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IF UNITED NATIONS SEEKS POSITIVE ROLE IN MIDDLE EAST, IT MUST ESCHEW 'ONE-SIDED'

RESOLUTIONS, EMBRACE POLITICS OF HOPE, ISRAEL'S REPRESENTATIVE TELLS ASSEMBLY

General Assembly Hears Introduction of Texts on Syrian Golan, Jerusalem; Palestinian Observer Says Israel Must Commit Itself to Peace 'In Word and Deed'

Urging the United Nations to discard its "one-sided" narrative of blame and engage in the politics of hope, Israel's representative pressed General Assembly delegates today to determine whether their work contributed to the cause of peace – or hampered it, as they concluded discussion of the question of Palestine, and opened debate on the broader situation in the Middle East.

As the Assembly gathered to hear speeches on Palestine and the Middle East that harkened to those of years past, she said sadly, the answer was self-evident. While the Assembly would likely adopt the resolutions before it on the "Syrian Golan" and "Jerusalem", among others, their relevance was of negative value. She wondered whether one-sided texts that condemned Israel's behaviour, year after year, brought any tangible relief to Palestinians.

Honestly addressing the issues required rejecting the approach that had become a yearly ritual and adopting a "fresh outlook". Indeed, while the rhetoric the Assembly used in connection with the issue seemed mired in finger-pointing, the facts on the ground had changed. She urged acknowledging that Israel was at peace with two of its neighbours – Egypt and Jordan – and that Palestinians were engaged in substantive peace talks. Meanwhile, the real situation in the Middle East evinced a "wave of extremism" across the region, with Iran's President inciting Israel's destruction. "This body must embrace a new paradigm", she asserted.

Speaking in exercise of the right of, the representative of the Permanent Observer for Palestine said that the only "side" being taken by the Assembly was that of international law and justice, in line with the United Nations Charter. Israel's comments on the repetitiveness of resolutions were empty arguments with no resonance among the majority of United Nations Member States, which supported the peace process, on the basis of international law.

Rather than ask whether resolutions contributed to the cause of peace, to which the answer was "yes", Israel should ask what it was contributing to that cause, she said. The answer was that Israel was not contributing, as shown by its continued building of colonial settlements, fragmentation of territory and imprisonment of civilians, and blockade of more than 1.5 million Palestinians. All such violations only worsened the destabilizing situation on the ground.

Turning to the wider Middle East, Egypt's representative said Israel's occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories was at the core of the Middle East conflict. Indeed, the Middle East situation called for intense action to advance final status talks on the Palestinian track, with a view to achieving a comprehensive settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict on all tracks, based on the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and all relevant resolutions.

Against that backdrop, he introduced the draft resolutions before the Assembly, saying first that the text on "Jerusalem" pointed to General Assembly and Security Council resolutions as the main terms of reference for Jerusalem's special status. As such, it renounced all legislative and administrative measures taken by Israel to alter that status.

The text on the "Syrian Golan" highlighted Israel's continued non-compliance with Security Council resolution 497 (1981), he said, and confirmed the applicability of both The Hague Convention (1907) and the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949). It also renewed calls for Israel to withdraw from the Golan Heights to June 1967 borders, resume peace talks on the Syrian track, and respect commitments reached through previous negotiations.

Apart from resolutions, the representative of Norway said a peace process required a "unity of purpose" from both parties, and it was difficult to see how a peace treaty could be concluded – much less implemented – without overcoming the internal Palestinian divide. That was why Egypt's role was so important in facilitating Palestinian reconciliation and brokering a calm in the Gaza Strip and Southern Israel.

While experience had cautioned against raising expectations, he said the Assembly could not but welcome that the parties appeared engaged in serious negotiations, particularly after the recent meeting at Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. He called on both parties to honour their Road Map obligations, urging also that settlement activity stop, and the agreement on movement and access be implemented. The Arab Peace Initiative held promise but would require painful concessions on all sides.

Jordan's representative added that a viable Palestinian economy was very important for the realization of peace. The major challenge was to revive it, attract new investment and create job opportunities. Jordan supported the Palestinian leadership in its efforts to establish a democratic system, build democratic institutions and provide necessary financing to reinvigorate the economy.

Also speaking today on the question of Palestine were the representatives of Algeria, South Africa, Sudan, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Canada, Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nicaragua, Iran, Namibia, Venezuela, Morocco, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Yemen.

Speaking in exercise of the right of reply was the representative of Syria.

Addressing the Assembly on the Situation in the Middle East were the representatives of Cuba (on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement), Kuwait, Syria, Libya, Switzerland, India, Turkey, China, Australia and Japan.

The General Assembly will reconvene on Wednesday, November 26 at 10 a.m. to take action on draft resolutions relating to the question of Palestine and the Situation in the Middle East.

Background

The General Assembly met this morning to continue its consideration of the question of Palestine (please see Press release [GA/10789](#)), and begin its consideration of the question of the Middle East.

The Secretary-General's report on the situation in the Middle East (document A/63/361), which contains replies from Member States in response to the Secretary-General's note verbale of 28 April 2008, concerns the implementation of the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolution 62/84, entitled "Jerusalem", and resolution 62/85, entitled "The Syrian Golan".

Under resolution 62/84, the Assembly supported the decision of Member States with diplomatic missions in Jerusalem to withdraw those missions from the city. Resolution 62/85 demanded that Israel withdraw from the Syrian territory it had occupied since 1967. In April 2008, the Secretary-General sent a note verbale to Israel's permanent representative, and to other Member States, requesting information on any steps their Governments had taken towards the implementation of the above referenced resolutions. As of 31 August 2008, replies have been received from Columbia, Ecuador, Mexico and Syria.

Also before the Assembly are two draft resolutions; the first, on Jerusalem (document A/63/L.36), reiterates the Assembly's determination that any actions taken by Israel to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration on Jerusalem are illegal, and thus void. By the text, the Assembly stresses that a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Jerusalem should account for Palestinian and Israeli concerns, and include internationally guaranteed provisions to ensure the freedom of religion of its inhabitants.

By the resolution on the Syrian Golan (document A/63/L.37), the Assembly expresses concern about the illegal occupation, the settlement construction and other activities of Israel in the Syrian Golan since 1967. The text further notes Israel's disregard of the Security Council's resolution 497 (1981) which null and voids Israel's ensuing actions to impose law jurisdiction and administration on the Syrian Golan civilians.

Per the Hague Convention of 1907 and the 1949 Geneva Convention Protection regarding Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, the draft resolution would have the Assembly call upon all parties thereto to respect and ensure respect for the obligations under those instruments in all circumstances, and for Israel to resume the talks on the Syrian and Lebanese issues and to honour the commitments and undertakings reached during previous talks.

In that context, the Assembly would request that all parties concerned, the co-sponsors of the peace process and the entire international community exert all the necessary efforts to ensure the resumption of the peace process and its success by implementing Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

Statements on the Question of Palestine

MOURAD BENMEHIDI (Algeria) said this year was the twentieth anniversary of the Algiers Declaration that had proclaimed the creation of an independent Palestinian State during the 1988 meeting of the National Palestinian Council. It had been an historic decision and had let the Palestinian people make the choice to unify their ranks and seek peace. That strategic choice had been made despite the injustice imposed on the Palestinian people by Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 1947, which had denied their rights to self-determination. Algeria had made the Palestinian cause one of its international actions.

