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President : Mr. Ashe (Antigua and Barbuda)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 36

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People ([A/68/35](#))

Report of the Secretary-General ([A/68/363](#))

Draft resolutions ([A/68/L.12](#), [A/68/L.13](#), [A/68/L.14](#) and [A/68/L.15](#))

The President : As we begin consideration of this afternoon's agenda item, let me reaffirm the undisputed consensus concerning the creation of an independent Palestinian State living side by side with the State of Israel, within secure and mutually recognized borders. This universally accepted solution was robustly reaffirmed recently in resolution 67/19, which granted Palestine the status of non-member observer State in the United Nations.

I take note of the considerable international diplomatic activity that has been taking place in order to restart the stalled negotiations between the two sides. There has been some forward movement on questions of substance, which I welcome. However, at the same time, there have been steps taken that are distinctly unhelpful to, and even undermine, the chances of finding the kind of solution called for by our Assembly. At present, the progression of the negotiations stands in jeopardy, and none of the overwhelming number of supporters of peace and stability in the region wishes to contemplate the possible consequences of such a situation.

The attention of the international community is currently being turned towards a new paradigm for improving the quality of life of human beings beyond 2015. At the heart of the post-2015 development agenda is a concern for people, regardless of race, religion or economic status — a concern for “the dignity and worth of the human person”, in the words of our Charter.

It is extremely regrettable that at such a moment, the people of Palestine find themselves locked in a historic battle for the very physical space that they have long called their home. Such space is a necessary condition to satisfy their basic aspirations today, to live in security, freedom, honour and dignity. Human dignity cannot be compartmentalized. The desecration of humanity, whether in the West Bank or in Gaza or in Syria or elsewhere, is the desecration of humanity everywhere, and that should be of concern to all people.

In my address to the Assembly on 14 June (see A/67/PV.87), I informed Member States that my priority for the sixty-eighth session was “The post-2015 development agenda: setting the stage”. In those remarks, I signalled my intention to hold a number of thematic debates, including one on “ensuring stable and peaceful societies”. That activity is intended to feed into the articulation of the post-2015 development agenda, which is an agenda for all peoples, countries and regions, including the Middle East. That region, regrettably, seems to be one where the dream of achieving peace and stability faces its keenest challenges, with causes that are both internal and external. In that regard, the political and social unrest that has taken place in a number of countries during the past few years readily comes to mind.

It is for that reason that I welcome the limited-term agreement recently announced by the P5+1 and Iran regarding the latter's nuclear programme. The negotiations that preceded the announcement of the agreement had begun with a dangerous rise in suspicions regarding the nature of Iran's nuclear programme. I believe, and I hope, this weekend's agreement represents a step in the direction of easing those tensions and suspicions. Therefore, I trust that as we all look towards the future, memories of past wrongs, whether in word or deed, will not unduly influence perceptions of present intentions.

I look forward to the timely and good-faith implementation of the terms of that instrument, as a contribution to strengthening peace and stability in the Middle East. I expect that such implementation will guide us on the path from confrontation to dialogue — dialogue that is aimed at strengthening peace, security and well-being within and among peoples. For it is through dialogue that we have a better understanding of each other's fears and suspicions. It is through dialogue that we show signs that we are as mindful of the hurts of others as we are of our own. It is through dialogue that we foster the spirit of trust and confidence that alone can sustain and give strength to our decisions. And it is through dialogue that we will identify the pathways toward a just, lasting and mutually satisfactory agreement between the independent States of Israel and Palestine, and towards a stable and peaceful Middle East in general.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Ambassador Diallo of Senegal, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to introduce draft resolutions A/68/L.12, A/68/L.13, A/68/L.14 and A/68/L.15.

Mr. Diallo (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (*spoke in French*): At the outset, let me thank all the delegations, and you personally, Mr. President, for your active participation in this morning's special meeting dedicated to the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Sixty-six years ago, the General Assembly solemnly recognized two States, only one of which actually saw the light of day. It was not until 29 November 2012 that the General Assembly finally deigned to grant Palestine the status of an observer State. Our Committee strongly supported that decision, which we believed would help to revitalize the peace process. That view was borne out by events, which means that we are on the right track, as symbolically illustrated by the first vote of the State of Palestine in the General Assembly, last Monday, 18 November (see A/68/PV.53). It is our fervent wish that by next year we will be welcoming President Mahmoud Abbas to the United Nations as leader of a sovereign and independent Member State.

The various parties, whose tenacious commitment moved the peace process forward, deserve enormous credit, including the United States of America, the League of Arab States, Jordan, the European Union, the Quartet and the Secretary-General. However, there are worrying signs that the process is undergoing a deep crisis of confidence, mainly as a result of the acceleration of illegal settlement activities, which caused the Palestinian negotiating team to withdraw in protest.

It is our view that the General Assembly, guarantor of international legitimacy, has an important role to play in the critical year ahead, with a view to maintaining the integrity of the process. The four draft resolutions that I would now like to introduce to the Assembly under the present agenda item incorporate our thinking in that respect.

During the past year, our Committee has redoubled its efforts to build on the momentum generated by resolution 67/19. We analysed all the implications of the new political reality of the creation of a State under occupation, which, from our point of view, presents new possibilities.

The first three draft resolutions are related to the work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Department of Political Affairs, and the special information programme on the Question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information. They reaffirm the important mandates entrusted to those entities by the General Assembly. As in the past, the Committee intends to make sure that the resources available to it are used in an optimal manner. The draft resolutions have been subject to extensive consultation with regional groups and were approved by the Committee. They have been circulated as documents A/68/L.12, A/68/L.13 and A/68/L.14, which are now before members. There are some new elements which I will clarify.

Over the years, the United Nations has declared international years dedicated to raising awareness about a variety of issues of particular importance to the international community. However, there has never been a year dedicated to the question of Palestine, which has been an item on the United Nations agenda for a very long time, still unresolved despite years of effort. Our Committee wanted to correct that historical imbalance, which is why draft resolution A/68/L.12 proposes that the Assembly proclaim the year 2014 as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People and that it request the Committee to organize activities in cooperation with Governments, relevant organizations of the United Nations system, intergovernmental organizations and civil society.

We chose the year 2014 to focus the attention of the international community on the issue and afford it the opportunity to contribute to the peace process currently under way. In the spirit of budgetary discipline, and fully aware of the financial constraints that the United Nations is facing, it is important to note that we will not be requesting additional resources from the regular budget. We will appeal to all supporters of the Palestinian cause to contribute generously to the initiative in the form of extrabudgetary funds.

Bear in mind that international years do not concern just the United Nations. Governments, intergovernmental organizations and civil society traditionally launch the bulk of activities relating to international years, including, for example, conferences, forums, youth camps, exhibitions, competitions, briefings, rallies, petitions, concerts, film screenings, workshops, festivals and so much more. We will be inviting members to share their ideas in the months ahead in order to shape and coordinate this major undertaking. I encourage Member States to co-sponsor the draft resolutions.

The fourth draft resolution, A/68/L.15, is entitled "Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine". It reaffirms the position of the General Assembly with regard to the essential elements of such a settlement and includes references to the developments of the past year. It welcomes the resumption of negotiations on all permanent-status issues within a nine-month time frame. It also encourages all States and intergovernmental organizations to pursue policies that ensure respect for their obligations under international law, in particular with regard to settlements.

I hope that these provisions and all others in the draft texts will meet the Assembly's strong support. The four draft resolutions that I have just introduced outline positions, mandates and programmes of special importance, particularly at the present crucial juncture. Our Committee is fully committed to the cause of Israeli-Palestinian peace. A vote in favour of the four draft resolutions will certainly be a vote in favour of peace.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Christopher Grima of Malta, Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to introduce the report of the Committee.

Mr. Grima (Malta), Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People: It is an honour for me, in my capacity as Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to present to the General Assembly the annual report of the Committee, contained in document A/68/35. Allow me to summarize each section of the report.

After the introduction of the report, chapters II and III outline the mandate entrusted to the Committee by the General Assembly and the organization of the Committee's work during the year. Under Chapter IV, the report reviews the situation relating to the question of Palestine, as monitored by the Committee, and contains a detailed factual account of the developments that have taken place in the period under review, which ended on 6 October 2013. The most recent events will be reflected in the next report.

Chapter V describes the action taken by the Committee, including the Chairman's participation in General Assembly and Security Council debates, statements issued by the Committee and its Bureau, and the continued dialogue between the Committee and members of intergovernmental organizations. This chapter also reports on the various international meetings and conferences organized by the Committee, as well as other mandated activities carried out by the Division for Palestinian Rights.

Chapter VI provides an overview of the work done over the year by the Department of Public Information pursuant to resolution 67/22 of 30 November 2012.

The last chapter of the report contains the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee, in which the Committee reiterates its view that the admission of Palestine as a non-member observer State by the General Assembly (see resolution 67/19) constituted an important step towards the realization of the two-State solution. That gave a new urgency to the resumption of the peace process and vested the State of Palestine with important additional rights to join international legal frameworks and to contribute to the work of the United Nations system as a whole. The Committee calls on all Member States to extend full diplomatic recognition to the State of Palestine and on the Security Council to revisit the issue of Palestine's full membership.

Welcoming the resumption of Israeli-Palestinian direct negotiations, the Committee calls for the sustained engagement and support of the international community, including a revitalized Quartet, which is vital to ensure that the parties negotiate in good faith, live up to their commitments and refrain from steps that jeopardize negotiations. The current diplomatic initiative may represent the final window of opportunity to achieve a negotiated two-State solution. In that regard, the Committee expresses its concern about Israel's settlement activity, which threatens to derail negotiations. The Committee welcomes the recently adopted European Union (EU) guidelines that prohibit funding by EU institutions for Israeli entities connected with the settlements as a first step towards fulfilling obligations under international law and calls for further international action against settlements.

The Committee condemns all attacks against civilians and calls on the parties to adhere to the terms of the Gaza ceasefire agreement. It calls upon the Security Council and the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to act urgently to uphold international humanitarian law and guarantee the protection of civilians.

The Committee also stresses the importance of Palestinian unity under the legitimate leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas to secure a comprehensive peace. It expresses its concern that the accomplishments made towards Palestinian State-building and reform are now endangered, owing to the chronic financial crisis, and calls upon donors to meet their prior commitments and to provide additional aid to avert further deterioration.

The Committee suggests that its programme of international meetings and conferences in 2014 be focused on widening international support for the achievement of

the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the creation of a favourable atmosphere for the success of the resumed permanent-status negotiations.

The Committee will mobilize increased international scrutiny of the developments on the ground, in particular settlement activities, and will emphasize responsibility and promote action by the international community to put an end to all illegal Israeli policies and practices in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. The Committee will also examine the legal ramifications of the new international status of the State of Palestine and will continue to call attention to the plight of the Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli jails and urge a resolution of their plight.

The Committee will continue to encourage civil society partners to work with their national Governments, parliamentarians and other institutions with a view to gaining their full support for the work of the United Nations on the question of Palestine. It expresses the hope that the reactivated working group will help to build stronger partnerships with civil society. It also encourages its members and observers to mobilize their respective civil societies at the national level, in particular young people, and to establish solidarity committees with the State of Palestine.

The Committee will reach out to all regional groups at the United Nations with a view to expanding its membership. It will actively work to organize more thematic debates on the question of Palestine in various United Nations forums. The Committee calls upon the General Assembly to proclaim an international year of solidarity with the Palestinian people.

The Committee requests the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat to continue its substantive and secretariat support, the programme of research, monitoring and publications and other informational activities in support of the Committee's communication strategy. The Committee encourages voluntary contributions from members and observers in line with their capacity to put the programme on a solid financial footing.

Finally, the Committee reiterates its view that the special information programme on the Question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information has made an important contribution to informing the media and the public of the relevant issues, and requests the continuation of the programme.

In closing, I would like to express the hope that the report that I have just presented will be of assistance to the General Assembly in its deliberations on the question of Palestine.

