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Committee on the Inalienable Rights
of the Palestinian People
352nd Meeting (AM)

SUCCESS IN RESUMING PEACE TALKS VITAL, TOP NEGOTIATOR STRESSES

AT MEETING OF PALESTINIAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE

Status Quo Cannot Be Maintained, Says Saeb Erakat in Briefing

Palestinians were “exerting every possible effort” to ensure the success of current efforts to re-start peace negotiations with Israel, their lead negotiator told the Palestinian Rights Committee today.

Calling on Member States to make their positions on the issue clear, Saeb Erakat underlined how important it was that Secretary of State John Kerry of the United States succeed in bringing about a resumption of talks. “No one would benefit more from his success and no one would lose more from his failure” than the Palestinians, Mr. Erakat said, adding that failure would mean falling deeper into the “evil apartheid that exists in the West Bank and Jerusalem”.

He said there were two reasons why the Palestinians had not pursued the rights acquired since gaining their new status at the United Nations. One was that it had taken a long time to prepare letters of accession to various agencies and conventions, though that process was now complete, and the other was that Mr. Kerry and the entire international community needed a chance to obtain the desired result.

Describing the current situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, he said 16,000 new settlement units had been built between 2009 and 2012, which worked out to an average of 11 housing units per day. Population growth in the settlements was three times higher than natural growth in Israel, and there had been an increase of 49,115 people in the last year. Following the decision to upgrade Palestine’s status at the United Nations on 29 November 2012, 11,500 new units had been tendered and approved, he said. In the same period, settler violence, including the burning of trees, mosques and churches, had increased by 315 per cent, and settlers were now manning roadblocks in the West Bank. Describing the situation as “apartheid”, he said it was worse than what had existed in South Africa and worsening “every hour”.

Noting that the Palestinians commemorated the *naqba* (catastrophe) every May, he said it was the first time in history that a nation had been “interrupted”.

Palestine had seen 418 villages destroyed and 70 per cent of its population condemned to exile as refugees. The commemorations continued because Israel was granted impunity and acted as it wished. Registering his own right and that of all his compatriots to anger and bitterness, he said Palestinians were born for one purpose: to restore Palestine to geographical maps. That was the task of all 11 million Palestinians scattered across the world.

Palestinians recognized Israel’s right to exist on 78 per cent of the land, with their own State on the remainder, he said. Additionally, if Israel accepted the 1967 borders, Palestinian negotiators were open to making minor modifications to the borders. Such ideas had been “entertained” in negotiations when Palestinians had turned over every stone possible in order to achieve peace. The global consensus favoured two States based on the 1967 borders, he said, recognizing that other States bordering Israel had a stake in the negotiations. There would be coordination every step of the way, based on their interests.

He went on to describe Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s strategy on Palestine as three-dimensional: the Israeli Prime Minister wanted a Palestinian Authority without authority; he wanted a cost-free occupation; and he wanted to push Gaza into Egypt’s sphere of responsibility. That status quo was unsustainable and would have severe repercussions in 20 years time. That made it all the more essential that Mr. Kerry succeed, and he had a chance because he knew the Palestinians and Israelis “inside out”. The “end game” must be two States based on the 1967 borders, he added.

Calling for a new definition of Arab-Western relations, he said they had not been defined since 1683, when Vienna had been besieged by the Ottomans. They must now be defined by “peace and democracy”, and the current status quo could not remain. It was time to understand that the Middle East was facing a situation like Europe had faced in 1849. Chaos could ensue and sticking to “peace and democracy” was vital to prevent that.

Describing himself as “the most disadvantaged negotiator in the history of mankind”, he pointed out that he had no army, navy, air force or economy, and that his people were fragmented. Nonetheless, Israel faced a stark choice: it could choose “live and let live”, which called for two States based on the 1967 borders, or it could go for one State. He said that, while he could talk to Israeli negotiators about that option, the persistence of the current situation was not at all possible. The status quo would “not be maintained under any circumstances”, and the apartheid existing today could not last, he emphasized, pointing out that the Palestinian population was growing faster than the Israeli one.