The Arab Peace Initiative had been received by Israel's continued aggression. Israel had enclosed territory, closed crossing points, continued the construction of the illegal separation wall, and refused to let refugees return. That had led to the fragmentation of the peace process, he said, adding that the prospects of a lasting peace seemed more remote. The impact had been disastrous on the humanitarian front, which was seen in the various reports of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and non-governmental organizations. It had produced tragic living conditions for Palestinians. The rates of poverty and unemployment had reached alarming levels.

The international community had to bring pressure on Israel and ensure implementation of relevant resolutions. Algeria pointed to the passivity of the Security Council. It was in no haste to complete the peace process and did not force Israel to act, he said. Algeria expected that the international community would be fully committed to bringing about a viable, sovereign and independent state with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

ZAHEER LAHER (South Africa) recalled that, at the Annapolis, Maryland, conference, Palestinian and Israeli leaders jointly declared their determination to work towards a peaceful conflict settlement based on the creation of two States, and to make every effort to conclude an agreement before the end of 2008. As year-end approached, it was time to reassess the parties' commitment to the process and the international community's assistance in bringing them closer to their stated goal.

Despite assurances that the talks continued, he said the situation had not significantly improved since their start. In fact, in some areas, such as illegal settlement activity, progress had deteriorated. Parties to negotiations were obliged to ensure that by their actions they indicated commitment to the process, as any positive political progress must be coupled with visible progress on the ground.

Israel had clear obligations under international law, he explained, and illegal acts such as the siege on Gaza, incursions in the West Bank, checkpoints and the separation Wall had all contributed to the cycle of violence. While recognizing Israel's security concerns, South Africa did not condone the use of disproportionate force to achieve it. Israel's right to self-defence did not entitle it to violate civilians' rights. Joining the global condemnation of illegal Israeli settlement activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, he urged Israel to immediately freeze all such activity and dismantle outposts built since March 2001.

Further, he urged Palestinians and Israelis to continue negotiations, reiterating that the primary responsibility for peace and security lay with the two sides. It was crucial that their actions be calculated to advance the quest for peace. As a nation previously beleaguered by conflict, South Africa hoped a negotiated settlement could be forged which created two States living in peace as neighbours. He also called on all Palestinian leaders to unite the Palestinian people. In closing, he said South Africa would continue ensure that the voices of victims living under occupation were not silenced by acts of repression. Inaction by the United Nations would be misunderstood as condoning suffering on the ground.

GABRIELA SHALEV (Israel) said one should ask whether General Assembly resolutions condemning Israel's behaviour brought any tangible relief to Palestinians. Had they had any other effect than to strengthen the belief in Israel that this "great Organization" was too one-sided to be allowed a significant role in the Middle East peace process? Worse, rhetoric used in connection with the issue implied a refusal to concede the legitimacy of Israel's existence, let alone the validity of its security concerns.

Those words, she said, belonged to former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Today, the Assembly had gathered to hear speeches on Palestine and the Middle East that were similar to those of years past, and as such, she called on States to engage in "soul searching". Did their work contribute to the cause of peace? Did it help the beleaguered region? The answer, sadly, was self-evident. While the Assembly would likely adopt the resolutions before it today, their relevance was of negative value.

Honestly addressing the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East required rejecting the approach that had become a yearly ritual, and adopting a "fresh outlook". The facts on the ground had changed, while the resolutions had not. She urged acknowledging that Israel was at peace with two of its neighbours, Egypt and Jordan, and that Palestinians were engaged in substantive peace talks.

As to the real situation in the Middle East, she pointed to the wave of extremism spreading across the region, which had endangered stability and threatened moderate forces. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad continued to incite Israel's destruction, while the Iranian Government developed nuclear capabilities and funded terrorist movements, including Hamas and Hizbullah.

Moreover, Syria continued to offer safe haven to terrorists, she said. Hamas launched incessant rocket attacks against Israeli civilians, while Hizbullah built a massive arsenal of weapons. Such critical issues must be addressed, yet, the Assembly's debate reflected a commitment to an old narrative. "This body must embrace a new paradigm", she asserted.

While Israel's ability to influence the United Nations' agenda was limited, on the ground, it was committed to the peace process, she said, and if the Organization sought a positive role, it must recognize that the two-sided conflict required a two-sided solution. The debate appeared silent on Palestinian responsibilities, including the rejection of extremism and acceptance of Israel's existence and right to self-determination. Israel could not accept 29 November as a day of solidarity with Palestinians without acknowledging that on that date, the United Nations proposed a two-State solution. "One-sided days of solidarity did not promote a culture of peace," she said.

Nonetheless, Israel and the Palestinians were advancing towards the establishment of a Palestinian State in peace and security alongside Israel, she said, and the recent meeting at Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, had produced more developments. The question was not whether to achieve a two-State solution, but how to do so. Progress was made through bilateral negotiation and agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. The international community's role was to strengthen moderates in the region, "those who want to bridge the gaps". In closing, she urged discarding the politics of blame and engaging in the politics of hope.

HASSAN HAMID HASSAN (Sudan) saluted that the day that the Assembly had begun its debate coincided with the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People and solidarity with the heroic people of Palestine. He hoped the international community carried out its duty regarding the dangerous situation on the ground, and worked to provide fairness and legality to the Palestinian people with the creation of an independent state with holy Jerusalem as its capital. He paid particular tribute to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and its staff.

The Israeli Government continued its expansion of settlements at a higher level and ignored all resolutions of the United Nations, including Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1515(2003). In addition to ongoing construction, Israel had continued its military occupations on the West Bank, destroyed infrastructure and had prevented humanitarian workers from reaching people.

Turning to the illegal separation wall, he said Israel had continued to erect that barrier at the expense of the Palestinian villages and farmland. In the Gaza Strip, Israel had continued its closing of crossing points and hampered supplies of energy. The occupying Power was increasing its seizure of the Gaza Strip, and living conditions were deteriorating. All that was happening ran counter to international law and legality, and the acts were the direct reason for the increase in violence.

The historic responsibility of the international community still remained, and Sudan hoped it would stand by its obligations as it had when it ended racial segregation in South Africa. The international community needed to force Israel to respect the resolutions on the question of Palestinian and the resolutions of the league of Arab States, including the Arab Peace Initiative.

Any current initiative that did not take into account the creation of an independent Palestinian State would not be successful. And any solution that did not put an end to the occupation of the Syrian Golan and Palestinian Territories would be a failure. Sudan supported all efforts that would lead to a just solution and the enjoyment by Palestinians of all their rights and to live in dignity.

TAWFEEQ AHMED ALMANSOOR (Bahrain), said preparations to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights went hand in hand with the issuance of reports reflecting increased human rights violations by Israel in the Occupied Territories. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in its report (document A/63/35), had affirmed that the Israeli army continued its military operations in Palestinian populations centres, seen in extrajudiciary assassinations and the demolition of civilian infrastructure and agricultural land. The Committee was concerned at the situation on the ground, as Israel had used disproportionate force against Palestinians.

Israel regarded Gaza as an "enemy territory", which had led to the closing of crossing points, and represented a collective punishment of Palestinians in that area, he said. The Committee also found that restrictive measures were the main cause of economic recession there, and the gross domestic product increasingly depended on assistance from donors. Israeli settlements in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem violated international law, which threatened peace and ran counter to resolution 478 (1980).