The President: I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): I am honoured to address the General Assembly at this important debate on behalf of the State of Palestine. On the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I reaffirm the gratitude of the Palestinian people and Government for the compelling expressions of solidarity received from all around the world, including those conveyed today at this commemorative meeting, with the participation of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

We express our appreciation to the Chair of the Committee, Ambassador Diallo of Senegal, for presiding over this special meeting and for his statement and introduction of the draft resolutions on the question of Palestine today. We also express our gratitude to the Rapporteur of the Committee, Ambassador Grima of Malta, for having introduced the Committee's report (A/68/35) and to the other members of the Bureau, including the Ambassadors of Afghanistan, Cuba, Indonesia, Namibia and Nicaragua, and all members and observers of the Committee for their principled support of the just cause of Palestine. I also commend the efforts of the Division for Palestinian Rights and the special information programme on Palestine of the Department of Public Information.

I thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his report on the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine (A/68/363) and for his tireless efforts. I would like to express our appreciation for the support of the United Nations system for the noble goal of peace and for the efforts of Personal Representative of the Secretary-General Robert Serry, of the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, and of the Department of Political Affairs and all United Nations agencies on the ground assisting the Palestinian people, including, inter alia, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the United Nations Development Programme, UNICEF, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the World Food Programme, UN-Women, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Here, we also express our appreciation for the commitment of the first United Nations Development Assistance Framework for the State of Palestine, aimed at enhancing development support and assistance to the Palestinian people and strengthening institutional capacity in line with national priorities. Undoubtedly, the international political, humanitarian, financial and moral support extended over the decades has helped sustain the Palestinian people and bolster their resilience as they have confronted innumerable hardships, in exile and under occupation, while awaiting the realization of their inalienable rights, justice and peace. We are grateful for the support, while again calling on the international community to exert all possible efforts, in line with relevant resolutions, the Charter of the United Nations and international law, to redress the injustice the Palestinian people have endured for far too long.

Our appeals to the international community are directly linked to the permanent responsibility of the United Nations towards the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all aspects. That responsibility is being upheld by the international community in many ways. However, political progress remains elusive, due to Israel's flagrant contempt for the resolutions and the authority of the United Nations and to the absence of political will characterized by the paralysis of the Security Council, which has precluded accountability by Israel, the implementation of relevant resolutions, and the advancement of a just peace.

The General Assembly, however, continues to act to uphold its responsibilities. During the last debate on the question of Palestine, on 29 November 2012, the Assembly undertook the historic, courageous decision to accord to Palestine non-member observer State status in the United Nations. With the adoption of resolution [67/19](#) — which was fully consistent with the right to self-determination enshrined in the Charter and in relevant resolutions, from resolutions [181 \(II\)](#), [194 \(II\)](#), and Security Council resolution [242 \(1967\)](#) — to the present day — another milestone was set in the long march of the Palestinian people to freedom and the realization of their inalienable rights and legitimate national aspirations.

Resolution 67/19 constitutes an important step towards ensuring the State of Palestine's rightful place among the community of nations, as the application submitted in 2011 by President Abbas for full United Nations membership regrettably remains pending before the Security Council. We are certain that the Assembly's overwhelming support for this decision will be considered on the right side of history and deemed an essential step towards rectifying this injustice and fulfilling the international covenant in this regard, 65 years after the adoption of resolution 181 (II) partitioning Mandate Palestine and the onset of Al-Nakba of the Palestinian people.

We are proud that the support for resolution 67/19 came from all corners of the globe, comprising countries from every major political and regional group. That initiative was rightly viewed as a crucial opportunity to reaffirm support for, and to salvage, the two-State solution at a time when its viability and popular conviction in it were being seriously eroded by the illegal policies of Israel, the occupying Power, in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, the territory constituting the State of Palestine. It was also an opportunity to reaffirm support for the Palestinian people's right to self-determination, freedom from occupation and the independence of their State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In fact, the global position in support of the two-State solution — based on the parameters of, inter alia, the borders of 4 June 1967, Jerusalem as the shared capital of the two States, and a just, agreed solution for the Palestinian refugees, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map — is the position to which the Palestinian people and leadership have been committed for at least a quarter of a century, since the formal acceptance of the two-State solution with the adoption of the Declaration of Independence of the State of Palestine in 1988. That significant compromise — to establish our State on only 22 per cent of our historic homeland for the sake of restoring our rights, achieving our freedom and ending the conflict — is among the boldest reflections of the Palestinian commitment to peace and coexistence with Israel, despite the great injustice endured by our people. That includes the Palestine refugees, who number over five million people and continue to suffer the untold hardships of dispossession and exile, including those resulting from the many crises that have wracked the region, the most recent being the tragic conflict in Syria, which has gravely affected the Palestine refugee community.

The State of Palestine is upholding that commitment, as reflected in the serious engagement in all stages of the peace process from the Madrid Conference to its legitimate actions at the United Nations to safeguard and promote the rights of the Palestinian people. We continue to act responsibly, respecting international law and United Nations resolutions, fully cognizant of the high risks entailed in a failure to seize the remaining opportunity for realizing the two-State solution, a point starkly underscored by the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs in his recent briefing to the Security Council (see S/PV.7063).

We have thus engaged in over 20 rounds of talks with Israel in the context of the direct talks resumed on 29 July 2013, on the initiative of United States Secretary of State Kerry and with the vital support of the League of Arab States, as well as the European Union, the Russian Federation and the United Nations as members of the Quartet, and all concerned States from around the world. During the negotiations, Palestine has maintained focus on the objectives of peace and coexistence, determined to overcome the obstacles that have repeatedly undermined the process.

Unfortunately, despite the genuine efforts we are exerting and despite the international community's full support, real progress remains elusive and hopes are diminishing as the challenges on the ground persist. Provocative Israeli actions, distractions and declarations undermine the spirit and aim of the negotiations to justly resolve all final-status issues — Jerusalem, the Palestinian refugees, settlements, borders, water, security and prisoners. That is reflected the most in the high

tensions and mistrust provoked by Israel's recent threats to construct thousands more settlement units, in grave breach of international law, in blatant disregard for global calls to halt them, and in contradiction of the basis for resumed negotiations and the goals of the peace process.

The reality on the ground in occupied Palestine is critical. Illegal and destructive Israeli actions, be they by the Government, its occupying forces or its extremist settlers, are sowing deep doubts about Israel's true intentions in the negotiations. Those actions are reinforcing the notion that it is only using this period to further entrench its illegal settlement enterprise and de facto annexation of Palestinian land and to continue its subjugation of the Palestinian people, while simultaneously attempting to ease international pressure in that regard.

Over the past year, Israel has intensified its aggression, colonization and collective punishment against the Palestinian people, in flagrant breach of international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, the human rights covenants, and resolutions of the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Human Rights Council, the Economic and Social Council and UNESCO and other bodies, in disrespect of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, and in arrogant disregard of international calls for compliance.

This has included, inter alia, the relentless construction of settlements and the wall, particularly in and around occupied East Jerusalem, Bethlehem and the Jordan Valley. Hundreds of dunums of land have been confiscated, and Palestinian civilians have been forcibly displaced; that has especially affected Bedouin families. Hundreds of homes and properties have been demolished, heavily targeting Palestinian Jerusalemites and Area C. There have been violent military raids by the occupying forces, causing loss of life, injury and property destruction. Excessive force has been used against peaceful civilian protesters, and there have been daily arrests and detention of civilians. More than 4,000 were arrested in the reporting period alone, as indicated by the Secretary-General. Nearly 5,000 Palestinians endure continued imprisonment under horrific conditions and abuse, including hundreds of children and prisoners stricken with cancer and prisoners on hunger strike, whose lives are endangered.

A myriad of measures obstruct the movement of persons and goods, foremost among which is the illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip. Religious sensitivities are aggravated, risking the outbreak of religious conflict, with incessant provocations by Israeli extremists against holy sites, especially at Al-Haram Al-Sharif, the detention of the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, and the harassment of worshippers, including during Christian Easter observances and the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

Extremist Israeli settlers have continued their criminal rampages, terrorizing Palestinian civilians, destroying farmlands and thousands of trees, affecting the livelihoods of thousands of families. They have vandalized churches and mosques and threatened the sanctity of Al-Aqsa Mosque. The settlers act with support, protection and incitement from Israeli officials, who persist in encouraging colonization of the Palestinian land and in their rejection of the two-State solution and the rights, and even existence, of the Palestinian people.

With regard to the situation in the Gaza Strip, it is condemnable that the inhumane Israeli blockade has entered its seventh year, in collective punishment of the entire Palestinian civilian population there and in grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention. The blockade remains the cause of vast humanitarian suffering, exacerbating poverty and other socioeconomic ills and despair. It continues to impede the reconstruction of thousands of homes and of destroyed civilian infrastructure and to prevent economic recovery, as imports remain restricted and exports nearly prohibited. A water and energy crisis also persists in Gaza. Ninety per cent of the water is unfit for human consumption, and power outages of up to 16 hours a day are severely impairing the function of hospitals, schools, water and sanitation networks, businesses and home life.

We reiterate our calls for an end to the Israeli blockade, the illegal colonization of our land, the collective punishment of our people and the violation of their human rights, including of the thousands of Palestinians who remain imprisoned by the occupying Power and who must be released. Such actions constitute systematic violations of human rights law and of grave breaches of international humanitarian law, under which our people are entitled to protection. They are contrary to the good faith required to lead the negotiations to the achievement of peace.

We reiterate that the two-State solution and Israel's settlement campaign are completely irreconcilable and that such illegal measures cannot be justified under any pretext. The international consensus is clear — settlement activities are illegal, constitute the major obstacle to peace and must be halted. Speaking of peace while at the same time engaging in its destruction makes a mockery of the international community's support for the two-State solution and sabotages all efforts in that regard, as does claiming readiness to negotiate without conditions while actually imposing conditions on the ground in the form of illegal facts that entrench the occupation and obstruct peace.

We are at a critical juncture in the long, historic search for peace, to which the State of Palestine is fully committed, as reflected in our adherence to the resumed negotiations and the parameters of the peace process upon which international consensus prevails. The decisions made now will determine whether the solution of two States — the State of Palestine and State of Israel living side by side in peace and security based on the pre-1967 borders — will be achieved, or whether that solution will be brought to an end by Israel's illegal policies.

Our collective effort, no matter how well intentioned, will fail, with far-reaching consequences, if Israel persists with the illegal policies of its 46-year military occupation and continues to undermine the foundations of a peaceful solution. That will trigger the onset of alternative efforts, political, legal and popular, to end the injustice and attain the rights of the Palestinian people — aspirations that they will never relinquish.

In order to sustain meaningful negotiations and overcome the political impasse towards the conclusion of a peace agreement, the reality on the ground must be immediately redressed. Israel must tangibly demonstrate, in word and in deed, its willingness to end its occupation and make peace. The mentality and policies of occupation, in all manifestations, must end. That is imperative to stem the decline of the situation, shore up popular belief in the possibility for peace, build trust between the parties and salvage this final chance for the two-State solution.

In the absence of a change in Israel's behaviour, we must continue to call for international action to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to respect all of its legal obligations. The message must be conveyed that Israel must cease all illegal policies and that the price of occupation is steep, while much is to be gained from peace. Violations must be met with measures for accountability. Failure to do so would be a disservice to the cause of peace, endangering the future of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples and prospects for peace and security in the Middle East and beyond.

The time is now for meaningful action to promote a just and lasting solution that will ensure the attainment of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the establishment of peace between Palestine and Israel. That constitutes the cornerstone of Arab-Israeli peace, as set out in the Arab Peace Initiative, a historic initiative for comprehensive regional peace.

We are at a crossroads. We reiterate our appeal to all States, intergovernmental organizations, the United Nations system as a whole and civil society to extend the support necessary to realize Palestinian-Israeli peace, which is all the more urgent in the context of the dramatic developments in our region.

