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CALL FOR RECOGNITION OF PALESTINE SOUNDED AS UNITED NATIONS

SEMINAR ON ASSISTANCE TO THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE CONCLUDES

(Received from a UN Information Officer)

VIENNA, 25 March – At the conclusion of the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People today, the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations called for recognition of the State of Palestine now that an ambitious programme to end the occupation in two years had been introduced.

Riyad Mansour said in closing remarks directed at Government representatives: "It is unacceptable to say all the right things while Israel continues to do the wrong things." Governments supporting a two-State solution should find practical ways to bring Israel into compliance, he said, adding that, while Palestinians were willing to participate in proximity talks, "we are not going to wait until they fail". Governments that had not yet done so should recognize the State of Palestine, and the Security Council should give Palestine its "birth certificate". After that, Palestine would apply for United Nations membership so that in 2011 it could raise its flag as the 193rd Member State.

The two-day Seminar, held under the theme "Building institutions and moving forward with establishing the State of Palestine", was organized by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

Zahir Tanin, Head of that Committee's delegation, noted in three plenary meetings, experts had analysed the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and made specific recommendations for the success of the ambitious new Palestinian Authority Programme – "Palestine: Ending the occupation, establishing the State".

He also expressed appreciation for the previous day's presentation by Palestinian Authority Minister Ali Al-Jarbawi, outlining the Programme's main points. "We shall keep the focus of the international community on achieving the long-term goals for Palestinian economic and social development and, above all, achieving Palestinian statehood, in accordance with international legitimacy," he said.

During the third plenary meeting, which preceded the closing session, four experts discussed the role of the United Nations in mobilizing and coordinating international assistance to the Palestinian people.

Maxwell Gaylard, Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process and United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory, explained how some 20 of the Organization's agencies were working in the field. Matthias Burchard of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) highlighted that body's many accomplishments, as well as the numerous constraints it faced, in its work for refugees.

Mike Bailey, representing the Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA), stressed the importance of respecting the human rights of the Palestinian people. Ghania Malhis, Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of the Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute in Ramallah, analysed the impact of the financial resources mobilized by the international community, in particular the Arab States and Arab civil society, on the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, concluding that the funds had been "wasted" on financing a fading peace process rather than funding the very basis of a lasting peace.

Plenary Three

MAXWELL GAYLARD, Deputy United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory, said the Palestinian Authority had to deal with some 20 United Nations agencies, 60 donor countries or organizations, and 150 international non-governmental organizations, in addition to numerous national ones. That entailed an enormous challenge, he added.

He said that during a joint United Nations-Palestinian Authority workshop, five basic principles had been devised to revive aid effectiveness: ownership by the Palestinians and the Palestinian Authority; harmonization in order to avoid duplication; alignment with the Palestinian Authority's actions, including support for its

Programme; ensuring accountability and transparency; and producing results.

The United Nations presence included the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), whose representatives had concluded that there were several areas in which the Organization could start working to deliver for the Palestinian population and in support of the Palestinian agenda. Those areas were governance, rule of law and human rights, livelihoods, education, health, and infrastructure. In each of them, six or seven agencies could come together and report to the country team. The humanitarian country team had seven members, including non-governmental organizations and the Red Cross, who were responsible for the yearly Consolidated Appeal.

Turning to Gaza, he said the enclave had been reduced to a "welfare society" in a situation that was entirely man-made. The United Nations was a big player through UNRWA and about 10 other agencies, which dealt with the basic problem of a "medieval" siege that locked the Strip in from both the Israeli and Egyptian sides as well as from the sea and the air.

The pockets of growth reported in the West Bank were the result of stimulus money, he said, stressing that the policy of closure had had a great impact on the economy, and that Area C in particular was doing very badly, with 79 per cent food insecurity. Areas between the separation wall and the Green Line had experienced a catastrophic drop in living standards, he said, noting that there were pockets of poverty even in East Jerusalem. The role of the United Nations system in mobilizing and coordinating international assistance to the Palestinian people was to ensure that aid was not focused merely on strengthening capacity, but also on giving hope and a voice to all Palestinians, he concluded.

MATTHIAS BURCHARD, Head of the Geneva Office of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), said the Agency was a useful illustration of the effectiveness of the United Nations in addressing the humanitarian and human development needs of the refugees – an important segment of the Palestinian community. Over the decades, UNRWA had directly delivered essential services to refugees at reasonable standards of quality in a reliable, predictable way and in close cooperation with the Palestinian Authority, communities and the United Nations system, he said.