He called on Israel to freeze its settlement activities. Israel's building of the separation Wall ran counter to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. Israel's presence in the Occupied Syrian Golan contravened a resolution banning military occupation of any region and Security Council resolution 497

(1981), which stated Israel's claim was null and void. There were 45 settlements in that area built on villages destroyed by the Occupation. Syrians in that area had limited access to water. In closing, he reaffirmed the United Nations' responsibility for the Palestinian question in keeping with international law. He called for creating an independent and viable Palestinian State living side by side with Israel, in line with relevant resolutions, the "Road Map" and the Arab Peace Initiative.

AHMED ABDULRAHMAN AL-JARMAN (United Arab Emirates) said that despite the passage of 60 years since the passage of Assembly Resolution 181, as well as many other resolutions calling on Israel to terminate its occupation of Palestinian land, Israel had refused to abide by the will of the international community. The Palestinian people were chafing under the yoke of Israeli occupation, which was depriving them of the simplest human rights.

By example, he said that Israel destroyed homes in Gaza and hampered deliveries of fuel and supplies and created a widespread humanitarian disaster. Israel had used barriers and checkpoints to separate Palestinian Territories and expanded their settlements. It had expanded the Wall deeper into the Palestinian Territories. The continued impotence of the international community had encouraged the Israeli Government to pursue its aggressive policies and to hold onto the Occupied Territories. This had contributed to the stagnation of the current political process.

The international community needed to press Israel to pull out from all the territories seized in 1967 and solve the problem of the refugees. It needed to help the Palestinian people achieve an independent state. The United Arab Emirates believed a comprehensive and permanent peace required a just settlement to other pending Arab-Israeli issues. It further required Israel to adhere to international resolutions and show serious intentions. Negotiations were needed on the issue of the Syrian Golan.

The United Arab Emirates was concerned that delivery of humanitarian assistance into the territories was being impeded because of the closure and blockade policy that deprived the Palestinians of their basic services. He called on the international community to provide protection to the Palestinian people and double all types of humanitarian assistance, and to help it to rebuild its national institutions. He backed all regional and international efforts that fully respected the rights of all states in the region to live in recognized boundaries.

SALEMAL-SHAFI (Qatar) said those following the annual reports of the Committee on the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People had found that they affirmed that a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question must be based on United Nations resolutions, Israel's withdrawal from territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, and respect for all regional countries to live within safe and recognized borders.

However, Israel had remained intransigent, and still violated international law and resolutions. Israel had resorted to extreme force against Palestinians, with the army continuing its operations in Palestinian population centres, including through extrajudicial killings, arrests and the continued blockade of the Gaza Strip. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East's latest appeal for humanity had come last week, he said.

Negotiations which took place, from time to time, to achieve a just settlement to the Palestinian question would never bear fruit without clear improvement on the ground, as "deeds always speak louder than words". Noting that 2008 was the anniversary of "al Nakba", he said most would agree that what was needed was the will to arrive at a just and durable solution to the conflict. For its part, the international community must move away from words towards work on the ground that would lead to results.

He called on Israel to stop violating international humanitarian law in the Occupied Territory, and underlined that peace, security and stability in the Middle East would not be achieved without a timeline for the return of Palestinians to their homeland, and creation of a viable Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

HENRI-PAUL NORMANDIN (Canada), reaffirming his country's firm commitment to the goal of a negotiated two-State solution and a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, said Canada backed Israel's right to live within secure borders, and the establishment of a sovereign, independent and viable Palestinian State as part of such negotiated settlement. However, he lamented that while much progress had been achieved over the past year, Canada remained nevertheless deeply concerned by the humanitarian situation facing Palestinians, and the continuing violence in Southern Israel and Gaza.

In order for the peace process to succeed, it was crucial that the parties took the necessary steps to foster the conditions for peace. It was vital that they continued to make efforts towards meeting all of their Road Map obligations, he said, noting that while the Palestinian Authority had made real progress in improving security, more needed to be done. That was why Canada's assistance had been focused clearly on the security and justice sectors. At the same time, further action was needed by the Government of Israel to address its obligations regarding settlements and access and movement.

He stated that Canada continued to recognize the important role of the United Nations and its Member States in supporting the peace process. Yet, Canada remained concerned about the number of United Nations resolutions which singled out Israel, as well as the disproportionate focus placed on the Middle East. Canada believed that the efforts of the United Nations and its Member States needed to complement efforts towards a comprehensive settlement.

Concluding, he said it was the duty of the parties, with the backing of the international community, to keep the momentum generated in the peace process and to conclude an agreement to ensure a just and lasting peace in the region.

NAWAF SALAM (Lebanon) said the official Israeli narrative portrayed that the expulsion of Palestinians resulted from directions from Arab leaders. However, two scientific researchers found there was no basis for that narrative, and it was part of a misguided campaign to shirk responsibility for the refugee problem.

Second, he said Zionist leaders believed it was impossible to achieve their project without the elimination of the Palestinians. That policy had been pursued by the supreme Zionist leadership to control larger portions of Palestinian land by evicting Palestinians in a manner of "ethnic cleansing". In that context, he cited documentation from 1949 on "the ethnic cleansing of Palestine" through terrorism and organized massacre.

The outcome of "al Nakba" was Israel's seizure of Palestinian land, he said, noting that the Palestinian tragedy continued today with Israel's settlement campaign in the West Bank. Israel had not been deterred by Assembly resolutions, and even after the international conference at Annapolis, Maryland, thousands of units had been built. In addition, Israel continued to illegally build the Wall, contravening the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. Such activities were documented in the Committee's report.

Moreover, the Gaza Strip was under siege, he said, and the closure of crossings impeded the delivery of goods. Israel continued intensive air raid attacks, under the pretext of responding to rocket fire. Though Israel claimed it had stopped its occupation of Gaza, from the angle of international law, the land was still under occupation, and as such, under effective control of a State.

Durable peace must be based on international law, the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference, and the Arab Peace Process, all of which insisted on Israel's withdrawal from Arab territories, he said. The problem of refugees was the essence of the Palestinian question, and he reminded delegates of Lebanon's refusal for refugees to stay on its land. He outlined the reasons for that, saying that doing so would run counter to Palestinians' human rights, outlined in the Universal Declaration. It was difficult for a small country, such as Lebanon, to secure decent living for 400,000 Palestinians, especially at a time when many Lebanese were immigrating. Also, settlement would threaten both Lebanese and Palestinian identities.

H.M.G.S. PALIHAKKARA (Sri Lanka) said his country had consistently supported the Palestinian peoples' efforts to realize their legitimate aspirations. He read a

message from Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa that had been delivered at Monday's session of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. In the message, President Rajapaksa had said this year's observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People was of special significance, as it marked 60 years of Palestinian dispossession. Sri Lanka reaffirmed its unequivocal support to the People and Government of Palestine, including their right to statehood.

While the Annapolis Conference provided hope, the achievement of an agreement based on the two-State solution by the end of 2008 had not materialized and the Palestinian people continued to endure increasing hardships. The agreement on a ceasefire in Gaza was a welcome development, and it was important for both parties to implement their obligations under the Quartet Road Map. The Road Map remained the most viable means of achieving a comprehensive settlement in accordance with United Nations resolutions.