For its part, the State of Palestine will continue to act responsibly, upholding its commitment to peace and cooperating with all international efforts in this regard, on the basis of its belief in the rule of law and the international resolve to secure a just solution. Internally, we will continue to develop our national institutions to strengthen our State's foundations, serve our people and ease their hardships while still under occupation. We are grateful for the international support of those efforts, the progress of which is well documented by the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians, the World Bank and the United Nations, despite the constraints and setbacks due to Israel's unlawful actions and the ongoing financial crisis. We will also continue to strive for reconciliation, which is so vital for achieving Palestinian national aspirations.

The Palestinian leadership is determined to bring an end to the tragedy endured by our people. We are determined to peacefully achieve the independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, to fulfil the rights of the Palestinian people, including Palestinian refugees, and to establish peace and security between Palestine and Israel. We are grateful for the principled support of all concerned States and peoples worldwide and urge that no effort be spared to achieve long-overdue freedom, justice and dignity for the Palestinian people. In that regard, we appeal for support for the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People in 2014 as an important contribution towards fostering the necessary momentum and political will in the year ahead to achieve the rights of our people and make Palestinian-Israeli peace a reality.

Mr. Prosser (Israel): John Fitzgerald Kennedy said that the great enemy of the truth is very often not the lie but the myth — persistent, persuasive and unrealistic. This is the third year that I am standing before the Assembly to make a statement on this agenda item, and once again I experience a sense of déjà vu as I listen to a distortion of history. The greatest legends of Greek mythology cannot rival the fables and fabrications that have come to be associated with this debate.

This debate may take place only once a year, but anti-Israel bias pervades the United Nations system all year round. In 2012, the Assembly found the time to adopt 22 resolutions condemning Israel, compared with only four that single out other nations. The worst human rights abusers receive a fraction of the condemnation that Israel — the only democracy in the Middle East — receives. Those irresponsible actions have irreversible consequences. The States that rubberstamp the anti-Israel resolutions every year have given the Palestinians a false sense of reality and fed their culture of victimhood.

It has only been one year since the Assembly voted to change the Palestinian delegation's status at the United Nations. To all those who voted in favour of the resolution (resolution 67/19) last November, I ask the following. What exactly has changed? Did the resolution give the Palestinian Authority control over Gaza? Not

in the least. Gaza comprises 40 per cent of the territory that President Abbas claims to represent, but he has not set foot in the area in six years. It seems to me that the Palestinian Authority has been asserting more control over some United Nations bodies than it does over the Gaza Strip. Since 2007, Gaza has been in the hands of Hamas, a terrorist organization that rains missiles on Israel's civilians.

Did the resolution adopted last year motivate the Palestinian Authority to finally hold elections? Not at all. Perhaps someone in the Assembly should remind the Palestinian Authority that its mandate expired in 2009 and that one election does not mean you can rule forever. At the same time, I have to wonder where all the countries that claim to stand for democratic values are. They are quick to cast judgment on Israel, but fall strangely silent when the Palestinians do not cast votes.

Did the resolution adopted last year inspire the Palestinian Authority to prepare their people for peace? Not in the least. Rather than teaching their children tolerance and mutual recognition, the Palestinian leadership continues to foster a culture of incitement. Palestinian Media Watch will soon release a report documenting hundreds of examples of Palestinian incitement since the peace talks began. One such example is the football teams named in honour of terrorists responsible for some of the deadliest attacks against Israelis. Instead of teaching kids to score goals, the Palestinian leadership's goal is to glorify murderers.

Israel recently made the difficult decision to release 26 convicted murderers as part of its commitment to advancing the peace talks. Shortly after, the Palestinian Authority (PA) announced that each of those 26 terrorists would be rewarded with \$50,000, and some will earn as much as Palestinian ministers. The motto of the PA's pension plan seems to be "the more you slay, the more we pay".

As the PA sings the praises of murderers, the international community tunes out and mysteriously loses its voice. I wonder how taxpayers in London or Luxemburg would feel knowing that their tax dollars were being used to reward convicted murderers? The Palestinian leadership has yet to learn an important lesson. You cannot abuse others and call yourself the abused. You cannot claim your history is being denied while denying the history of the Jewish nation.

In Gaza, Hamas is poisoning the hearts and minds of the next generation. They recently published a textbook for 50,000 high-school students in which page after page denies Judaism's historical connection to the land of Israel and describes Zionism as racism. Textbooks should be for education, but Hamas uses them for provocation, indoctrination and escalation.

Those are just the most recent examples of the incitement targeting the next generation. Terrorism does not begin with an attack on a bus or in a pizza parlour. It begins in classrooms, mosques and day camps where Palestinian children are being taught prejudice instead of peace, terror instead of tolerance, and martyrdom instead of mutual understanding.

That incitement is having deadly consequences. The number of Palestinian terror attacks against Israel doubled from 2011 to 2012. Thus far in 2013, there have been 1,163 terror attacks against Israelis and dozens of attempted kidnappings. Just over a week ago, Eden Atias, a 19-year-old Israeli soldier, was stabbed to death while sleeping on a passenger bus. Eden was the latest victim of the escalating terror attacks against Israelis. In September, 20-year-old Tomer Hazan was murdered, two soldiers were injured in an attack near Nablus and a 9-year-old girl was stabbed while playing in her front yard. In October, four Israeli civilians were injured in a stabbing attack, and Sraya Ofer was brutally beaten to death outside his home in the Jordan Rift Valley.

All those who claim to be working to advance peace must remind the Palestinians that there are no shortcuts. Peace is not achieved by changing a name plate at the United Nations, by unilateral actions or by adopting a string of anti-Israeli resolutions, and it will not be achieved in Manhattan's Midtown East, but rather in the Middle East. So long as the Palestinian leadership chooses symbolism over pragmatism, it will be harder to achieve peace.

In a few days, on 29 November, the United Nations will observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Let me take a moment to remind the Assembly of what really occurred on that day in history. On 29 November 1947, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), which came to be known as the partition plan. That resolution provided for the establishment of a Jewish State and an Arab State. The Jews accepted huge compromises and gave up on dreams the Jewish people had harboured for generations. But they welcomed the plan and joyously declared a new State in their ancient homeland. Chaim Weizmann, who later became the first President of the State of Israel, proclaimed,

"It is the profound desire of our people to establish relations of harmony and mutual respect with their Arab fellow citizens [and] with the neighbouring Arab States".

Rather than accept the partition plan, five surrounding Arab nations declared war on the newborn Jewish State. Their intentions were made clear by Azzam Pasha, the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, who said,

"[I]t will be a war of elimination and it will be a dangerous massacre which history will record similarly to the Mongol massacre or the wars of the Crusades."

The Arabs not only rejected the United Nations offer of a Palestinian State, they then declared war against the Jewish State. Since losing that war, they have perpetuated the Palestinian refugee problem and still have the audacity to demand solidarity. Broadway may be down the street in New York, but the real theatre is here at the United Nations. In this Hall, the Arab nations shine a spotlight on the Palestinian refugees, but back home in the Middle East they leave them in the dark. Since 1948, the Arab States have refused to accept the Palestinian refugees into their societies, confined them to refugee camps and passed discriminatory laws.

Resolution 181 (II) speaks of the creation of a "Jewish State" no fewer than 25 times. And yet today, 66 years later, has anyone heard Palestinian leaders utter the term "Jewish State"? Of course not. Palestinian leaders call for an independent Palestinian State, but they insist that the Palestinian people return to the Jewish State. That is a euphemism for the destruction of the State of Israel and the single greatest hurdle to achieving peace. Many in this Hall are convinced that the root of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the settlements. In fact, from the time that Israel gained its independence in 1948, until 1967, the West Bank was in Jordanian hands and Gaza in Egyptian hands. Throughout that time there was not a single settlement, yet the Palestinians still sought our destruction. Today, just 2 per cent of the Israeli population lives in settlements, but they are blamed for 100 per cent of the problems. The math simply does not add up.

Israel is the ancient homeland of the Jewish people. It is the birthplace of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; the land where Moses and Joshua led the Jewish people and King Solomon built the Jewish Temple. Israel is the place where the Bible tells us about David, who was made king and laid the cornerstone for his palace in Jerusalem, the eternal capital of the Jewish people. That was King David from Judea, not King David from the West Bank, and certainly not King David from the so-called occupied territories. After all, a person cannot occupy his own home. And for thousands of years, Jerusalem served as the capital of the Jewish people. Three thousand years ago, my ancestors walked the same streets that my children walk, spoke the same language that I speak and prayed at the very same Temple Mount where millions of Jews pray every day.

Yet all of those historical facts are brushed aside. Instead, all we hear in the Assembly are rants, rhetoric and biased resolutions. It does not take a fortune teller to predict the language in those resolutions. After all, the same text is copied and pasted each year, much of it dating back five decades. Yet country after country sees no problem in standing up and parroting propaganda. I am reminded of words that are sometimes ascribed to President John F. Kennedy, to the effect that however big the propaganda may be, if it is repeated often enough the masses will regard it as the truth.

The draft resolutions being voted on today (A/68/L.12, A/68/L.13, A/68/L.14 and A/68/L.15) have no relationship to the facts on the ground. Just last week the United Nations adopted nine resolutions condemning Israel. One of them condemned Israel's treatment of the Syrian people. Israel's treatment of the Syrian people? It is inconceivable that while Israeli hospitals are treating Syrians who have escaped Al-Assad's massacre, the United Nations is denouncing Israel's treatment of Syrians. As if that were not enough, the General Assembly will soon vote on another draft resolution calling on Israel to hand over the Golan Heights and its residents to Syria. It is nothing short of absurd for the United Nations to demand that even more civilians be subject to Al-Assad's brutality.

At the United Nations, there are countless resolutions that delegitimize and demonize Israel. Why do I never hear anyone speak about all the good work that Israel is doing for the Palestinians? While the Palestinians are busy condemning Israel at the United Nations, Israel is busy supporting the Palestinian economy and developing its infrastructure. Today, more than 100,000 Palestinians earn their living in Israel, making up more than 10 per cent of Palestinian gross domestic product. Israel is also building four electrical substations and providing more than 1,400 million gallons of clean water annually. Palestinians receive world-class health-care services in hospitals throughout the country. In the first half of 2013 alone, more than 94,000 Palestinians received treatment in Israeli hospitals. And we continue to give, even as our goodwill is knowingly exploited. While the Israel Defense Forces uncover one terror tunnel after another, the flow of consumer goods continues into Gaza uninterrupted. Each day, the State of Israel delivers 400 truckloads to the Palestinian people via the Keren Shalom terminal.

In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act — a remark that has been attributed to George Orwell. The truth is that Israel is not just speaking about peace; it is demonstrating its commitment every single day. Peace is a central value of Israel's society, and it has been the goal of the Israeli people and every Israeli leader since the State was re-established, 65 years ago. We will not be deterred from that goal. Israel has always extended its hand for peace, and it will continue to do so for our children and grandchildren. When we faced an Arab leader who wanted peace, we made peace. That was the case with Egypt and with Jordan. We are committed to negotiating with our Palestinian neighbours so that our two peoples can live side by side in peace, dignity and freedom.

I call on my colleagues in this Hall not to be distracted by unilateral efforts and biased resolutions. Remind the Palestinians to take responsibility and that the only way to reach a comprehensive peace deal is through hard work and direct negotiations. Working together, we in this Hall can all make history by making peace. Working together, we can author a better future, one where our people can live in security, free from violence, and where the horizon is ripe with opportunity and our children can live side by side in peace.

Mr. Dehghani (Islamic Republic of Iran): I have the honour to address the General Assembly today on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) on agenda item 36, entitled "Question of Palestine".

This important debate coincides with the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people. On this day, the international community reaffirms its continued and unwavering support for, and solidarity with, the long-suffering people of Palestine in their national struggle to achieve the independence of their State, peace and justice. NAM pays tribute to the resilience of the Palestinian people in their pursuit of their legitimate national aspirations, which they have for too long been unjustly denied.

