIII. COMMISSIONER-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST ISSUES A STATEMENT ON WORLD REFUGEE DAY 2012

To mark the 2012 World Refugee Day, the Commissioner General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Filippo Grandi, issued a statement in Brussels on 20 June 2012, the text of which is reproduced below

To mark World Refugee Day, I have chosen to speak on the theme of protection – the protection of the rights of the Palestine refugees we serve in the five fields of operation of UNRWA: Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. This special day reminds us of the trauma faced by all refugees around the world who have been uprooted by violence, persecution or conflict. This is an experience that reverberates among the Palestine refugees whom we at UNRWA serve. They are indeed a vulnerable population, made more so by the volatile political landscape they inhabit.

Refugees are forced to leave behind everything that most of us take for granted: home, friends, loved ones, sense of belonging, everything that is familiar. Nobody should have to undergo such trauma. For many, at least there is hope for a better future and light at the end of the tunnel of displacement and dispossession that characterizes the refugee condition. Unfortunately, Palestine refugees are unique in having an unresolved, 64-year-old political plight. This is why we constantly appeal to the peacemakers to address the issues that would give them the protection they need and deserve.

Sixty-four years after their original displacement, UNRWA, together with our partners in other United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, national authorities, donors and the wider international community, continues to strive to provide for the material needs and to contribute to the protection of the fundamental rights of approximately five million Palestine refugees. Addressing such issues takes commitment and action. International solidarity and cooperation

must be at the foundation of our response. This is especially so at a time when global economic problems are putting pressure on humanitarian and development budgets. In that regard, I wish to express my sincere appreciation for the support that the European Union has been providing to UNRWA in our efforts to address the needs, and safeguard and advance the rights, of Palestine refugees.

However, these efforts can only serve to alleviate, to a certain degree, the consequences of the continuing lack of a political solution. These consequences are felt most severely in the occupied Palestinian territory, where Palestine refugees continue to experience dispossession and displacement on a daily basis as a result of a pervasive regime of restrictions of movement, house demolitions, expropriation of Palestinian lands and natural resources, expansion of settlements which are illegal under international law, a separation Barrier that deviates deep inside the West Bank, and the blockade on Gaza which was tightened five years ago and which chronically undermines Palestinian human development in spite of its welcome but still insufficient easing.

Such obstacles to the legitimate aspirations of Palestinian civilians to live a normal life require a concerted political response in order to ensure respect for international law that has often been lacking. Finding solutions to end the occupation, to peacefully resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to put an end to this most protracted of refugee situations are now more vital than ever. Such solutions must be inclusive, allowing for refugee representation, and must address the question of Palestine refugees in a manner consistent with their

rights. Refugees must be present in this process and their voice must be heard. Their role and input are essential for any peace agreement to be truly “just and durable”.

UNRWA, with the support of the Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department of the European Commission, is helping Palestine refugees to tell their own story, have their voices heard and advocate for the protection of their own rights. For that reason, we have brought three representatives of Palestine refugees to speak to you today: Shereen Araj, from the village of Al Walaje; Sameer Abdel Latif from Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem; and Mohamed Alkorshan from the Bedouin community of Area C in the West Bank.

They came not to talk about UNRWA, but to talk about their own lives as refugees. After hearing them, try to understand what it means to be a Palestine refugee today. Unfortunately their stories are not unusual, but are in fact emblematic of the ongoing trauma faced by Palestinians today in the occupied Palestinian territory.

Let us all continue to strive to ensure that all people displaced by conflict and upheaval get the support they need to build a better life. Let us strive also to give our full attention to finding a long-overdue solution to the plight of Palestine refugees, so that they may also see an end to so many years of dispossession and displacement.

IX. UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION INSCRIBES SITES IN PALESTINE ON THE WORLD HERITAGE LIST

During its meeting from 24 June to 6 July 2012 in Saint Petersburg, Russian Federation, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee considered the inscription of 36 sites on the World Heritage List, including the Church of the Nativity and the Pilgrimage Route in Bethlehem, Palestine. On 29 June 2012, the Committee inscribed the two sites on the World Heritage List and UNESCO issued a press release, excerpts of which are reproduced below.

New sites have been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, including the Birthplace of Jesus: the Church of the Nativity and the Pilgrimage Route, in Bethlehem, Palestine; Sites of Human Evolution at Mount Carmel: The Nahal Me’arot/Wadi el-Mughara Caves, in Israel, Rock Islands Southern Lagoon, in Palau, and the Cultural Landscape of Bali Province: the Subak System as a Manifestation of the Tri Hita Karana Philosophy, in Indonesia; and Rabat, modern capital and historic city: a shared heritage, in Morocco.

Birthplace of Jesus: the Church of the Nativity and the Pilgrimage Route, in

Bethlehem, Palestine, was also placed on the List of World Heritage in Danger as it is suffering from damage due to water leaks. The inscribed property is situated 10 km south of Jerusalem on the site identified by Christian tradition as the birthplace of Jesus since the second century. A church was first completed there in A.D. 339 and the edifice that replaced it after a fire in the sixth century retains elaborate floor mosaics from the original edifice. The site also includes Latin, Greek Orthodox, Franciscan and Armenian convents and churches, as well as bell towers, terraced gardens and a pilgrimage route.