The unity of the Palestinian people was important to achieving a lasting solution, and he urged all segments of the Palestinian polity to resolve their differences and unite behind President Abbas and his Government. Sri Lanka considered it timely that the international community would take practical measures to produce an early resolution to the problems of the Palestinian people.

ABDULLAH HUSSAIN HAROON (Pakistan) said it was regrettable that as the end of the year approached, the prospects for a peace treaty envisaged by the Annapolis conference had disappeared. But even more regrettable, and of grave concern, was the serious deterioration of the conditions in the Occupied Territory.

While the international community had expected that the post-Annapolis period would be used to undertake immediate and credible confidence building steps aimed at improving the overall environment conducive for the success of the negotiations, the opposite had in fact occurred. Defying calls of the international community, Israel had continued, with impunity, its illegal practices, policies and military campaigns, with disastrous consequences both for the population under occupation and for the peace process, he said.

Asserting that killing of all civilians was unacceptable, he declared that repeated Israeli military attacks and incursions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, particularly in the Gaza Strip, had resulted in considerable loss of innocent life and injuries, including among women and children. He reiterated Pakistan's call on all sides to reject violence and instead respect their own obligations under international human rights law and humanitarian law.

Continuing, he said confidence would not be built in the face of incessant actions involving use of force, human rights violations, discrimination, erection of checkpoints, and blockades of entire populations resulting in social and economic strangulation and collective punishment of the Palestinian people. He urged Israel to seriously reconsider its policies and actions, which were endangering the lives of the besieged Palestinian people and also the peace process – actions which in turn did not serve Israel's own security concerns.

Further, Israel had to honour its commitments and obligations in order to demonstrate its credibility and desire for peace. "It must shun the use of force, immediately halt the construction of the separation Wall, stop its colonization campaign of settlements, and demolish outposts as promised at Annapolis and remove the blockades of the Gaza Strip," he said.

He added that the international community, especially the diplomatic Quartet and the United Nations, needed to ensure that urgent steps were taken by all sides to remove all those impediments for peace, observing, "We may have missed a timeline of Annapolis for a peace treaty. But we must not let the hope for peace die. Failure is not an option."

MARÍA RUBIALES DE CHAMORRO (Nicaragua) said the Palestinians, who had lived for more than 4,000 years on their lands, continued to be excluded from other nations, as they had not been able to achieve a free and sovereign State on their territory. She cited Assembly resolution 181 of 1947, which had outlined the creation of a Jewish and Arab State, saying that Israel was allocated the most fertile areas. The Israelis, unsatisfied, used their military force to destroy that situation, driving more than 800,000 Palestinians into exile, and destroying temples, churches and mosques. Israel persisted, and in 1967 launched a large-scale settlement movement which annexed the Arab section of Jerusalem, creating fresh waves of Palestinian refugees join those from 1948, she said.

The ongoing Occupation had been worsened by the building of the wall, she said, which separated East Jerusalem from the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The 2004 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice had stated that the wall contravened international law, and that Israel must immediately stop its construction and make reparations. The Court had also called for the resumption of the peace process with the implementation of the Road Map. It had made the point that all States were obliged to not recognize the illegal situation stemming from the wall's construction, and all States Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention must ensure that Israel complied with international humanitarian law.

Though Israel had continued to build the wall, and was supported by one Security Council member, it could not change resolution 181, she said. Israel had not ended collective punishment against Palestinians, she said, citing recent killings and the wounding of more than one hundred civilians, particularly in the Gaza Strip, the indiscriminate use of force, and the destruction of Palestinian homes. Israel carried out daily arrests, and more than 100 women were still detained in Israeli prisons, many subject to inhuman conditions. Israel pursued its settlement campaign, illegally confiscating lands, transferring Israeli settlers and building the notorious wall to protect them. The campaign breached international humanitarian law, she said.

It was time to adopt confidence-building measures to move towards a final settlement, she said. Commending the Committee for its work on Palestinian issues, she advocated a politically just settlement based on United Nations resolutions, including outlining Palestinians' right of return. Nicaragua supported the Palestinian cause as a matter of principle, and she called for stepping up efforts to find a peaceful solution, taking as basis for it recognition of pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

MOHAMMAD KHAZAEI (Iran) concurred with earlier speakers in observing that, 60 years after the occupation of the Palestinian territories, the situation had deteriorated rather than improved, with at least 7 million Palestinians now declared as refugees, thereby constituting the world's oldest and largest refugee population.

Also as a result of the occupation of the Palestinian territories, more than 11,000 Palestinians, including hundreds of minors and women, were being kept in "appalling conditions" in Israeli prisons or in detention camps, he said, adding that it was common knowledge that nearly all the detainees, in particular children, had been subjected to torture, humiliation, abuse and beating by Israelis during detention.

He further observed that due to the inhuman blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip and because of the collective punishment carried out against the entire Palestinian population there, more than 1.5 million Palestinian residents of Gaza continued to face a humanitarian crisis with the women and, in particular, children, who accounted for more than 56 per cent of that population, experiencing the most dramatic impacts of that "brutal Israeli crime".

He noted that the Palestinian mothers who were enduring that suffering legitimately expected the United Nations, the General Assembly and the Security Council to be more attentive to their plight and more effective in addressing their sufferings. While the Assembly had reaffirmed, time and again, that the Organization had a "permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine until it was resolved in all its aspects", effective measures to end the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories had yet to be taken by the international community.

Iran believed that the Palestinian question lay at the heart of the Middle East crisis, and as such, a durable peace in Palestine and the Middle East would only be possible through justice, full restoration of the rights of the Palestinian people, including the return of all Palestinian refugees to their homeland, an end to discrimination, as well as an end to the occupation of Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories, and additionally, a democratic mechanism through which all inhabitants of Palestine, as well as Palestinians driven out of their homeland, would have the possibility to determine their future in a democratic and peaceful fashion, he said.

He firmly rejected allegations made by "a certain regime" regarding his country's intentions with regard to its nuclear programme, which he said was absolutely peaceful. Those were preposterous allegations intended to distract the international community's attention from abhorrent Israeli crimes. Instead, it was the said regime which posed the most immediate threat to regional and international peace and security, he said, adding that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) had attested to the peacefulness of the Iranian nuclear programme.

KAIRE MBUENDE ([Namibia](#)) said it had been more than 60 years since the Assembly had adopted resolution 181. The Security Council also had adopted more than 60 resolutions, yet the question of Palestine remained unresolved. The people of Palestine remained stateless and deprived of the inalienable right to self-determination. Israel had disregarded the demands of the Palestinian people and had systematically failed to comply with Assembly and Council resolutions.

It was the responsibility of the international community to ensure the people of Palestine realized their inalienable right to self-determination and statehood. He urged the United Nations to act decisively by implementing its own resolutions. The people had suffered for far too long for justice and freedom. He called upon the international community to provide the necessary moral, political and economic assistance.

Namibia was deeply concerned about the deteriorating situation in the territories as Israel continued to follow practices inconsistent with its obligations under international law as an occupying Power. Those activities included construction of settlements, expansion of the wall, and placing restrictions on the movement of people, goods and humanitarian supplies. He reiterated a call to Israel to halt punitive measures and abide by humanitarian law.

Unless the two sides joined the peace process with genuine political willingness, little could be achieved, he said. Namibia called on all concerned parties, including the diplomatic Quartet, to work to find a just and comprehensive resolution on the question of Palestine and durable peace in the Middle East.