Following the historic adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 67/19, of 29 November 2012, which accorded to Palestine non-member observer State status in the United Nations, Israel, the occupying Power, has blatantly intensified its illegal settlement activities, along with many other unlawful policies and practices in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. The situation continues to be extremely severe in the Jordan Valley — where thousands of Palestinians, including hundreds of Bedouin families, have been displaced and thousands more are at risk of forced displacement due to Israel's illegal colonization — as well as in and around occupied East Jerusalem, where the occupying Power continues to pursue measures aimed at the quiet transfer or depopulation of the indigenous Palestinian inhabitants and at ensuring a Jewish majority in the city. In that regard, NAM calls for a complete end to all Israeli settlement activities, the construction of the wall, home demolitions, residency revocations, excavation, including near Al-Haram Al-Sharif, and the closure of Palestinian institutions in the city.

We condemn Israel's detention and imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians, including women and children, who are subjected to deplorable conditions of captivity and all forms of ill treatment. We also condemn the ongoing terror, violence and provocations by extremist Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians and property, including homes, agricultural lands and Muslim and Christian holy sites. We caution that such actions are fuelling religious sensitivities, which risk further destabilization and must be brought to an immediate end by the occupying Power, which bears responsibility for all of the illegal colonization activities in the occupied Palestinian territory and for their consequences and must be held accountable for those crimes.

Israel, the occupying Power, continues the illegal construction of settlements and networks of Israeli-only bypass roads linking settlements, the confiscation of vast land areas and the transfer of Israeli settlers to the occupied Palestinian territory, as it has flagrantly pushed ahead with its plans to colonize and de facto annex more Palestinian land, even in the midst of a peace process. The Non-Aligned Movement remains firm in its condemnation of Israel's illegal settlement policies and practices. We stress that all such unlawful attempts to alter the demographic composition, character and status of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, are all null and void and have no validity whatsoever. In that connection, the Movement calls for urgent action and practical measures by the international community, in particular by the Security Council, to compel the occupying Power to cease completely its settlement campaign in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and to abide by all of its obligations under international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, United Nations resolutions, the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (A/ES-10/273) and its obligations under the road map in that regard.

The sea, air and land blockade of Gaza imposed by Israel, the occupying Power, entered its seventh year in June, deepening poverty and despair among the more than 1.7 million Palestinians living there. The devastating impact of the illegal blockade and the repercussions of the trauma, destruction and displacement inflicted by Israeli military aggression, particularly in 2008, 2009 and 2012, have continued to impact every human right and to disrupt every aspect of life. The blockade constitutes collective punishment of the entire Palestinian civilian population in Gaza, which is in grave breach of international humanitarian law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention. In that regard, the Movement calls upon Israel, the occupying Power, to promptly and unconditionally end its illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip and to open all its crossing points to ensure the regular and sustained movement of persons and goods, in accordance with its obligations under international law, Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and all other relevant United Nations resolutions.

Israel has continued its arbitrary and abusive imprisonment and detention of thousands of Palestinian civilians, including children as young as 12 years old, who are being subjected, inter alia, to forced interrogation, violent beatings, psychological harassment and humiliation, unhygienic conditions, solitary confinement, torture, denial of access to medical care, education, family visits and medical neglect, leading to death. It is the conviction of the Movement, as stated in the Declaration on Palestine Political Prisoners, drafted at the May 2012 Ministerial Meeting of the Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement, and adopted by the sixteenth Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in Tehran in August 2012, that Palestinian prisoners should be immediately released and their plight addressed by the international community, particularly the Security Council and the Human Rights Council.

NAM expresses deep concern at the lack of progress in the Middle East peace process and regrets the fact that, even as peace negotiations have resumed, pessimism is overtaking hope, as every passing day reaffirms that Israel, the occupying Power, is more interested in maintaining its control over Palestinian land than in achieving a just peace. For that objective, the occupying Power has relied primarily on its settlement activities — perpetrated in grave breach of international humanitarian law — in addition to other unlawful practices aimed at the isolation, separation and subjugation of the Palestinian people, which constitute gross human rights violations and collective punishment.

In that connection, we stress the need for intensified and coordinated efforts by the international community to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to cease its illegal policies and genuinely commit to the peace process on the basis of United Nations resolutions and long-standing agreed terms of reference. The international community must act to prevent a total collapse of the peace process after so many years of effort and support for the process, on the basis of a clear foundation rooted in international law, United Nations resolutions and the international consensus on the two-State solution, based on the pre-1967 borders and a just and comprehensive solution to the plight of the Palestine refugees on the basis of resolution 194 (III).

The Movement welcomes all efforts and initiatives aimed at realizing justice for the Palestinian people and stresses the importance of the admission of the State of Palestine as a non-member observer State by the General Assembly, on 29 November 2012, as well as its admission as a Member State by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization General Conference. We consider that development to be a vote of confidence affirming that Palestine meets the Charter's criteria for statehood, and that it is ready and willing to assume its responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations. We are optimistic that the General Assembly's granting of non-member observer State status to Palestine will help accelerate the momentum in the Security Council regarding its pending United Nations application.

In conclusion, the Movement reaffirms its unwavering commitment to a just and comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, with the question of Palestine at its core, and to the immediate restoration of the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to exercise its self-determination and sovereignty in an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Khiari (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me great pleasure to speak on behalf of the Arab Group in the debate on agenda item 36, regarding the question of Palestine, which coincides with the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This is an important occasion, at which the international community reiterates its solidarity with, and support for, the fraternal Palestinian people in its long struggle to achieve its legitimate aspirations to self-determination, to live in dignity, peace and stability and to build its independent State.

I would like to thank Ambassador Diallo, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, for his statement and for introducing the various draft resolutions on Palestine. We also thank the ambassador of Malta for introducing the Committee's report (A/68/35). We would also like to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his report on the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine (A/68/363).

The Assembly's adoption of resolution 67/19 at this time last year, which accorded Palestine the status of a non-member observer State at the United Nations, was a very important landmark in the history of the Palestinian people. Adopted by an overwhelming majority, the resolution expresses the broad support of the international community for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State in the context of the two-State solution. It also reflects the firm belief of various segments of the international community that no alternative exists to seeking peace and stability, in accordance with the relevant international frameworks, in order to open new vistas for all the peoples of the region.

The international community was optimistic when direct negotiations resumed between the Israeli and Palestinian sides under the auspices of the United States. It expressed its full support and encouragement for the steps taken, which should involve maximum efforts so as not to squander the opportunity, especially given the current situation in the Middle East. Any further setbacks and disappointments can no longer be tolerated. The members of the League of Arab States were among the first to support those efforts. The Arab League hopes that those efforts will culminate in a comprehensive and lasting solution to the Palestine question that allows the Palestinian people to regain its rights, makes possible the establishment of an independent State along the June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and leads to the secure and peaceful coexistence of all parties in the region.

Unfortunately, that is not what we see on the ground today when it comes to Israel's stance, practices and the provocative statements made by a number of its officials. That runs counter to the serious approach needed to achieve the desired peace, and threatens ongoing negotiations and the prospects for a resolution between the two sides.

The Israeli settlements are a gross violation of the rules of international law regulating the legal status of territories under foreign occupation. They also seek to change the character of the occupied territories. That involves the threat of partitioning the Palestinian territories and their fragmentation, imperilling the prospects

for the establishment of the Palestinian State. In that context, the Arab Group calls for ending the settlement activities, which are a gross violation of the norms of international law, and for adherence to the United Nations resolutions regarding international legitimacy and the terms of reference of the peace process.

We continue to condemn the acts of aggression by the occupying authorities and by Israeli settlers against the Palestinians, the confiscation of their land, the demolition of their homes and the infringement of their most fundamental rights, including those of prisoners and detainees. Such practices are, in the opinion of segments of the international community, a breach of international legitimacy, and a blatant challenge to the principles of human rights and international humanitarian law. The Arab Group also condemns the repeated acts of aggression by the occupation authorities and Israeli settlers against Al-Quds Al-Sharif and its Christian and Islamic landmarks. Israel is seeking to alter its geographic and demographic character, in addition to desecrating Islamic and Christian houses of worship — especially the Al-Aqsa Mosque — and abusing their visitors.

The Group calls for the total lifting of the stifling Israeli embargo imposed on Gaza since 2007. We must put an end to the serious and tragic economic repercussions for the Palestinian population, including women and children, resulting from it, which deprives it of the most rudimentary possibilities of earning a decent livelihood. The Arab Group affirms the contents of the statement issued by the meeting of the Ministerial Committee for the Arab Peace Initiative held last week in Kuwait. The Committee reiterated

“its support for the resumed negotiations, while warning of the risks resulting from the continued acts of aggression and practices of Israel, including the settlement policies, which risk derailing the current negotiations. The Committee calls on the United States and other members of the Quartet to compel the Israeli Government to cease all its destructive policies and practices, which are detrimental to the current path of negotiations and the peace process”.

The Arab Group recalls the fact that the Committee reiterated that it was

“committed to the principles, contents and terms of reference of the Arab Peace Initiative to achieve just peace in the region based on international law and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations — putting an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and establishing an independent Palestinian State along the June 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital, thereby resolving all final-status issues, including concerning borders, security, Jerusalem, refugees, water and the release of Palestinian prisoners and detainees”.

Finally, I cannot but reaffirm the fact that the Arab Group is committed to achieving a just, durable and comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict on all tracks, foremost of which is the Palestine question. The Group reiterates that there is a need to restore all the Palestinian people's legitimate and inalienable rights to self-determination, within an independent, sovereign State within the June 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Mr. Vrailas (European Union): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The candidate countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia; the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina; the European Free Trade Area country Liechtenstein, a member of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, align themselves with this statement.

The European Union has long argued that the historical changes under way in the Middle East made the need for progress on the Middle East peace process all the more urgent. We remain convinced that now is the time for the Palestinians' aspirations for statehood and sovereignty and the Israelis' for security to be fulfilled through a comprehensive, negotiated peace based on the two-State solution and ending all claims. For that reason, the European Union warmly welcomed the resumption of direct negotiations between the parties and commended the bold leadership shown by President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu. We also commended the fundamental role played by the United States, and the dedication of Secretary of State John Kerry and the important support expressed by the League of Arab States.

We also stressed the importance of the fact that the resumption of negotiations would lead to tangible and timely progress, a point that is even more relevant today. The two parties need to remain committed to the negotiation process and should refrain from actions that could undermine the prospects for peace. We call on both leaders to continue to show the bold leadership needed to overcome the challenges ahead and to take the difficult decisions that are necessary if a comprehensive agreement is to be reached within the nine-month agreed time frame.

The European Union will continue to remain supportive of the process and committed to ensuring its success. As negotiations progress, we intend to give further concrete form to our support, in line with what will be agreed by the parties. We will continue to contribute, together with other regional and international partners, including within the Quartet, to a negotiated solution on all final-status issues, including Jerusalem, borders, security, water and refugees. In so doing, we will continue to be inspired by our clear positions with regard to parameters, principles and issues, including those expressed in the conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council of December 2009, December 2010, May 2011, July 2011, May 2012, December 2012 and July 2013, which I would like to reaffirm on this occasion.

The European Union deplores the recent Israeli decisions to advance settlement expansion in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Our position is clear: settlements, the separation barrier where built on occupied land, the demolition of homes and evictions are illegal under international law. Such activities constitute an obstacle to peace and threaten to make a two-State solution impossible. The European Union reiterates that it will not recognize any changes to the pre-1967 borders, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties. All settlement activity, including in East Jerusalem, should cease immediately. New construction plans should be abandoned. All outposts erected since March 2001 should be dismantled. A way should be found through negotiations to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of two States.

The European Union is also gravely concerned about the serious limitations on the Palestinian Authority with respect to promoting the economic development of Palestinian communities in Area C and about their worsening living conditions. The European Union and its member States are particularly concerned by the instances of collective demolitions in recent months, often resulting in the displacement of Palestinians, including Bedouin communities. We are convinced that Palestinians require access to a fair planning and zoning regime so as not to resort to building without an Israeli permit, which can lead to demolitions. We also reiterate our call for Israel to work together with the Palestinian Authority to allow more access to, and control by the Palestinian Authority over, Area C. Social and economic developments in Area C are of critical importance for the viability of a future Palestinian State, since Area C is its main land reserve.