Citing UNRWA's accomplishments in imparting knowledge and skills, he said it had provided elementary, preparatory, vocational and technical training to some 260,000 pupils in more than 315 educational institutions, while employing 10,600 educational staff. Gender-equity enrolment had been sustained since the sixties, he said, adding that the Agency's work in the field of primary health care had had a considerable impact in ensuring long and healthy lives among refugees. UNRWA had also established services dealing with the consequences of protracted violence and insecurity, including mental health care and physiotherapy.

"However, many of these outcomes are also a sad witness to the urgent and pressing needs resulting from crises that have started to cripple what has so proudly been achieved," he continued. In Gaza, the overarching concern remained the closure of its borders since June 2007. Hopefully the recent Israeli approval for the entry of the materials necessary to complete humanitarian projects, frozen in June 2007, would now actually commence. The generous pledges of some \$5 billion to rebuild Gaza might now be put to use.

Despite reports of some improvement in the West Bank, poverty rates among refugees there were very high, he said, attributing that increase to the continuing extensions of the Barrier, the associated closure regime, restrictions on the development of land and water resources in Area C, as well as settlement expansion, house demolitions and evictions, including in East Jerusalem. "After more than 40 years of occupation, the West Bank is splintered to a point where its integrity as a viable economic and social unit is deeply compromised," he warned.

Emphasizing that UNRWA's work was limited by a lack of funds and a budget gap of \$141 million, or nearly 25 per cent of its core budget, he said the greatest challenge to humanitarian and development work, however, was the absence of a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The ultimate assistance that the refugees needed was a just and lasting resolution of the conflict – a solution that delivered a viable Palestinian State existing in peace with its neighbours.

MIKE BAILEY, Executive Committee of the Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA), said the organization concurred with and supported the principles and aspirations of the Palestinian people, encapsulated in the Palestinian Authority Programme. Consisting of 90 international non-governmental organizations, AIDA worked to promote development throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, supporting farmers and local cooperatives, while promoting economic development. The Association also worked with national and local authorities and service providers to develop and consolidate reliable, affordable access to basic services, such as water, health and education, always with an overriding concern for humanitarian rights and justice.

Turning to the Palestinian Authority Programme, he said the key guiding principle in translating it into the foundations of a viable Palestinian State was accountability to the people. The international non-governmental organization community would continue to seek better cooperation and collaboration with the Palestinian Authority and Palestinian civil society, he said, expressing hope that the Authority would, in pursuing the Programme's goals, be mindful and vigilant in ensuring the protection of space for advocacy and free expression by Palestinian civil society organizations.

Highlighting the situation in Area C and East Jerusalem, he said the Palestinian Authority did not control the rights, security or access to justice of Palestinians living there. It should take steps to support, politically and diplomatically, the changes needed in Area C and East Jerusalem. The current insistence of the Israeli Government that Jerusalem was wholly and exclusively Israel's capital added significantly to the uncertainties and fears of East Jerusalem Palestinians, he noted, adding that AIDA was also gravely concerned about the blockade imposed on Gaza.

He said that whatever problems the Palestinian people faced in their daily lives – whether because of the Israeli occupation or due to the lack of a Palestinian State – none was as serious as the continual abuse of their human rights and the obstacles they encountered when seeking justice for those abuses. Palestinians had been detained without charge, trial or proper access to legal representation. They told of attacks and detention by Israeli settlers as they went to school or worked their land, he said, calling for support of the human rights of the Palestinian people.

GHANIA MALHIS, Chairperson, Board of Trustees, Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute, Ramallah, said international assistance to the Palestinian people continued to grow. From 1994 to 2000, annual contributions had averaged \$500 million, jumping to an average of \$1 billion during the years 2001-2005. It was expected to reach almost \$2 billion in 2010. Arab assistance, apart from contributions to UNRWA, accounted to about 25 per cent of contributions.

She said the initial analysis of the contributions' impact on the ground had led to two conflicting conclusions. The good news was that the international community and Arab countries had managed to mobilize substantial resources to assist the Palestinian people. But the second conclusion was that it had been almost impossible to trace any positive impact on the ground. Palestinian gross domestic product (GDP) for 2009 was 13 per cent lower than that of 1999, she said, adding that international support was needed to help the Palestinian Authority address a budget deficit equivalent to 39 per cent of GDP.