JULIO RAFAEL ESCALONA OJEDA ([Venezuela](#)) said his delegation supported the Palestinian cause and the work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of Palestinian People. In that context, he urged strict compliance with the United Nations Charter and international law, as well as respect for State sovereignty, self-determination and non-intervention in State affairs. It was unacceptable that the Assembly, year after year, noted the more than 60 years of suffering of Palestinians, who took with them only the dream of returning to their lands. It was unjust that the Organization had not managed to restore their peace and well-being, in breach of its governing principles.

Sovereignty resided with Palestinians, he explained, and it was vital that they be granted complete control over their territory. Occupation was violence that engendered violence, and was not the "raw material" with which to build peace. In a climate of State terrorism, there could be no climate of reconciliation. Nonetheless, while Palestinians had been exposed to a wide range of abuse, they had not been destroyed.

Israel could not continue to ignore the "clamour for justice", and he called on Israel to withdraw from Palestinian territories, stop construction of the separation wall, which contravened the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, stop closures of the Gaza Strip, and end its system of checkpoints throughout the West Bank, which flagrantly violated human rights. Children were dying, he added.

Venezuela supported the creation of two States living side by side within secure, internationally recognized borders, he said, adding that only thorough negotiations could a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement to the Palestinian question be achieved. The solution must be based on relevant United Nations resolutions, and guarantee Palestinians' effective self-determination and right to return home.

HAMID CHABAR ([Morocco](#)) said the debate was very important this year with the disturbing developments in Palestine and the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. Morocco reiterated its ongoing support for the Palestinian people on all levels, and he said the question of Palestine was a very important question for the Kingdom of Morocco. Morocco was concerned with the suffering of the Palestine people, who faced "inflexibility and injustice", as well as collective punishment from Israel.

He condemned the practices of Israel and asked the international community to shoulder its responsibilities. Putting an end to the violence and following the path to peace was the only solution. He stressed the importance of the logic of dialogue and compliance with agreements, and other positive efforts, including the Arab Peace Initiative. As a member of the monitoring committee of the Initiative, he called on all parties to continue with the peace process. Morocco commended the efforts of Egypt to narrow the gap among Palestinian factions, differences that were an obstacle to achieving an independent state. Morocco was very concerned with the provocative measures of Israel.

The Palestinian economy was suffering from the limited movement of goods and services to the territories and the blockade policy was hurting the Palestinian people. It had produced a deteriorating economic situation that had harmed the people's daily lives, he said. The international community needed to pool their efforts to resolve the conflict.

ADIYATWIDI ADIWOSO ASMADY ([Indonesia](#)) said that after the Annapolis Conference in 2007, the international community had hoped that the prospects for peace would help improve the humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Yet, the activity of the Israeli Defense Forces in the area, the Hamas militants in Gaza, and continued divisions among Palestinian factions had resulted in limited progress over the past year.

While it was clear that the final objective of a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement would not be reached this year, the international community should not diminish what had been achieved. He pointed to the continuing bilateral negotiations between the two parties, and the Paris donor conference in December 2007 had shown that the international community was fully committed to supporting the peace process. In May 2008, hundreds of foreign representatives attended the Palestine investment conference in Bethlehem, where investors had pledged \$1.4 billion to support Palestinian business projects. In May 2006, the Quartet had announced a package of measures to stimulate economic development, ease movement and access restrictions, develop 60 per cent of the West Bank in Area C, and build Palestinian security capability.

Israel and Hamas had reached an agreement in June on a ceasefire brokered by Egypt, which had provided the basis for further efforts on the part of Egypt. And in July, Indonesia and South Africa had organized the new Asia-Africa Strategic Partnership Ministerial Conference on Capacity Building for Palestine, he noted.

Indonesia believed that those events and meetings showed the readiness and steadiness of the international community to resolve the Middle East issue, and he urged the community to continue demonstrating its commitment and dedication until the final prize was won. He urged Israel to honour its obligations to relevant United Nations resolutions, withdraw its forces from all occupied territories and the Syrian Golan, change its aggressive policies, and refrain from compromising the status of Jerusalem. He also urged Israel to respect the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and dismantle the existing walls and its associated regimes.

He called on Hamas to continue to maintain the ceasefire and called on all Palestinian factions to commit to a common front, since only through the unity of all

Palestinians could peace and independence be realized. Indonesia reiterated its unwavering support for the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. It supported the process begun in Annapolis as, well as the Arab Initiative.

HAMIDON ALI ([Malaysia](#)) endorsed the observation of many speakers that, more than 60 years since the question of Palestine had first come before the United Nations, the international community was nowhere near resolving that contentious issue. Indeed, rather than improving, the situation in the Occupied Territory was in fact deteriorating even further.

He noted that the occupying Power continued to distort the life of the Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, through the expansion of illegal settlements and related infrastructure, including the separation wall, and the fragmentation of the Territory using checkpoints and other obstacles. Even more worrisome was the fact that the settlements had become the locus from which violence and attacks were being launched by illegal settlers on Palestinian civilians, with a lack of enforcement of rule of law by the Israeli authorities.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza, which was being described as "virtually an open prison", remained dire, and except for a brief respite recently, had shown no improvement in the movement of either people or goods in and out of Gaza. Malaysia was especially concerned at the Israeli practices of human rights violations that affected the youth and children, the most vulnerable group, in the Occupied Territories. Calls by the international community, including by the United Nations, to stop those "atrocities" and human rights violations had gone unheeded, he said.

Malaysia was supportive of efforts aimed at finding a just, durable and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian issue, including the Quartet-backed Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative, and was hopeful that the negotiations would bring tangible results leading to a just solution to that contentious issue. For that to become a reality, parties concerned had to show commitment and sincerity in that effort, he added.

ISMAIL MOHAMED YAHYA ALMAABRI ([Yemen](#)) said Palestinians were suffering in isolation, thorough the enforced annexation of their land and destruction of their homes in a calculated fashion. All such measures were inhuman, and were being carried out in defiance of international law. Such actions rejected the human rights of Arabs in all Occupied Territories, and were in constant contravention of General Assembly resolution 194 of 1948, and Security Council resolutions 338 (1973) and 242 (1967). They undermined international efforts to implement peace agreements reached at various stages of difficult negotiations, including those to create the Road Map and undertaken at the Annapolis, Maryland, Conference.

The global community was duty-bound to end such injustices and enable Palestinians to enjoy their freedom and right to self-determination, he said. Indeed, freedom was a fundamental right, bound to the very beginnings of humankind, and reaffirmed by religions and human rights principles. The conditions of those living in the Occupied Syrian Golan were no better than those of the Palestinians, and no more acceptable. They were victims of human rights violations, and suffering under the intransigence of Israeli forces.

To address that situation, it was essential to restart negotiations, and, further, to support Turkey's efforts to bring about a peaceful solution between Syria and Israel under the land for peace principle, he said. Israel must withdraw to the borders of June 1967. Syria wished to have peace, and would take a positive attitude. He hoped the upcoming Middle East peace conference would mark a "meaningful" turning point. For the United Nations, he hoped the Organization would pressure Israel to meet its obligations, in keeping with a clear-cut timetable.