The European Union remains the largest donor to the Palestinian Authority and has constantly encouraged and supported the Palestinian State-building process. However, we are particularly concerned with the slowing economic development in the Palestinian territory and the difficult fiscal situation that is producing. We will continue to play our part. At the same time, we call on other donors, especially those in the region, to increase their financial support to the Palestinian Authority.

The European Union followed with great concern the hostilities that affected the Gaza Strip and Israel in November 2012, and regretted the loss of civilian lives on both sides. We renew our condemnation in the strongest terms of any violence deliberately targeting civilians. We welcomed the ceasefire that put an end to those hostilities, and we urge all parties to fully comply with its provisions.

At the same time, we must recognize and underline that the present situation in Gaza is unsustainable and will remain so as long as it remains politically and economically separated from the West Bank. Fully recognizing Israel's legitimate security concerns, including with regard to vital threats in the region, and expressing its appreciation for some recent positive measures by Israel with regard to the opening of the crossings for commercial goods, the European Union continues to call for the immediate, sustained and unconditional opening of crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from the Gaza Strip. To that end, the European Union calls for the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), full respect for international humanitarian law and the full implementation of the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access.

The European Union also continues to call for intra-Palestinian reconciliation behind President Abbas in line with the principles set out in his speech of 4 May 2011, as an important element for the unity of a future Palestinian State and for reaching a two-State solution.

Mr. Beck (Solomon Islands), Vice-President, took the Chair.

In conclusion, the European Union reaffirms its commitment to the two-State solution. We have before us a historic opportunity to reach an agreement to finally end this conflict. We are convinced that such an agreement would open the door to deepened and enhanced cooperation between the European Union and all the countries of the region, thereby contributing to the prospect for a new era of peace, security and prosperity.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (spoke in Arabic): At the outset, we wish to align ourselves with the statement delivered by the representative of Tunisia on behalf of the Arab Group and the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

The General Assembly debate on this important item coincides with the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People and the first anniversary of resolution 67/19, on the recognition of Palestine as a non-member observer State at the United Nations. In that context, we express our thanks and appreciation to the Secretary-General and the various United Nations entities, in particular the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.

We support all regional and international efforts to reach a final solution, especially the ongoing negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli sides to achieve a solution on all final-status issues, including borders, settlements, water, Jerusalem, refugees and security. We commend the United States for its role in facilitating the resumption of negotiations. However, Israeli practices may undermine the possibility of reaching a final solution. Israel continues to build new settlement units and to

expand existing settlements in complete disregard for its international obligations and for the calls of the international community to end those illegal practices, which contravene the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. The Israeli Government also continues to confiscate land and to restrict the movement of people and goods by dividing up the Palestinian territories. The economic blockade imposed by Israel on Gaza has entered its seventh year, exacerbating the suffering of the Palestinian people. The fact that thousands of Palestinian citizens, including women and children, remain in Israeli jails also contravenes international law and international humanitarian law and is a major source of continuing tension in the region.

We call on the international community to put pressure on Israel to unconditionally cease its aggressive practices and its illegal blockade of Gaza, to open all border crossings and to stop all illegal settlement activities in the occupied territories. We urge Israel to put an end to its repeated attacks on the Al-Aqsa Mosque and its attempts to alter the geographic and demographic nature of Jerusalem and to comply with Security Council resolutions [242 \(1967\)](#), [338 \(1973\)](#), [1397 \(2002\)](#), [1515 \(2003\)](#) and [1860 \(2009\)](#), which call for Israel to withdraw from all territories occupied in 1967.

In that context, we call for the immediate release of all Palestinians detained in Israeli jails, specifically the sick and the children, as well as those detained before the Oslo Agreement. We call on the international community to put pressure on Israel to ensure the fair treatment of Palestinian prisoners in accordance with international law, the Fourth Geneva Convention and international humanitarian law, as a first step towards their release.

We call on Israel to implement Security Council resolution 497 (1981), which calls for Israel to withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan to the pre-June 1967 borders.

We also support the brotherly country of Lebanon and its efforts to protect its security and to preserve its territorial integrity. We call on Israel to put an end to its aggression against Lebanon from the land and the air and to withdraw from all occupied Lebanese territories, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1701 (2006).

In conclusion, we support all legitimate aspirations of the brotherly and steadfast Palestinian people. The people of Kuwait and its leadership will continue to provide political, moral and financial support to the brotherly people of Palestine in order to put an end to the Israeli occupation and to establish a Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, in accordance with the provisions of international law and international terms of reference. We hope that the Palestinian State will soon become the 194th State Member of the United Nations.

Mr. Reyes Rodríguez (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Cuba welcomes the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/68/35) and fully associates itself with the statement made earlier by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

With today's debate we add to the long list of discussions in the United Nations on the question of Palestine that have not led to an effective solution that can put an end to Israel's crimes against the Palestinian people and that will make it possible for them to fully exercise their inalienable right to self-determination in a fully independent State of Palestine.

Israel, the occupying Power, continues to defy the international community by persisting in its transgression of international norms and treaties and in its non-compliance with General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.

The report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People notes the worsening situation in the region, in particular in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. That is particularly as a result of Israel's excessive use of force against the Palestinian civilian population and the many other illegal policies and practices, such as the expansion of Israeli settlements, continuing human rights violations and collective punishment, which cause the Palestinian people immense suffering.

On 29 November 2012, the General Assembly adopted by an overwhelming majority resolution 67/19, which granted Palestine the status of non-member observer State at the United Nations. That led to Israel's announcement of its intention to build more than 3,000 housing units in the occupied territories, including in occupied East Jerusalem, and to withhold from Palestine the tax and customs revenue collected on behalf of the Palestinians.

Cuba reiterates its condemnation of the ongoing expansion of all illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, as well as the continuing violation of Security Council resolutions and the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the implications of the Israeli settlements on the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of the Palestinian people throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, appointed by the Human Rights Council, concluded that the settlement policy contravened a multitude of human rights of the Palestinian people and that the violations were interrelated and formed part of an overall pattern of violations that was primarily characterized by the denial of the right to self-determination and institutionalized discrimination against the Palestinian people.

The aggressive acts of Israeli settlers against Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem continue. The illegal construction of the wall in the occupied West Bank continues, in violation of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice of 9 July 2004 (see A/ES-10/273). The restrictions have caused severe losses to the majority of the population, who do not have access to medical, educational and social services or the markets and holy sites in East Jerusalem.

During the period covered by the report of the Fact-Finding Mission, Israel carried out the demolition of at least 594 Palestinian-owned structures, displacing at least 924 people. During the reporting period, Israeli forces killed at least 196 Palestinians and injured more than 1,600 people in the Gaza Strip. In addition, Israeli forces caused the deaths of 20 Palestinians and injured more than 4,200 people in the West Bank and East Jerusalem during clashes.

The restrictions on the movement of people and goods from and to the Gaza Strip continued to cause a deterioration in the living conditions of the 1.7 million Palestinian residents, including women and children.

I have mentioned only some of the alarming data provided to us by the recent report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, which vividly depicts the serious violations that Israel continues to perpetrate against the Palestinian people.

Cuba renews its strong condemnation of those actions and of Israel's illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. Cuba demands that the occupying Power immediately halt its acts of aggression. The international community must not remain unmoved any longer at the continued deterioration of the situation and must take action to ensure that the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council are respected.

The Security Council must take the responsibility incumbent upon it and must accept, without any further delay, the request made by the State of Palestine in 2011 for recognition as a State Member of the United Nations. That is the express wish of the overwhelming majority of the States that make up the Organization. The passivity of the Security Council before Israel's crimes, owing to the threat or the use of the veto by one of its permanent members, is the highest expression of hypocrisy on the part of those who are self-appointed paragons in defending and respecting human rights when it comes to criticizing or punishing developing countries that disagree with their policies or defy the political, social or economic order they want to impose.

Cuba supports the initiative of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to have the General Assembly proclaim an international year of solidarity with the Palestinian people in order to increase international awareness of the cause.

Before I conclude, I wish to commend, on behalf of Cuba, the decision of Guyana and El Salvador to establish diplomatic relations with the State of Palestine. Furthermore, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Lithuania and Switzerland have decided to give the Palestinian delegations in their countries the status of embassies or a similar entity.

Just a few days ago, we bore witness to a historic moment in the General Assembly, when the representative of the State of Palestine participated for the first time in an election in this organ (see A/68/PV.53). Cuba congratulates the Government and the people of Palestine for that event, which is a new step towards what should be the final objective, that is, the participation of the State of Palestine as a full Member of the United Nations. Cuba will continue to support the Palestinian people in their legitimate struggle for justice, peace, dignity and the right to self-determination. We also reiterate our desire for peace for the rest of the peoples of the Middle East.

Mr. Waheed (Maldives): Last week, the State of Palestine cast its first ballot in a General Assembly election (see A/68/PV.53). It was a symbolic step by a nation determined to become a full Member of the Organization. It was one step of many towards recognition. No matter how long it takes or how difficult the path, the Republic of the Maldives will walk shoulder to shoulder with our Palestinian brothers and sisters. The vast majority of the United Nations membership supports Palestine in that journey. The work of the Organization will continue to support the aspirations of its people, as manifested today in the work of the Secretary-General and the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

My delegation thanks the Secretary-General for the compilation of his report (A/68/363), in accordance with resolution 67/23, and we thank the Committee for its report (A/68/35).

Next Friday will mark the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. I wish to reiterate the solidarity of my Government and that of the people of Maldives with the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination. The Maldives will remain steadfast in support of Palestine, and we will not falter in our condemnation of the serious injustices being committed in the occupied territories. The political and religious authorities of both sides need to ensure that the cultural and religious rights of all people are respected, and that the right to live free from fear and abuse is respected.

It has been 66 years since the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), on the partition of Palestine. Yet we still find ourselves in this Hall today expressing our

concerns about how little progress has been made. The situation has become a never-ending conflict that takes place not only on the battlefield but on city streets and in the homes of innocents.

The Secretary-General's report notes that, during the previous reporting period, 338 Palestinians were killed, including 232 Palestinian civilians and eight Israelis. Those figures not only represent an increase in the violence of an ongoing conflict, but demonstrate the true nature of the conflict. Although this is a war zone, it is not a war: it is an occupation. It is the disenfranchisement of a nation to exist and of a people to be free. It is the theft of their economic right to prosper and their right to hope for a brighter future.

We have not given up hope. Our Government welcomed the resumption of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks in August with the active mediation of the United States. In that regard, my delegation commends the Arab Peace Initiative, the Government of Egypt, the United States and the United Nations for their exemplary leadership. My delegation is fully in line with the principled position that a permanent settlement of the question of Palestine can be reached only by ending the occupation that began in 1967, achieving the independence of the State of Palestine on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and achieving a just and agreed solution to the Palestine refugee issue on the basis of resolution 194 (III).

The unfortunate reality, however, is that a comprehensive solution is still years away. We believe in a two-State solution, but expert after expert has told us at the United Nations that the window for such a solution is closing. It is being closed by new settlements changing the demographics of Palestine. It is being closed by an economic embargo meant to leave a people destitute. It is also being closed by a refusal to grant Palestinians access to Palestinian land.

Discriminatory practices by the occupying Power have had a devastating impact on the most vulnerable and have had dire impacts on social and economic sectors, as well as on Palestine's natural resources and its environment. The 1993 Oslo Accords stipulated that area C of the West Bank was to be transferred to the Palestinian Authority by 1998. That has not happened. The World Bank released a report last month that attests that the refusal is costing the Palestinian economy \$3.4 billion.

The occupation is one that inherently leads Palestine to being poor and dependent on foreign aid. The occupation makes it a breeding ground for extremism. The occupation also stands in the way of every measure that would afford them an ounce of dignity, and it is perpetuating a cycle of oppression that has already lasted generations.

