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UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN SUPPORT OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

United Nations Headquarters, New York
23 and 24 September 2002

Theme: End the Occupation!

NGO DECLARATION

We come together as non-governmental and civil society organizations committed to the United Nations goal reflected in the theme of this conference: "End the Occupation". Our organizations, in Africa, in Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America, in the Middle East, together with our Palestinian and Israeli partners, work in our countries to bring this goal to fruition.

It is very appropriate that we meet at the United Nations given the permanent responsibility the Organization has for the question of Palestine. We believe that the immediate cause of the conflict is the occupation by Israel since 1967 of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. We demand unequivocally: "End the occupation" – a call rooted in international law and the position of the United Nations.

As civil society organizations, we are appalled by the international community's failure, so far, to provide serious protection for Palestinian civilians living under military occupation. While efforts have been made in the United Nations towards such protection, use and threat of a veto by the United States has prevented passage of the appropriate resolutions. In its place, non-violent activists of non-governmental and civil society organizations from around the world, at extraordinary personal risk, have mobilized to provide human protection to Palestinians facing the onslaught of military occupation. We highly commend the work of these brave activists. However, we believe that the necessity of their presence, as the only buffer between helpless civilians and a powerful military machine, stands as an indictment of the international community's failure to provide the serious protection of Palestinian civilians living under occupation that is required under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

We fear that the consequences of a U.S. war against Iraq will be calamitous for Palestinians and others in the region. Specifically, we are gravely concerned that such a war could be used to conceal the "transfer" – ethnic cleansing – of Palestinians from their homeland.

We are angered and dismayed at the deterioration of humanitarian conditions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and at the escalation of repressive measures being used against the Palestinian people, its leadership and its institutions, in particular the siege of Yasser Arafat's Headquarters in Ramallah, by the Occupying Power in violation of the Geneva Conventions. Those include annexation and settlement, the reoccupation of Palestinian cities and blocking of roads between them; expulsions and targeted assassination of scores of Palestinians; attacks on ambulances and medical personnel; house demolitions; destruction of water storage facilities; uprooting of thousands of fruit and olive trees; 24-hour curfews; almost permanent closures of towns, villages and cities; and excessive use of force, including weapons of war such as F-16 bombers and helicopter gunships used against apartment houses, refugee camps and other civilian targets, causing the deaths of numerous Palestinians. We deplore the loss of innocent lives on both sides.

Our Call:

· We look to the United Nations to bring an end to these violations. We believe that the United Nations, its Charter, its resolutions, as well as the Geneva Conventions and other sources of international law, provide the best framework for resolving the Israel-Palestine conflict and ending Israel's occupation, leading to conditions of justice and a comprehensive and lasting peace.

· We hold Israel accountable to end the occupation, and to implement the Geneva Conventions' protections of Palestinians while it is ending the occupation.

· We hold the international community responsible for protecting Palestinians living under an illegal occupation, through ensuring implementation of the Geneva Convention's protection of occupied populations and civilian population in times of war and through enforcement of the numerous United Nations resolutions calling for an end to Israel's occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem.

· We recall the words of U.S. President George W. Bush, in a far different context, when he asked whether United Nations "resolutions [are] to be honored and enforced, or cast aside without consequence?" We believe all United Nations resolutions must be honored and enforced, and we believe the consequences for failing to honor and enforce the decisions of the international community are serious and have a global impact. Such violations of the Geneva Conventions constitute grounds for war crimes prosecution under the terms of the Rome Treaty establishing the International Criminal Court. We know that Security Council resolutions [242](#) and [338](#) serve as the linchpins of diplomatic peace efforts. We urge full and immediate compliance with those resolutions. We also call on our governments and on the international community acting in concert to ensure swift and comprehensive enforcement of all outstanding resolutions regarding Israel's illegal occupation, non-compliance with the Geneva Conventions, human rights, and other violations.

· We urge the parties to return to the negotiating table and to seek with the support of the international community a just and comprehensive settlement to the conflict. It should be based on Security Council resolutions 242, 338 and [1397](#) and lead to the end of Israeli occupation and the establishment of an independent, sovereign and viable Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security. It must also include the right of return, the status of Jerusalem and other outstanding issues.

· We call on the United Nations to establish a Women's Commission of Palestinian, Israeli and other peace activists, in accordance with the mandate of Security Council Resolution 1325.

Our Commitments:

· We commit ourselves and our organizations to work within our own countries, to pressure our own governments and parliaments, and to urge the United Nations itself, in particular the members of the Security Council, to move quickly to create an international interposition (buffer) and protection force in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, recognizing that any protection force must be tied to a political process leading to an end to the occupation. Should the Security Council continue to be paralyzed on this issue, we call on the General Assembly to use exercise its authority to consider this issue and to reach its own determination and decision regarding the authorization, mandate, funding, recruiting and deployment of such an international force. Such an international force would provide crucial protection for Palestinian civilians living under occupation as well as for Israeli civilians deprived of personal security as the consequence of occupation. We intend to press our own governments to support such a move in the General Assembly.

· We will continue to support the NGO and civil society movements inside the Occupied Palestinian Territory who are working under tremendous odds to provide for the humanitarian needs of their people and for the realization of an end to occupation. We will continue to participate in and support the work of those groups working directly to protect Palestinians from the military assault of the occupation forces.

· We will work to press our own Governments, as well as regional and international organizations, to fully implement all relevant United Nations resolutions on the Question of Palestine, including those dealing with the end of occupation, creation of a Palestinian State with its capital in Jerusalem, the right of return, the removal of settlements, and related issues. We look forward to continuing to coordinate our work and campaigns with the NGO network on the question of Palestine worldwide. We also call for full implementation of Article 14 of United Nations Security Council [resolution 687](#) which calls for the establishment of a "zone free of all weapons of mass destruction" throughout the Middle East.

· We encourage the United Nations and its Secretary-General to take the lead on the international efforts to find a comprehensive, just and lasting solution.

· We commend the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for hosting this NGO and civil society forum. We express our deep thanks to the Division for Palestinian Rights and other units of the Secretariat for their work in preparing and organizing the forum. We urge the Committee to continue to convene such international and regional forums to enable the network of international civil society organizations to continue its coordination of campaigns until such time as the occupation is ended.

As non-governmental and civil society organizations, we stand with the United Nations in the effort to realize the goals of this conference: to End the Occupation.

New York, 24 September 2002