He called on the United Nations, particularly the Security Council, to play its historic role to end Israel's obstinacy. Israel's respect for international law and relevant resolutions would bring an end to a protracted conflict, and enable people to enjoy prosperity.

Right of Reply

Speaking in exercise of the right of reply, the representative of [Syria](#) said Israel did not like the fact that the Assembly had allocated today to celebrate solidarity with the Palestinian people. The Israeli representative considered the Assembly's interest in Palestine a biased position against Israel and its aggressive policies.

He said the representative of Israel had said the voices of right and peace, in support of the justice of Palestine over the decades, were an incitement to radicalism and terrorism and had impeded progress. Israel's serious isolation confused the answers and fabricated allegations. The true matter was Israeli occupation of Palestine territory and the daily prosecution of the Palestinian people.

The representative had also unfairly accused Syria of offering safe haven to terrorists. Syria had hosted millions of Palestinian refugees, some of them for more than 60 years. They were waiting for the right to return, he said.

The representative of Israel said the international community stood against it, but that representative had wanted to use the term international community according to her own measurements. The Israeli delegate seemed to think that if a majority of the Assembly opposed Israel's aggressive policies, then that meant the majority encouraged radicalism and terrorism. However, Israel had the darkest record of terrorism and it had introduced official terrorism into the region, he said.

Also exercising the right of reply, the representative of the [Observer for Palestine](#) spoke to Israel's questioning of the tangible benefits of General Assembly resolutions. She responded that yes, indeed, those resolutions were to bring immediate benefits to Palestinians. However, that would only be possible if Israel complied with them. That was the missing link, and the reason why the Assembly, year after year, continued to address the same depressing issues that had only been exacerbated with the passage of time. She called on Israel to end its more than four decades of military occupation and become a law-abiding member of the community of nations, rather than disparage international efforts to rectify Palestinians' suffering.

The only "side" being taken by the Assembly was that of international law and justice, in line with the United Nations Charter, she said. To Israel's comments on the repetitiveness of resolutions, she said they were empty arguments with no resonance with the majority of Member States, which supported the peace process, on the basis of international law. Rather than ask the arrogant question of whether resolutions contributed to the cause of peace, to which the answer was "yes", Israel should ask what it was contributing to that cause. She said Israel was not contributing by its continued building of colonial settlements and the wall, fragmentation of territory, imprisonment of civilians and blockade of more than 1.5 million Palestinians. All such violations, many tantamount to war crimes, only worsened the destabilizing situation on the ground. That was the problem.

She said no security pretext could justify Israel's continued occupation of Palestinian lands. Nowhere could security be achieved through the collective dismemberment of a people. All were cognizant of that, which was why the peace process was supported. Israel should acknowledge the international consensus that the situation was not tenable, and must commit itself to the peace process both in word and deed. She supported the two-State solution on the basis of 1967 borders, and was committed to that.

Introduction of Draft Resolutions on the Situation in the Middle East

MAGED ABDEL AZIZ ([Egypt](#)) said Israel's occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories was at the core of the Middle East conflict. Indeed, the Middle East situation called for intense action, notably to advance final status talks on the Palestinian track, with a view to achieving a just and comprehensive settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict on all tracks, based on the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and all relevant resolutions.

In that context, he said, the Assembly adopted two draft resolutions this time of year as a rejection of Israel's occupation of Arab territories: one that concerned the question of Jerusalem, a city that should maintain its special status; and another on the occupied Syrian Golan, which confirmed the global community's determination to end Israel's occupation of Syrian territories.

Implementation of Annapolis commitments would provide the appropriate environment to achieve settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, he said, adding that achieving a comprehensive peace depended on Israel's sincere commitment to attain it. As such, it should cease its unlawful practices in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Syrian Golan. He looked forward to advancing the Syrian-Israeli peace track, with a view to achieving Israel's full withdrawal from the Syrian Golan to the June 1967 borders.

Introducing the latest versions of the texts before the Assembly today, he said the draft resolution on Jerusalem (document A/63/L.36) stated that General Assembly and Security Council resolutions were the main terms of reference for Jerusalem's special status, and renounced all legislative and administrative measures taken by Israel to alter that status. It confirmed that any just solution to the question of the city must consider the legitimate concerns of Palestinian and Israeli sides, and include international guarantees to ensure the freedom of belief and religion of its inhabitants.

The draft on the Syrian Golan (document A/63/L.37) would have the Assembly reaffirm Security Council resolution 497 (1981), and it highlighted Israel's continued non-compliance to its implementation. Confirming the applicability of The Hague Convention (1907) and the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949), the draft would also renew calls for Israel to withdraw from the Golan Heights to 4 June 1967 borders, resume peace talks on the Syrian track and respect commitments reached through previous negotiations.

He explained that the time had come to deal with the Middle East situation within a comprehensive framework. As people in the region aspired for peace and development, he called for international will to realize full Israeli withdrawal from all Palestinian and Arab territories occupied since 1967, based on international law, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative, among other things.

ILEANA NÚÑEZ MORDOCHE (Cuba), speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, declared that the situation in the Middle East was the result of the ongoing military occupation by Israel of the Palestinian Territory and other Arab Territories. She reiterated the Non-Aligned Movement's regret that since 1967, for forty-one years now, the Palestinian people had continuously suffered under Israel's "brutal military occupation of their land", and that they continued to be denied their fundamental human rights, including the right to self-determination.

The Movement stressed that the primary danger to the realization of the inalienable and national rights of the Palestinian people and the achievement of the two-State solution for peace continued to be Israel's unlawful settlement campaign. That campaign had included the vast confiscation of land, the construction and expansion of settlements, the transfer of settlers, the construction of the wall, the construction of Israeli-only bypass roads and the imposition of a permit regime and other severe restrictions on movement in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.

The Non-Aligned Movement was also alarmed by the rising incidence of Israeli settler violence, harassment and intimidation against the Palestinian civilians, their properties and agricultural land, and called on the occupying Power to take all measures necessary to end such violence and lawlessness, and to hold the perpetrators of crimes against the Palestinian civilian population accountable for their action, she said.

She further reiterated the Movement's strong condemnation of all illegal Israeli settlement activities and colonization measures, including in and around Occupied East Jerusalem and in the Jordan Valley, which were aimed at what she termed as the "illegal de facto annexation of more Palestinian land". The Non-Aligned Movement called for an immediate and complete cessation of all such illegal acts and for Israel's compliance with all of its international legal obligations.

In that regard, the Movement condemned Israel's continuing flagrant challenge and disrespect of the International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion, in defiance of the General Assembly. Her delegation remained seriously concerned by the little progress so far made in the peace process re-launched after the Annapolis Conference in November last year and the resumption of direct, bilateral negotiations between the Israeli and Palestinian sides, she added. To that end, she called on all concerned parties, including the Quartet, to exert the necessary efforts in promotion of the peace process towards the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East based on the relevant Security Council resolutions.

ABDULLAH AHMED AL MURAD (Kuwait) said Israel's persistent illegal policies and practices were perhaps the most outstanding activity that jeopardized the stability of the Middle East region. Israel had persisted in its hostile practices and had continued to build a separation wall, despite the International Court of Justice ruling on 9 July 2004 that labelled it illegal. Israel's practices were a clear and flagrant violation of the fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, concerning the protection of civilians during war.