There has to be a way forward. There has to be compromise. Despite the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on 9 July 2004 (A/ES-10/273), the occupying Power continues with the illegal construction of the wall in the occupied West Bank and around occupied Jerusalem. The wall is estimated to be twice the length of the 1949 armistice demarcation line and would isolate and entrap 11,000 Palestinians, who would then be dependent on the occupying Power granting them permits to them to live in their own homes.

Underground and surface water resources are almost exclusively controlled by the occupying Power. The report of the Committee states that

"approximately 1 million Palestinians in 492 communities in the West Bank access or consume 60 litres of water per capita per day or less, significantly below the World Health Organization recommendation of 100 litres per capita per day ... Israeli settlers in the West Bank consume approximately six times the water consumed by Palestinians" (A/68/35, para. 37).

The expansion of settlements is detrimental to the peace process and undermines the basis for a future Palestinian State. Yet the Government of Israel has approved the construction of approximately 24,000 residential units in the occupied territories and has retroactively legalized others. Under international law, settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory, including that in East Jerusalem, is illegal. The Government of Israel, however, continues to issue construction tenders for housing units that will stop the development of the Palestinian people. Furthermore, they refuse to act when illegal construction takes place on the private property of Palestinians. The Republic of the Maldives strongly condemns those actions. We furthermore condemn the unjust demolition and evictions that took place in Area C and resulted in the displacement of some 907 individuals, including 458 children. In the interests of pursuing meaningful negotiations and a lasting peace, it is up to the occupying Power to cease all illegal activity in the occupied territories.

The Maldives commends the efforts made by the Palestinians to advance their State-building programme despite the serious budget deficits and restrictions imposed by the occupying Power. The Maldives believes unequivocally in the need for an independent, free and sovereign Palestinian State. We also believe in the right of Israel to security, safety and peace. It is the occupation that is the problem for both nations. It is the occupation that perpetuates hatred, fear and violence. We, the States Members of the United Nations, beat this drum year after year, and we make little progress. The ancestors of those two nations built the pyramids in less time than we have taken to find a just and lasting solution to this question. Generations have lived under oppression and fear. It is our hope that this is the last generation — the one that will see the end of this journey.

Mrs. Nusseibeh (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I would first like to emphasize a message from His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates, to the Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, regarding the firm position of the Government and people of the United Arab Emirates on supporting the State of Palestine until its territories and all its legitimate rights, including the right of return and self-determination, are fully restored, and it is established as an independent State with Jerusalem as its capital. I would also like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation and continued support for the Committee and its efforts to advance the Palestinian cause and promote a peaceful solution to all the aspects of the issue, in accordance with the decisions of international law.

My delegation welcomes the Palestinian delegation's participation, for the first time since the establishment of the United Nations, in a vote in a General Assembly election (see A/68/PV.53). We regard it as a significant and historic step and look forward to its culmination soon in international recognition of Palestine as a full Member and independent State of the United Nations, like all others.

The United Arab Emirates strongly supports all the positive regional and international political efforts that for decades have attempted to achieve a peaceful, fair settlement of the Palestinian question, including those made recently by the United States, leading three months ago to the resumption of direct political negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli sides with a view to reaching a final peace agreement settling all the core issues. In that connection, my delegation emphasizes the essential role played by the United States in resuming negotiations. However, if negotiations fail we cannot go back to square one.

We also emphasize the importance of the commitment on the part of Israel, the occupying Power, to lifting the unjust siege imposed on the Gaza Strip, releasing thousands of Palestinian detainees and withdrawing from all occupied Palestinian territories. That is a prerequisite for creating an environment conducive to continuing the negotiations and reaching, within the nine-month deadline, an acceptable peace agreement based on a two-State solution and peaceful coexistence and that complies with the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative and the agreed principles of the peace process. We strongly condemn Israel's ongoing settlement activities, and hold the Israeli Government responsible for the current breakdown in negotiations and other efforts aimed at achieving a just settlement of the issue. Now more than ever, we urge the international community, especially the Quartet and the Security Council, to take serious and concrete measures to force Israel to immediately cease all its illegal settlement activities.

The economic and social conditions in the occupied Palestinian territories have deteriorated severely owing on the one hand to ongoing Israeli practices and on the other to the Palestinian Authority's inadequate resources. We hope that donors will provide more emergency aid to the Palestinian people and continue their development assistance contributions in a timely manner, in order to enable the Palestinian Authority to overcome its current financial crisis and alleviate the negative effects of the occupation.

In closing, my delegation, which is a sponsor of the four draft resolutions (A/68/L.12, A/68/L.13, A/68/L.14 and A/68/L.15) under this agenda item in the General Assembly, believes that a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East is the only strategic option for countries that support peace and stability in the region. That cannot be achieved without addressing the root causes of the Arab-Israeli conflict, including Israel's withdrawal to the pre-June 1967 borders, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with full sovereignty and East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Alrowaiei (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to take the opportunity afforded by the forthcoming International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People to reiterate Bahrain's support and backing for the Palestinian people in their just journey towards recovering their inalienable rights and creating an independent State on their national territory with Jerusalem as its capital, so they can be like all other peoples.

In this context, His Majesty King Hamad bin Issa Al Khalifa of Bahrain has sent a letter to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in which he urges the international community to remain vigilant and to monitor the situation carefully so as to bring an end to all activities resulting from Israeli practices that might impede or hamper negotiations — to the illegal settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories, especially Jerusalem; to the repeated Israeli attacks on religious sites, especially the Al-Aqsa Mosque; and to the unjust blockade of Gaza. It is also important that negotiations ensure that all religious sites are treated equally. His Majesty also noted that it is a propitious time to achieve a just and lasting peace.

The international community should therefore step up its efforts to make the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations a success, and we hope that we will be able through negotiations to rapidly put an end to the conflict. We have no doubt that the creation of an independent Palestinian State that is lasting and viable, living side by side with Israel, within safe and recognized borders, is an urgent matter and can be achieved. That is especially true following the adoption by an overwhelming

majority of resolution 67/19, granting Palestine the status of non-member observer State in a mark of support for the struggle of the brave Palestinian people. His Majesty the King has also stated that those are feasible and legitimate aspirations insofar as the United Nations is working for a just and lasting peace with the support of all its Member States, and that we will achieve our objective through the creation of two States living side by side in peace and cooperation with each other.

We thank Ambassador Diallo, Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and all members of the Committee for their diligent and praiseworthy efforts to draft the report before us (A/68/363). We highly appreciate their efforts to enable the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights, as recognized by the General Assembly in 1974. The Security Council resolutions of 1967 also recognized the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and all Arabs in the occupied Palestinian territories.

We would also like to thank the Chair for raising the awareness of the international community with regard to the suffering and needs of the Palestinian people, and for all media activity within the framework of the General Assembly, including the awareness-raising and training programme for Palestinian journalists held last year, which shed light on various aspects of developments and progress related to the issue of Palestine and the Middle East peace process.

The report before us contains detailed information that reflects the deterioration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. That deterioration is ongoing, day after day, and includes constraints and limitations on the freedom of movement, closures, the blockade of Gaza, and the continued building of the wall of separation by Israel. A just, comprehensive and lasting peace is a strategic option that will require the adoption of United Nations resolutions and the implementation of all relevant documents and resolutions, including respect for the road map, the principle of land for peace, and the Arab Peace Initiative. The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People closely reflects the aspirations and the feelings of the international community towards the brotherly Palestinian people.

Mr. Masood Kahn (Pakistan): Resolution 67/19, adopted last year, is a landmark in the struggle of the Palestinian people to realize their right to self-determination. The resolution sparked the dream that an independent State of Palestine would soon emerge on the map of the world. Today we express once again our solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Earlier this year, hopes for a State of Palestine were revived with the reactivation of the peace process. In that regard, we pay tribute to the United States Secretary of State, Mr. John Kerry, whose persistent and resolute diplomacy brought the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government back to the negotiating table. What we have seen in the past five months is that the dialogue between the two sides is fragile. Despite that, we must not lose hope. The talks should not break down. We understand and respect the vow of secrecy between the sides on the sensitive and difficult negotiations they are conducting. Public signs about those talks are, however, not very encouraging. The resignations of the Palestinian negotiators point to serious problems behind closed doors.

There are four obstacles to the success of the negotiations that must be removed.

First, the two sides, the people of Israel and Palestine, and not just their official representatives, should believe in and support a two-State solution. Two independent States, Palestine and Israel, with their border drawn as it existed before the 1967 war, should plan to live side by side in peace and security. East Jerusalem, Al-Quds Al-Sharif, will be the Palestinian State's capital.

A two-State solution is the best solution on the table. All others — a binational State or a unitary, singular State — are mirages that would further fracture the two States and shatter all hopes for peace. The vision of the two-State solution should be owned and backed by multiple religious communities and secular constituencies on both sides. To that end, the leaders on both sides have to inspire and instil confidence. Palestine and Israel must heed Secretary Kerry's call for a sense of urgency, because if no progress is made in the nine-month talks, the window of opportunity will start to close and the peace process will plunge back into free fall and uncertainty.

Secondly, Israel must roll back its plans for expanding illegal settlements. The Secretary-General, in his report entitled "Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine" (A/68/363), maintains that settlements are illegal under international law and has warned that the situation on the ground presents a growing cause of concern over the viability of a two-State solution. Israel knows that those settlements are the single biggest impediment to peace talks. Yet on 3 November, it chose to announce plans for over 1,700 units, followed by plans for the construction of another 20,000 units in the West Bank, including in the E-1 area.

That frantic surge in settlements should be halted to give the talks a chance to succeed. In that regard, we urge the United States to use its special relationship and influence with Israel. That is also necessary to prevent the Palestinian State from turning into disjointed enclaves. The new Palestinian State must have a geographically viable, contiguous territory. We welcome the release of Palestinian prisoners by Israel, but regret that the impact of that gesture has been neutralized by the announcement of new settlements.

Thirdly, disposessions in the occupied territory, especially in East Jerusalem, must be stopped. The report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/68/35) registers a significant increase in demolitions and displacements. The number of people displaced from East Jerusalem in the first eight months of 2013 was more than the combined total for 2011 and 2012. Media reports suggest that while the number of settlers is growing, thousands of Palestinians are being forced to leave Jerusalem.

Fourthly, in Gaza the collective punishment meted out to the Palestinians continued into its seventh year. An average of fewer than 200 people were allowed out of Gaza per day in the first half of 2013, compared to around 26,000 in the same period before the blockade. Nineteen out of 20 projects of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East have ground to a halt due to the shortage of construction materials.

The international community should not remain silent while Palestine continues to disappear before our eyes. We appreciate the European Union guidelines on the funding of projects in the occupied Palestinian territories. The Quartet should also become more active in supporting the peace process. Pakistan believes that the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, including through the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanese territories and the Syrian Golan, is the only guarantee of sustainable peace in the region.

The Palestinian Authority undertook the ambitious task of building infrastructure and institutions for the future Palestinian State three years ago. They have made considerable progress towards achieving that objective, but there is still a long way to go. The international community must step forward to help the Palestinians more vigorously in that endeavour.

Palestine sits at the United Nations today as a State and was able to vote in the General Assembly for the first time last week (see A/68/PV.53). This is a reality that must be recognized by all. There is no alternative. The sooner this realization sinks in, the less will be the suffering on all sides and the better it will be for the peace and stability of the region.

Mr. Al-Naama (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to thank President Ashe for having convened this meeting and to extend my thanks to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for its efforts to ease the suffering of the Palestinian people and to ensure that all of their rights are restored. I pay tribute to the important role played by the Division for Palestinian Rights for its efforts to that end.

We align ourselves with the statements made by the representatives of Tunisia on behalf of the Arab Group and of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

This year, we are celebrating the first anniversary of the historic decision of the General Assembly to grant the State of Palestine the status of non-member observer State. That historic decision repaired a great injustice done to the Palestinian people. It was also in keeping with the ultimate objective of creating a Palestinian State within the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in order to restore the rights of the Palestinian people and work for lasting peace in the Middle East.