He acknowledged that Palestine faced a “deep problem” over reconciliation, with a continuing “coup d’état” by Hamas in the Gaza Strip. While the group had been elected fairly, and no one had asked it to change its Charter as a political party, governing meant working as a Government, not as a party, and unfortunately Hamas had continued to define itself as a party, not as a Government. The ballot box offered the only route to reconciliation, he said, expressing hope that it would remain the method by which different sides resolved their differences.

Committee Chairman Abdou Salam Diallo (Senegal) then opened the floor to questions and comments.

Pakistan’s representative asked Mr. Erakat whether there had been any change in his assessment of prospects for engagement with Israel.

Mr. Erakat said he had no conditions for re-starting negotiations. A halt to settlement activity was not a condition, but “a must”. Israel needed to make a choice: “settlements or peace”. Mr. Kerry was working on three tracks — political, economic and security — with all three closely interlinked as a package. However, Israel continued to claim it had no partner, he said, likening that complaint to “a broken record”. Palestine could have “Mother Teresa as President, Montesquieu as Speaker and Thomas Jefferson as Prime Minister” but Israel would still manage to relate them back to Bin Laden, he added.

Indonesia's representative asked about the possibility of convening a high-level meeting or special sitting of the General Assembly to discuss settlement construction in order to help to promote a return to negotiations.

Mr. Erakat replied that he liked the idea of a General Assembly meeting but would consider it as one of a number of possible strategies for encouraging Israel back to the negotiating table. It was important not to appear threatening, he said, while vowing to pursue whatever it took to defend Palestinian rights and dignity, including an application to the Security Council for full United Nations membership.

The representatives of Libya, Cuba, Turkey and Morocco also made comments in response to Mr. Erakat's briefing.

Rodolfo Reyes Rodriguez (Cuba), Committee Vice-Chair, reported on the Special Meeting of the Committee held on 17-18 April in Caracas, saying it had focused on the implications of the status upgrade of the State of Palestine and on initiatives to strengthen solidarity with the Palestinians. It had been the first ever meeting of the full Committee held away from Headquarters, and it had adopted the Caracas Declaration, with a plan of action formulated after the meeting. Implementation would require hard work and ambition, and once adopted, there would be follow-up, monitoring and reporting. Lack of monitoring had been a key failing of previous initiatives, he noted.

Following the Vice-Chair's report, Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer for the State of Palestine, stressed the Caracas meeting's importance to advancing the cause of the Palestinian people.

Venezuela's representative expressed hope that the Caracas Declaration and Plan of Action would prove useful tools for supporting the Palestinians in their plight.

The representative of the League of Arab States delegation asked about the Caracas Plan of Action, collective responsibility and a proposal to disseminate information about voting patterns at the United Nations.

Mr. Mansour agreed that all countries must take responsibility and that implementation of the Plan of Action would be done in the spirit of collective responsibility. He added that he prepared yearly analyses of voting at the United Nations, with a view to persuading States to vote with expectations.

Namibia's representative sought clarification on a missing word in the text.

The Chair promised to have the Secretariat look at it, saying he believed it to be a drafting problem.

The Committee then took note of the report on the Caracas meeting, including the Plan of Action.

Christopher Grima (Malta), Rapporteur of the Committee, reported on the United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine held in Addis Ababa on 29 and 30 April. The theme had been African solidarity with the Palestinian people for the achievement of their inalienable rights, he said.

The Committee then took note of the report on that meeting.

The Committee then approved the provisional programme of the United Nations International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace to be held in Beijing on 18 and 19 June 2013. The Meeting would review the situation on the ground and the main obstacles to a two State solution, as well as recent efforts to end such practices, exploring current options.

Taking up other matters on the agenda, Mr. Diallo (Senegal) said the Russell Tribunal had held its last meeting recently, adding that the initiative was timely, with the Tribunal's work impacting on negotiations for years to come. He also said that excessive criticism had been levied at King Mohammed VI of Morocco. He praised the King's efforts on behalf of the Palestinian people.

Mr. Mansour then called attention to the release of the film *State 194*, which discusses Palestinian efforts to build to acquire statehood at the United Nations.

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* The 351st Meeting, held in Caracas, was not covered.