The suffering of the Palestinian people in Gaza continued as Israel continued its siege and deprived the area of supplies. Kuwait called on the international community to act swiftly to end the Israeli siege, open the crossing points and let fuel, food and humanitarian assistance reach the people of Gaza.

Kuwait renewed its commitment to support the Palestinian people in their quest for their own State, on their own their land, with Jerusalem as its capital. It renewed its demands that Israel withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan back to the border of 4 June 1967, in implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions. Kuwait also demanded that Israel cease its continued violation of Lebanese airspace and territories. The 2007 Annapolis Conference had presented a new incentive to settle the Palestinian Question, he added.

While affirming that Conference's momentum, Kuwait stressed the need to discuss all tracks, including the Lebanese and Syrian tracks, and three issues that Israel needed to consider seriously: the status of Jerusalem; a halt to building settlements; and the right of return for refugees, based on Assembly resolution 194 of 1948. The change of Israeli Governments should not justify any freeze in the negotiation process. The presiding Government could continue negotiations while the incoming Israeli Government could continue in its path, he said. The next few months would be a test of Israel's seriousness to achieve peace. He hoped the upcoming meeting of the Quartet in Moscow in March would be a step forward and provide the peace process with a new push.

BASHAR JA'AFARI (Syria) said today's debate coincided with the anniversary of "al Nakba", and he noted that the United Nations, since 1947, had not stopped dealing with many aspects of the situation in the Middle East. The General Assembly had called on Israel to end its occupation of Arab territory, and had stressed that all measures that Israel had taken in Jerusalem and the occupied Syrian Golan were illegal. Syria had conformed with Security Council resolution 497 (1981) on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and had expressed its will to work for peace since its participation in the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference.

He urged Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories to June 1967 borders, and reinstatement of Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine. The 2008 meeting in Damascus saw Arab leaders reiterate their will to attain a sustainable peace based on international law and the Arab Peace Initiative. Israel had responded by invading the West Bank, laying siege to Palestinians, soiling holy places, and undertaking a "scorched earth" campaign in the occupied territories. Moreover, it continued to build settlements and the racist separation wall, despite the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice.

The Security Council, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the World Health Organization, among others, had adopted resolutions condemning occupation of Palestinian territory, he said. Among such drafts, he cited Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 478 (1980), 497 (1981) and 487 (1981), and Assembly resolution 194/48 on the right of Palestinians to return to their lands. In addition, an ample range of jurisprudence was contained in international law, notably on crimes of aggression.

Continuing, he said Israel had refused to allow Rapporteurs, on various occasions, to visit the Occupied Arab Territory. Despite international efforts, Israel had not halted its "relentless" pillage of human and economic resources. He asked: why had such measures failed? Who was responsible, and where was the solution? The failure was in the non-implementation of resolutions. Had it not been for some countries' insistence to exempt Israel from international law, Israel would not have been allowed to annex Syrian and Palestinian Arab territories.

Israel's only concern was its own security, he said, and as such, it was unacceptable that the United Nations continued to ask Arabs to demonstrate their will for peace. Israel must demonstrate its will for peace, and convince Arabs of it. For its part, Syria had engaged in talks with Israel, with Turkish mediation, in the hope of undertaking direct negotiations under the aegis of international authorities. That called for Israel and the United States to make Middle East peace a priority.

Israel continued to pillage natural resources, plant land mines, and bury nuclear waste in the occupied Syrian Golan. He had raised those issues with the United Nations specialized agencies, and was waiting for them to take measures.

ATTIA OMAR MUBARAK ([Libya](#)) said that sixty-one years ago, the Assembly had imposed the partition of Palestine and likewise imposed the displacement of the Palestine people after dispossessing their property. The suffering continued and violations of the human rights of the Palestinians continued, even with the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It was as if the Palestinian people were not covered by that Declaration.

The Palestinian people were still struggling for an independent State and there were increased Israeli settlement activities that had forced the Palestinians to flee their land. Despite the resolutions of the Assembly and the International Court of Justice ruling that the construction of the "racist" wall was illegal and ran counter to the peace process, Israel had behaved as if it were a State above the law, he said. Israel's pretext in building the wall hung on baseless allegations. Rather, the wall was actually made to annex more land, water and natural resources. Israel wanted to impose the final shape of the territory and make boundaries unilaterally as it undermined attempts to construct a contiguous Palestinian State and hindered the peace process.

The blockade of goods and checkpoints had hampered the inflow of goods and the continued blockade of Gaza threatened the social situation as unemployment increased. The main actors, particularly the Security Council, had ignored those acts, even as international appeals highlighting the humanitarian disaster had been raised, he said.

Libya supported the right of all Palestinian refugees to return to their lands, and their right to resist occupation. After the Annapolis Conference, the occupation authorities had intensified their brutal aggression against the Palestinian people and doubled their settlement activities. The achievement of peace meant that Israel needed to pull out from all Arab territories occupied in 1967 and a viable Palestinian State had to be created.

PETER MAURER ([Switzerland](#)) said the Middle East situation had benefited from several encouraging developments. He pointed to the recent developments in Lebanon, especially the Doha Agreement, the announcement by both Lebanon and Syria to open diplomatic missions in Damascus and Beirut respectively, and the indirect peace talks between Syria and Israel under the aegis of Turkey.

Yet Switzerland had also noted a continued deterioration of the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and was concerned by tighter restrictions on the movement of people, the expansion of Israeli settlements, the construction of the separation barrier, and the destruction of Palestinian houses for administrative motives in the West Bank. Those measures contributed to additional political and social fragmentation and had hampered economic development, among other impacts, he said. In regards to Gaza, he called on the parties to respect the ceasefire, and he demanded that the blockade be lifted immediately.

Switzerland called on the parties to the conflict to honour their obligations with regard to the Road Map, international humanitarian law and human rights law. Intra-Palestinian reconciliation would be a cornerstone of a future Palestinian State and he welcomed the efforts towards a sustainable agreement undertaken by Egypt. The impact of an end to the conflict would be immense in terms of lives as well as in social, economic and environmental terms. A future in which two viable States lived side by side in peace and security vastly outweighed the efforts needed to overcome the current deadlock, he said.

SALEEMI. SHERVANI ([India](#)) said that with its "age old" cultural connections to each of the Middle Eastern communities, India had an abiding interest in the early resolution of the problem that had troubled that region since the United Nations' establishment. Indeed, commitment to the Palestinian cause was a cornerstone of India's foreign policy, and the country had recognized that resolution of the problem in the Middle East began with addressing the question of Palestine.

As such, the lack of substantive progress was a concern, he said, and despite "praiseworthy" regional efforts to resolve divisions, the situation created by June 2007 events had persisted. Gaza remained cut off, while barriers to free movement persisted in the West Bank. Such activities had created fresh grievances in an old conflict, and all acts of violence only vitiated the atmosphere for a results-oriented dialogue based on trust. In addition, unresolved issues relating to the occupation of territories in Lebanon and the Syrian Golan could fuel an already combustible situation.

Urging all parties to eschew violence, he said the international community had an immediate interest in a comprehensive solution to problems besetting the Middle East. He urged the diplomatic Quartet to do more to push the process forward towards the desired outcome. India also supported a political solution, based on the Road Map, and the Arab Peace Initiative.