We have always stated that the only viable solution is a two-State solution on the basis of the Madrid terms of reference, the concept of land for peace, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative. The achievement of that objective, unfortunately, is hampered by Israel's strategy of fait accompli, occupation, use of brutal force and rejection of the option of peace and of the creation of a Palestinian State, and by its continuing illegal settlement activities in the occupied territories, in addition to the statements made by its representatives rejecting the concept of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace on the basis of the relevant decisions of the United Nations.

Israel continues to violate international law and international humanitarian law, as is quite clear from such international documents as the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/68/35). Palestinians, including women and children, continue to be detained in Israeli prisons and detention centres, buildings continue to be bulldozed, the separation wall keeps growing, and the violence against the Palestinian people continues unabated. We are especially concerned by the Israeli Government's strategy of sabotaging the Palestinian economy and depriving the Palestinian people of access to water. Qatar rejects and condemns any attempt to Judaize Jerusalem and to desecrate holy sites, Muslim or Christian, including attacks on the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque and the excavation work being carried out beneath it. We urge the United Nations and all other relevant international organizations to ensure that the national and Arab character of Jerusalem is respected.

The unfair blockade imposed by Israel on Gaza continues, despite the deterioration of the humanitarian and economic situation there. Building materials, for example, have been prohibited from being imported into the territory, despite the calls of the United Nations to lift that prohibition. The electricity supply in Gaza is unreliable, which undermines basic living conditions there.

The deterioration of Palestinian living conditions in the occupied territories, in particular Gaza, the ongoing suffering of the Palestinian diaspora, the repression by the occupying forces, the repeated military aggression against the Palestinian people and violations of international law by the occupying Power remind us today of the need to lend our support to the Palestinian people whenever possible. We urge the international community to work for a lasting, comprehensive and just peace and to support the Palestinian movement towards the creation of a Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, that includes all the territory occupied since 1967.

Qatar underscores that Israel's occupation of the Syrian Golan is a threat to peace and security throughout the region and a violation of international law and decisions of international legitimacy. Israel's attempts to annex the Syrian Golan are null and void. We condemn the illegal Israeli practices seeking to appropriate natural resources in the area, including water resources.

In conclusion, on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I express our full solidarity with the Palestinian people and their Government in their struggle to put an end to foreign occupation and recover their inalienable rights. Qatar will continue to provide aid and assistance to the brotherly Palestinian people until their inalienable rights have been restored.

Mr. Dabbashi (Libya) (*spoke in Arabic*): About a year ago, in a historic gesture, the General Assembly adopted resolution 67/19, whereby it acknowledged the existence of the State of Palestine, which was accepted as a non-member observer State in the United Nations. With that step, the international community affirmed its resolve to move towards responding to the aspirations of the Palestinian people and the achievement of their dream of establishing their own independent sovereign State over their entire territory.

However, the General Assembly resolution was soon met by arbitrary, provocative actions by the Israeli authorities, including the pursuit of new, aggressive settlement policies to build thousands of residential units within the occupied Palestinian territories with the aim of placing more new Jewish immigrants on the Palestinian land that is still in the hands of Palestinians and of undermining the possibility of the establishment of any form of a Palestinian State on less than 20 per cent of the historical land of Palestine. That was borne out by the 355 per cent increase in settlement activities during the first quarter of this year compared with the same period last year.

Despite broad international condemnation of the Israeli settlement policy and the continuous affirmation by the United Nations of Israel's breaches of international law, the Israeli occupation authorities have persisted in their arrogance, illegitimate practices, violations of international law and refusal to acknowledge the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. The Palestinian people have been oppressed for decades through the usurpation of their territory and their dispersal throughout the world. Palestinian suffering increases every day. Zionist settlers — armed to the teeth, shielded by impunity and not held accountable by any authority — perpetrate daily actions of aggression against the actual owners of the land, who are the Palestinians. Instead, they are encouraged by the Israeli occupation forces to persist in such barbaric practices, which have inflicted gross damage on people, land and property.

The Israeli occupation authorities seek to depopulate Palestinian territories through detention, intimidation, the demolition of homes and displacement, especially in East Jerusalem, which has been subjected to a fierce campaign of Judaization and demographic manipulation. In blatant violation of the most basic human rights and principles of international law, including the Geneva Conventions, the Israeli occupation authorities have imposed an embargo on more than 1.5 million Palestinians in the largest prison on the face of the Earth, the so-called Gaza Strip. I do not think I need to recall the details of the various atrocities perpetrated by the Israeli occupation authorities, because they are practices carried out every day in full view of all and always present in our memory.

The question of Palestine is the only issue that is as old as the United Nations. Yet unlike all other international questions, it has remained without a solution or even the prospect of one. That is due to the failure to implement the relevant resolutions of the Organization, because Israel is treated as a State above the law. It acts on that basis and always finds those to protect it, at the expense of the rights of the Palestinian people. Israel has never wanted to achieve a peace agreement with the Palestinians that would allow the Palestinians to exercise self-determination and establish a sovereign, independent State. Therefore, since 1993, Israel has consistently used the so-called peace process to buy time to further assimilate Palestinian territories, rendering the establishment of a viable Palestinian State impossible. That is the current status quo, with settlements metastasizing like cancer in the occupied Palestinian territories.

I do not know what will be achieved by the Palestinian-Israeli talks if the Israelis have never officially recognized an inch of the land of Palestine as occupied Palestinian territory. They also call on the Palestinians to recognize Israel as a State for the Jewish people, without defining the borders of such a State. That clearly means the expulsion of the remaining Palestinians from the territories that were occupied in 1948 and the establishment of a so-called greater Israel as envisaged by the leaders of the racist Zionist movement and the Israeli religious extremists, with the displacement of Palestinians from the remaining Palestinian territory.

We have heard the representative of Israel refuse to tell the story of the past century but instead invoke the history of the past 3,000 years. He does not want to know that the number of Jews in historical Palestine in 1917 was no more than 7 per cent of the population, and that in 1947 their number — despite the Balfour Declaration, which gave land to those who did not deserve it — was no more than 36 per cent of the population of historical Palestine. They do not want to acknowledge those facts, and they always say that the whole of Palestine belongs to the Israeli Jews, who have come from every corner of the world and have displaced the indigenous owners, who are the Palestinians.

Israel's continued intransigence, its rejection of all attempts at settlement and its continued construction of new settlements in the Palestinian territories will lead only to further bloodshed and will block international initiatives to establish peace in the region. It is incumbent on the Security Council and the international community to alter the way they deal with Israel. They should see to it that the Palestinian people have their own independent State. If peace is to endure in the region, it will be achieved only by supporting the efforts of the State of Palestine to obtain full membership in all international organizations. I say that peace will not be achieved except through support for the efforts of the State of Palestine to obtain full membership in all international organizations, as it has in UNESCO, and through the withdrawal of the Israeli occupation forces from all occupied Arab and Palestinian territories, including the occupied Syrian Golan and the Lebanese Shaba'a Farms.

Mr. Mukerji (India): At the outset, I would like to express our appreciation to the President for convening this important discussion in the General Assembly on the question of Palestine.

We are marking the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Let me begin, therefore, by quoting from the message of my Prime Minister, His Excellency Mr. Manmohan Singh, to the friendly people of Palestine on this occasion.

"On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I reaffirm India's strong and steadfast support for the Palestinian cause. We welcome the recent efforts of Palestine and Israel, mediated by the United States, for resumption of direct peace talks, and remain hopeful that the negotiations will lead to a comprehensive peace process for the final resolution of the conflict within an agreed timeline. India supports a negotiated resolution, resulting in a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognized borders, side by side and at peace with Israel, as endorsed in the Arab Peace Initiative, the Quartet road map and relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions.

"I also take this opportunity to extend heartiest congratulations to the people of Palestine and their leadership on obtaining non-member observer State status in the United Nations General Assembly last year. India has always played a proactive role in supporting the Palestinian cause in multilateral forums. We sponsored the resolution enhancing Palestine's status in the General Assembly and will continue to support Palestine's bid for full and equal membership of the United Nations.

"India has also supported the nation-building efforts of Palestine through technical and economic assistance, including budgetary support. We are supporting the construction of schools and setting up an information technology centre and vocational training centre in Palestine. Additionally, India contributes \$1 million annually to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. We are also implementing development projects in Palestine jointly with Brazil and South Africa as partners in IBSA. India will continue to support those efforts.

"On this important occasion, on behalf of the people of India, I convey our best wishes and greetings to the friendly people of Palestine."

It has been almost a year since the Assembly voted to upgrade Palestine's status in the United Nations to that of non-Member observer State (resolution 67/19), along with other resolutions that are voted on every year. While that was an important milestone, the aspirations of the Palestinian people and leadership to full membership of the United Nations still remain to be achieved.

The resolution of the Palestinian question is a prerequisite for building a sustainable and lasting peace in the Middle East region. Given the fragile and unpredictable situation in the Middle East with the ongoing conflict in Syria, there should be no more delay in addressing the Israeli-Palestinian issue. The situation in the occupied Palestinian territories has been deteriorating, due to settlement activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Those activities are creating new realities on the ground, threatening the very premise of a two-State solution. The blockade of Gaza has also had serious consequences for the lives of Palestinians. It has adversely affected essential services, economic activities and infrastructure development. The Palestinian Authority is also facing a severe financial crisis that could erode the significant progress it has made in building State institutions.

All those issues must be addressed in a timely manner if a just and durable peace in the region is to be achieved. While there has been improvement in restrictions on

the West Bank and movement of humanitarian supplies and construction material into Gaza, we continue to hold that it is necessary for Israel to lift the blockade on Gaza and allow the normal and unrestricted movement of persons and goods within Palestine. We also join others in urging Israel to stop settlement activities.

India has a long history of solidarity with the Palestinian people. As it has demonstrated over the past six decades, including during its memberships in the Security Council, India also stands ready to support all measures that the Palestinian leadership may take towards political resolution of the final-status issues. In conclusion, I would like to reiterate India's continued support for the Palestinian cause.

Mr. Kommasith (Lao People's Democratic Republic): My delegation endorses the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Last Monday, 18 November, in this very Hall, we witnessed a historic first vote by the State of Palestine in the General Assembly of the United Nations in the election of a judge to the Residual Mechanism of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (see A/68/PV.53), and I congratulate the Palestinian people on that auspicious occasion.

As many of us have said today, making progress in that direction is a critical issue of global justice and a defining test of this Organization. Member States must therefore work further to enable Palestinians to realize their inalienable rights, including the rights of return and self-determination, as well as their earnest aspirations to freedom, prosperity, peace and justice in an independent sovereign State of Palestine, based on the pre-1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

We must acknowledge that the Palestinian people's changed United Nations status and right to be a recognized State does not alter their firm commitment to resolving the conflict through dialogue and peaceful means. We are well aware of how they have suffered and struggled over the last several decades without a glimmer of hope, while the international community has been unable to take decisive action at the level where it matters most. Over time, we can see the growing ability of the Palestinian Authority to establish the institutional foundations essential for international recognition of Palestinian statehood, as endorsed by all major international organizations and institutions. We commend the Palestinians for that heroic effort, despite the serious obstacles and challenges they confront.

The continued illegal settlement activity and destruction of property, homes and businesses in the occupied territories have not only worsened the already critical socioeconomic situation facing the Palestinian population, they also constitute a breach of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law, as well as an obstacle to the peace process and opportunities for negotiation.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic wishes to see a just, lasting, comprehensive and peaceful solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict under the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Quartet road map, which envisage a sovereign, independent and viable State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side in peace and security with the Jewish State of Israel. We therefore strongly support the renewed engagement of the United States of America, supported by the Arab League follow-up committee and many world leaders, and call on the parties to live up to their commitments, negotiate in good faith and refrain from steps that could jeopardize negotiations. We should give negotiation a chance. Peace comes only through dialogue.

