



General Assembly

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Committee on the Inalienable Rights
of the Palestinian People
307th Meeting (AM)

PALESTINIAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE, MEETING FOR FIRST TIME IN 2008,

ELECTS BUREAU, CHARTS COURSE FOR YEAR

Permanent Observer of Palestine Urges Redoubling Of Efforts to Prevent Collapse of Recent Gains in Region

All stakeholders in the Middle East must redouble their efforts to prevent the collapse of recent positive initiatives in the region, the Permanent Observer of Palestine told the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People today, meeting briefly to elect its Bureau and approve its work programme.

Convening its first meeting of the year, the Committee also adopted the agenda for the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, to be held in Amman, Jordan, next week, on 19 and 20 February.

In his statement, the Permanent Observer of Palestine, Riyad Mansour, thanked the Committee for advancing the cause of the Palestinian people as they worked to end the occupation through a just solution based on Security Council resolutions. He said that, since the beginning of the Annapolis process and the successful donor conference in Paris, hope had again risen. In the past two and one half months, however, there had not been any progress — either in terms of the humanitarian tragedy in Gaza or on any aspect of the Road Map. The Israelis were sabotaging the positive results reached at both Annapolis and Paris. Salvaging the process required redoubled efforts to put the peace process back on track and show the Palestinian people that the process was producing positive results.

Speaking on behalf of United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Under-Secretary-General and Chef de Cabinet Vijay Nambiar reaffirmed the continued support of the Secretariat for the Committee's mandate, at a time when there was some hope that a just and comprehensive peace could finally be achieved, despite the many unfortunate events that had occurred in the new year. He called on all parties to work for progress under the Road Map and the Annapolis process, and to ameliorate the humanitarian condition of the Palestinian people, particularly in Gaza. He also called for participants of the Paris donor conference to fulfil their commitments to the Palestinian people. He pledged the continued support of the United Nations to the Palestinian people through its many organizations on the ground and other parts of the system.

The Committee, by acclamation, re-elected Paul Badji of Senegal as Chairman, and named Zahir Tanin (Afghanistan) and Rodrigo Malmierca Diaz (Cuba) as Vice-Chairmen. Saviour Borg of Malta was selected as Rapporteur, also unanimously.

Mr. Badji thanked the Committee for its continued support and said the presence of Mr. Nambiar during the meeting was testament to the Secretary-General's commitment to helping the Palestinian people achieve their inalienable rights to self-determination and sovereignty. Those rights did not translate into working against the rights and interests of Israelis, many of whom had suffered greatly in the recent past, but the Israelis should give serious thought to the sufferings inflicted daily on the Palestinians and put an immediate end to that tragic situation.

Updating the Committee on developments since the Committee last met on 29 November 2007, Mr. Badji noted the appointment of Roberterry as the new Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and the many meetings between various parties that had occurred since the Annapolis talks. He also noted a statement issued 4 February by the Committee expressing alarm over the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Introducing the draft programme of work, he said that the text summarized relevant developments during the sixty-second General Assembly session and explained how the Committee intended to carry out its mandated activities in the coming year. It also expressed the Committee's utmost concern about the situation in the Occupied Territory, including East Jerusalem, denouncing continued closures, the sealing off of the Gaza Strip and unrelenting Israeli incursions into Palestinian population centres. It welcomed the holding of the Annapolis conference as a pivotal point for resuming permanent status negotiations aimed at ending the occupation and establishing a viable Palestinian State.

He said that the objective of the two-day Seminar in Jordan was to build on the positive momentum sparked by the Annapolis conference and the Paris donor conference. Participants would discuss the scope of the socio-economic and humanitarian emergency in the Occupied Palestinian Territory; the United Nations, internal and regional responses to the needs of the Palestinian people; and the immediate and longer-term steps that needed to be taken on the road to Palestinian economic recovery.

Andrew Whitley, Director of the New York Liaison Office of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) provided an overview of the humanitarian situation in Gaza. He said that rocket attacks from Gaza had been condemned, but the high civilian casualties caused by the Israeli response could only be explained by lax rules of engagement and near impunity that came from a lack of accountability. He also described the severe effects of the blockade imposed on Gaza and the closures in the West Bank. He called for a ceasefire, a prisoner exchange, the restoration of Palestinian authority and fulfilment of donor commitments to UNRWA and other mechanisms aimed at assisting the Palestinian people.

The representatives of Tunisia and Malaysia also made statements nominating members to the Committee's Bureau.

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