Based on those numbers, the mobilized resources had been wasted, she said, noting that they had been used to finance a fading peace process rather than funding the very basis of a lasting peace. The approach taken was a reactive one, whereby donors responded to crisis after crisis rather than building a stable environment in which crises could be pre-empted. Such resources always had a negligible impact, no matter the size of the investment. The Palestinian Authority carried a great responsibility for that as it had failed to invest the mobilized funds in development, spending them instead to cover running expenditures.

Describing Israel's responsibility as a "colossal" one, she said that since 1993, that country had continued its colonial practices, isolating the Gaza Strip and the West Bank from each other and from East Jerusalem, confiscating Palestinian lands, building settlements, and constructing a separation barrier. Israel had

confiscated 85 per cent of Palestinian water and uprooted more than 1 million trees, among other material losses.

She said that, in order to find a way forward, it was important to translate efforts into massive reforms and visionary partnerships involving donors, the Palestinian Authority and key sectors of society. The main component of a paradigm shift in developmental strategies must be a capable and innovative workforce. A responsible private sector and civil society must be engaged in order to create the necessary infrastructure for a flourishing Palestinian economy that nurtured creativity and innovation, she said, emphasizing, however, that all such efforts would be of "zero significance" unless they were coupled with a political solution ending the Israeli occupation.

Closing Remarks Session

RIYAD MANSOUR, Permanent Observer of Palestine, said the Palestinian Authority had brought representatives, experts and academicians from the Occupied Palestinian Territory to the Seminar, while United Nations agencies had also sent representatives. They were helping the Palestinians not out of charity or because they could not help themselves, but because the United Nations, since inception, had been mandated to be involved in the question of Palestine until it was resolved in all its aspects.

He said the Palestinian Authority had introduced an ambitious programme to end the occupation in two years by building institutions under the difficult circumstances of occupation. The situation of Palestinian women had been exposed, even though it was embarrassing. That reality must be addressed, he stressed, welcoming the criticism. "We – living under occupation – are not afraid," he added.

Ending the occupation was not only the responsibility of the Palestinian people, who were at the forefront, he said. Governments and United Nations agencies also had responsibilities. "It is unacceptable to say all the right things while Israel continues to do the wrong things," he emphasized, adding that Palestinians expected the right things to be implemented. They were "sick and tired" of hearing the right things being said without anybody offering any practical way to bring Israel into compliance.

The Palestinian Authority was willing to participate in proximity talks, though they were unlikely to succeed, he continued, adding: "But we are not going to wait until they fail." There was global consensus about a two-State solution, and in that context, he urged European and other countries supporting a two-State solution to recognize the State of Palestine within its pre-1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. Palestinians could then "march" to the Security Council to get a "birth certificate" that would recognize the State of Palestine. If some countries wished to add a caveat with some adjustments, the Palestinian Authority might be willing to consider it. After such a resolution, Palestine would seek United Nations membership and raise its flag as the 193rd Member State in 2011, he said.

ZAHIR TANIN (Afghanistan), Head of the Delegation, Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Right of the Palestinian People, noted that in three plenary meetings, experts had analysed the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and made specific recommendations for the success of the Palestinian Authority's Programme entitled "Palestine: Ending the occupation, establishing the State." Expressing appreciation for yesterday's presentation by Palestinian Authority Minister Ali Al-Jarbawi, which had outlined the Programme's main points, he said many other speakers had backed that forward-looking document, which called on Palestinians unilaterally to build the administrative, economic and institutional foundation of an independent State, in spite of the occupation.

He went on to say that experts had reviewed the current socio-economic situation on the ground and examined ways to advance the Palestinian State-building agenda. Participants had also highlighted the imperative of achieving economic independence and sustainable growth through responsible governance and the development of domestic capacities and resources. Other speakers had emphasized the crucial continuing role of international assistance in supporting the Palestinian economy.

The two days of deliberations had been most informative, insightful and inspiring, he continued. Accounts of humanitarian conditions were disheartening, yet they strengthened the determination to provide relief to the Palestinian people. "Simultaneously, we shall keep the focus of the international community on achieving the long-term goals for Palestinian economic and social development and, above all, achieving Palestinian statehood, in accordance with international legitimacy," he said in conclusion.

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