The Lao People's Democratic Republic has long recognized the State of Palestine, and I wish to reaffirm its consistent support to the Palestinian people in attaining the long-delayed goal of a viable, peaceful and prosperous State of Palestine that is a full-fledged Member of the United Nations. I take this opportunity to commend the role played and work done by United Nations agencies, especially the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, to assist millions of Palestinians in need during all these years amid multiple difficulties. We also wish the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People every success in its noble endeavour for a peaceful, just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the question of Palestine.

Mrs. Rubiales de Chamorro (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Government of Reconciliation and National Unity of Nicaragua wishes to take the opportunity afforded by this debate on the question of Palestine to salute the heroic Palestinian people and their authorities on this International Day of Solidarity. We reaffirm our solidarity and support for their just struggle to establish a sovereign and independent Palestinian State.

We find ourselves at this debate almost a year after the adoption of historic resolution 67/19, in which, together with the rest of the international community, we renew our solidarity with the cause of the Palestinian people and, at the same time, our hopes for, and commitment to, the search for a solution to the problem of Palestine, which is the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the need to achieve a just, complete and lasting peace.

The greatest desire of the Palestinian people is to find peace and to live in harmony with its neighbours in a free, independent and viable State. However, that cannot be achieved as long as the Israeli occupation and its aggression continue and as long as the Palestinian people, who have struggled heroically to resist under very difficult conditions, cannot redeem their legitimate ancestral rights, recover their occupied land, or experience the return of refugees, the release of prisoners, the lifting of the blockade, and the rights to water and to live freely within their own borders.

Nicaragua is concerned about the stalemate in the peace negotiations, which has lasted for months. Israel continues to construct more settlements in the occupied territories, especially in East Jerusalem. Putting an end to the construction of those illegal settlements is an indispensable prerequisite to committing to the negotiations in good faith. We demand a halt to any further construction of settlements in the occupied territories and to the ethnic cleansing being conducted by Israelis.

Israel must negotiate on the basis of the various United Nations resolutions. The international community must redouble its efforts, especially those of its permanent member ally in the Security Council, so that Israel will put an end to its arbitrary behaviour and truly commit itself to negotiate in order to achieve a new era of peace and stability in the Middle East.

We cannot waste this historic opportunity. It is enough to read the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/68/35), presented today, for the entire community of nations to realize that the massive violations of human rights and the economic, political, social and cultural rights of our Palestinian brothers and sisters are continuing.

Nicaragua believes it is important to adopt the necessary confidence-building measures to drive forward effective negotiations by the parties, which will make it possible to progress towards the ultimate achievement of a just peace based on the recognition and existence of two free and sovereign States. Our Government advocates a politically just solution to the Palestinian problem on the basis of the various resolutions adopted by the United Nations, especially those establishing the right of return of Palestinian refugees and calling for Israel's withdrawal from Arab territories occupied in 1967, in accordance with the land-for-peace principle, established at the Madrid Conference, and the Arab Peace Initiative, which would make it possible to create a Palestinian State that is independent, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

We welcome the release of 104 Palestinian political prisoners. But we also urge the release, as a show of goodwill, of the thousands of Palestinian prisoners who continue to be incarcerated by Israel in an arbitrary manner.

Now more than ever and after the demonstration of support by an overwhelming majority of the international community for resolution 67/19, we have an opportunity to redress the injustice committed against these brotherly people. Nicaragua, as a newly elected member of the Coordinating Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, along with its people, will continue to support the just cause of the Palestinian people as a point of principle. Together with the Committee and the rest of the international community, will intensify our efforts to seek a peaceful solution that will lead to the creation of a Palestinian State as a way of achieving a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

My delegation is a sponsor of all of the draft resolutions (A/68/L.12, A/68/L.13, A/68/L.14 and A/68/L.15) to be adopted today by the General Assembly, which aim at finding a solution to the question of Palestine and to a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. We call upon members to join the initiative to declare 2014 as the year of solidarity with Palestine, which should lead to Palestine's entry as the 194th State Member of the Organization.

Mr. Mamabolo (South Africa): A few days from today, on 29 November, we will join the Palestinian people in celebrating the first anniversary of their statehood. Speaking on the day of the acceptance of Palestine as a non-member observer State of the Assembly last year (see A/67/PV.45), we expressed our disappointment that the Palestinian people were not granted full membership in the Organization, as they so deserved. Knowing full well the constraints faced by the people of Palestine and the inaction of the Security Council on that important matter, we recorded that historic achievement as a positive step towards the full implementation of the much-awaited two-State solution. Almost a year from that momentous occasion, the status of Palestine has not changed.

The negotiations between the two parties are ongoing, but the environment within which they are being held is far from being conducive. The reasons for the stalemate in the negotiations are well known. They include the increasing expansion of old and the building of new settlements, the obliteration of Palestinian homes, the blockade of Gaza; attacks on Palestinian holy sites, the limitation of movement, and the confiscation of land. The settlement construction activities are perhaps the most deleterious act of aggression, as they result in the transfer of the Israeli population into the occupied Palestinian territories, thereby limiting or thwarting the possibility of creating two contiguous States. It is said that these activities have also led to the resignation of the Palestinian negotiation team as they feel that these irresponsible activities undermine the spirit of negotiations.

We all know that these egregious activities are a violation of article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

Amazingly, all of this happens in full view of the mighty Security Council, but it continues to do nothing about the situation. If Israel were negotiating in good faith, it would have stopped its illegal practices and allowed a positive spirit to prevail during this critical time. It is the responsibility of those who protect and have influence over Israel to use their leverage over the Israelis to abandon their obstructive behaviour and work towards a peaceful and lasting solution. Clearly, Israel is emboldened by the fact that it has influential partners who have the wherewithal to protect it, even as it plunges the region into even deeper chaos. Having said that, however, we welcome the positive role played by such parties as the United States, the European Union, the Quartet and the United Nations in making the negotiations a possibility. We hope that they will be able to help the parties realize their noble goals and finally bring to a conclusion the protracted peace process in the Middle East.

South Africa stresses the urgent need for Israel to lift the illegal blockade on Gaza, which entered its seventh year in June. The blockade continues to worsen the already dire socioeconomic and humanitarian situation in Gaza. We are disappointed that the measures that were enacted by the Israeli Government in order to ease the implementation of the economic initiative for Palestine, including approval for the importation of greater quantities of construction materials and water into Gaza, have now been suspended. We were hopeful that those measures would continue to the revival of Gaza, which has suffered a great deal due to the blockade, which continues to frustrate the lives of its inhabitants and has contributed directly to the increase in unemployment and poverty. All of our hopes have once again been dashed.

In conclusion, we welcome the decision to proclaim 2014 the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. We hope that the international community will exert all necessary efforts in 2014 to finally ensure the implementation of the two-State solution and guarantee the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. South Africa stands ready to contribute robustly to that effort.

The Acting President : We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item for this meeting.

Several representatives have requested to take the floor in exercise of the right of reply. I remind them that statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second intervention and should be made by representatives from their seats.

Mr. Roet (Israel): Today we heard a number of Arab delegations liberally spreading condemnation and accusations. It would appear that those delegations are attempting to trample on the democratic process in the General Assembly in the same way they trample on the freedom of their own people. One would think that their efforts would be better spent improving the human rights situation in their own backyards. These cynical attacks undermine the professional nature of this forum. It is unfortunate that certain delegations insist on politicizing and monopolizing the valuable time of this body, as they have done throughout most of this discussion. Many have used this forum to launch a range of baseless accusations against my country, acting as cheerleaders for a Palestinian cause and thereby distancing us from peace instead of assisting us in reaching it. It is truly absurd to hear some of the world's most oppressive tyrannies lecture the Middle East's only true democracy about human rights. One has to wonder what rights these representatives might be referring to. Perhaps they mean religious rights, such as those exercised by Libya, whose representative spoke today.

Let me take the example of Libya. It is a tragedy that after all of the international efforts to better the lives of the Libyan people and to free them from one of the world's worst dictators, its representative chose to use the same rhetoric and language as in Al-Qadhafi's time, calling my country a racist Zionist movement and calling people and settlements, whether one likes them or not, cancerous. If Libyans truly care about the situation, I would advise them that a great deal of the weapons being wielded in my country and hampering the peace process are coming from Libya. Perhaps the Libyan authorities would be better off, instead of lecturing Israel, taking care of their own people. For the sake of the Israeli and Palestinian cause, perhaps they could improve their border control.

One-sided, dogmatic and cheap propaganda is not productive. Name-calling does not lead us towards real peace, but takes us farther away.

A few countries congratulated the Palestinian delegation on having voted in the election for the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. I would like to remind representatives that that vote has nothing to do with attaining a Palestinian State. A Palestinian State can be achieved by negotiation. The road to peace, for which we all pray, goes through Ramallah and Jerusalem, and not via such discussions as heard here.

I would not like to use the whole 10 minutes of time that I am allocated, but simply refer to the member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) who spoke here. We heard many representatives of NAM criticize Israel today. I would like to point out that these same representatives chose to ignore the crimes of the State that is the Chair of NAM, Iran. Some countries spoke of their honour in agreeing to the statement delivered by the representative of Iran. Iran is actively supporting a murderous regime in Damascus and at the same time leading the chorus of attack in this Hall against Israel. The rhetorical hypocrisy of NAM must stop. Countries that care about the peace process should assist not only Israel but primarily the Palestinians in making the right, proud and courageous choice of negotiating on the ground instead of in the General Assembly.

Mr. Hamed (Syrian Arab Republic) (spoke in Arabic): I did not wish to take the floor at this late hour. However, the lies and allegations submitted by the representative of the Israeli occupation authorities deserve a reply, albeit a very brief one. Israel, whose representative boasted of its human rights record, is the last State — and I reaffirm and underscore, the very last State — that has the right to invoke human rights, given the tremendous and countless human rights violations it has committed since 1948 in the occupied Palestinian territories, the occupied Golan and Lebanon.

The representative of the Israeli occupation authority said that Israel helps the Syrian people. At first I thought that I had misheard, but it seems that what I heard was true. If anything, it shows that the representative of Israel is hallucinating wildly. The only assistance provided by Israel is to armed terrorist groups in the disengagement area in the occupied Syrian Golan. The Israeli representative acknowledged that in his statement today. Is such assistance to terrorist groups, including Al-Qaida affiliates, not a violation of international law and the disengagement agreement? It endangers the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in the occupied Golan. That is precisely what happened when armed groups, assisted by the occupying Power, received medical treatment in Israeli hospitals and the staff and premises of UNDOF were repeatedly kidnapped or attacked by these armed groups.

Mr. Taguri (Libya) (spoke in Arabic): I thank you, Sir, for giving me the floor to speak in exercise of my right to reply. Like the representative who spoke before me, I did not want to take the floor and further postpone the adjournment of this meeting, but given what I have heard I feel forced to respond.

What we and other Arab delegations have said regarding violations of human rights by Israel is not something that we invented. It is a reality documented by numerous reports of human rights entities and bodies and international organizations. We are here to consider the Palestinian issue and the reports prepared by various international bodies dealing with the Palestinian question. All reaffirm exactly what has been said by the Arab States regarding settlement policies, Palestinian prisoners and detainees, violations of human rights, violations of the rights of the Palestinian people, and the blockade of Gaza. All of those facts have been documented and cannot be denied. They are a simple reality, regardless of anything that might be said to the contrary, especially by the Israeli representative.

Programme of work

The Acting President : I should like to consult members regarding an extension of the work of the Second Committee. Members will recall that at its 2nd plenary meeting, on 20 September, the General Assembly approved the recommendation of the General Committee that the Second Committee should complete its work by Friday, 29 November. However, I have been informed by the Chair of the Second Committee that the Committee requests an extension of its work to Friday, 6 December, as such an extension would facilitate reaching consensus on the pending draft resolutions before the Committee.

May I take it that the General Assembly agrees to extend the work of the Second Committee until Friday, 6 December?

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.

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