At the same time, Middle East peace required movement on other tracks. He was encouraged by regional efforts to resume talks on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, and commended Turkey for re-energizing the Syria-Israel track. Recognizing the regional progress made to help resolve the political confrontation within Lebanon earlier this year, he also welcomed the decision to establish diplomatic relations between Syria and Lebanon. On other issues, he urged abiding by relevant Security Council resolutions. In closing, he said the tragedy in the Middle East could not be allowed to continue. He urged seizing the moment to enable a vision of an independent sovereign State of Palestine.

MORTEN WETLAND ([Norway](#)) said that while experience cautioned against raising expectations for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Assembly could not but welcome that the parties appeared engaged in serious negotiations, particularly after the recent meeting at Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. Calling on both sides to honour their Road Map obligations, he said settlement activity must stop, and the agreement on movement and access must be implemented.

Negotiations would benefit from tangible improvements on the ground, and without such sources of hope, the international community ran the risk of eroding popular support on both sides. "Expectations are high", he said. "If they are not met, we could face political setbacks and violence", something that must not be allowed to happen.

There was a "deeply worrying" economic and social situation in the Gaza Strip, he said, where most of the population depended on United Nations food aid, and prospects for economic activities were "staggered" by Israeli restrictions. He called on Israel to ease restrictions on the movement of goods, and refrain from administering punitive measures against an entire population.

Further, as the Palestinian economy was perhaps more vulnerable to the current economic crisis than anywhere else, the global community must stand by its commitments. For its part, Norway contributed \$137 million to the Palestinian Territory in 2008, and recently pledged to maintain that same support in 2009 and 2010. To other donors, he said "now is not the time to scale down". As chair of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, Norway emphasized the link between external

financial support and political results.

As a peace process required a "unity of purpose" from both parties, he said it was difficult to see how a peace treaty could be concluded – much less implemented – without overcoming the internal Palestinian divide. That was why Egypt's role was so important in facilitating Palestinian reconciliation and brokering a calm in the Gaza Strip and Southern Israel. Commending the positive role of regional actors in contributing towards a peaceful solution, he said the Arab Peace Initiative held promise but would require painful concessions on all sides.

FAZLI ÇORMAN ([Turkey](#)), aligning himself with the statement France made yesterday on behalf of the European Union, said the prospect of permanent stability in Lebanon introduced by the Doha Agreement, as well as the proximity talks between Syria and Israel in Istanbul, were all important steps which boded well for the future of the Middle East region. However, all that progress notwithstanding, many challenges still remained.

Particularly, the current situation in and around the border of Israel and the Gaza Strip was a source of concern for everyone. Also, settlement activities of Israel in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, as well as the continuing construction of the separation wall, were not contributing to the peace process and were contrary to Israel's obligations under the Road Map. He said as the world had entered a new period in the Middle East, it was imperative that neither party took any step which could undermine the peace process and prejudice the final status negotiations. In that regard, Israel's security concerns needed to be addressed and the Israelis had to address the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip.

Appealing to all Palestinian leaders to unite for peace, he said Turkey continued to contribute to the process of confidence building and had increased interaction between Israelis and Palestinians through several joint projects, as well as addressing the needs of the Palestinian people.

Welcoming the landmark developments in Lebanon in the implementation of the Doha Agreement, he said Turkey believed the future looked much brighter for Lebanon and pledged his country's continued efforts towards reaching peace in the region based on a two-State settlement.

Noting that the anniversary of the Annapolis Conference was approaching, ZHANG YESUI ([China](#)) observed that although the goals of those talks had not been reached, there had been positive development through subsequent multiple rounds of direct talks and close contact between representatives of Palestine and Israel. The core issue of the final status had been explored in a frank manner, and that would continue to narrow the differences between both parties and lay a foundation for the final settlement plan.

He firmly believed that political talks constituted the only approach to a solution to the situation in the Middle East, and he urged both Palestinians and Israelis to "maintain their faith in adhering to peaceful talks in all circumstances", so that an independent Palestinian state could become a reality; one which lives peacefully side by side with Israel.

He also expressed deep concern at the increase in violence and the deteriorating humanitarian situation for the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, and he urged Israel to allow unimpeded access of humanitarian goods to that area. Continuing, he noted that settlements in the West Bank were in violation of Israel's obligation under international law, and were also "unconducive to guaranteeing Israel's own security".

Calling for the international community to continue to support the Palestinian people, he also urged the Palestinians to continue to develop their capacity building efforts and accelerate their economic development. Commending the peace talks between Syria and Israel through the mediation of Turkey, as well as those with Lebanon, he noted that stable progress had been made and he encouraged all parties to continue forward. China, he said in conclusion, had always been committed to the Middle East peace process and had shown that commitment through its role on the Security Council, as well. He pledged that China would continue to work with the international community towards a comprehensive solution to the Middle East situation.

MOHAMMED AL-ALLAF ([Jordan](#)) said the Middle East faced challenges stemming from "non-progress" in addressing major issues. The Palestinians' desired to establish an independent state on national territory, and momentum generated at Annapolis threatened to be lost, which stood to render the peace process void. He urged that the peace process must be kept on track, and that the Israeli side undertake confidence building measures to improve the human situation on the ground, including through opening the checkpoints.

He said the process must be based on the conviction that the solution could only be attained by peaceful means, and that military power and unilateral solutions would only threaten regional and international peace and security. King Abdullah would put forth all efforts to help both parties reach a peaceful and viable agreement, with an establishment of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. Targeting and killing civilians would only hamper the efforts of the peace process, and continue the murder and destruction. However, he said putting an end to violence was not the responsibility of one party alone to the exclusion of the other. Rather, all the concerned parties must work together.

However, he regretted that Israel continued the illegal practices which had changed the de facto situation in the occupied territories through settlements, building the separation wall, and changing the situation in Jerusalem, which constituted a flagrant violation of international law and the Fourth Geneva Convention. Jordan rejected those actions, and he stressed that Gaza was witnessing a deterioration and drop in standards of supplies, goods and medicines, and an increase in unemployment, which was a situation that no one could accept. The drop in health services and the social and economic conditions faced by the Palestinians was tragic, and he called on the international community to support "our brothers in Palestine" to put an end to their suffering.

He said Jordan was deploying all possible efforts to put an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people and to avert the further deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the West Bank and the Gaza strip. Jordan also supported the Palestinian leadership in its efforts to establish a democratic system and to build institutions that were transparent, including security institutions and the provision of the necessary financing in order to reinvigorate the Palestinian economy.

A viable economy was a very important condition for the realization of peace, and the major challenge was to revive it and attract new investments and create job opportunities. In closing, he said that Jordan supported all efforts to realize a just, lasting and comprehensive peace and to put an end to the conflict in all its aspects.

NORIHIRO OKUDA ([Japan](#)) viewed direct negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians as essential for moving towards lasting peace. Yet, he was deeply concerned at the staggering, harsh conditions on the ground, especially in Gaza. Settlement activities in the West Bank had not been frozen as had been hoped. Further, restrictions on movement were having an adverse impact on ordinary people and generating resentment against the peace process among many Palestinians.

A comprehensive agreement addressing all core issues, such as permanent borders, Jerusalem, security arrangements, refugees and water resources, was the beginning of stability and prosperity in the Middle East. It was essential for the Palestinian people to build a viable and sustainable economy. To help achieve that goal, Japan had promoted the "Corridor for Peace and Prosperity" Initiative, which was to build an agro-industrial park in the Jordan Valley to provide jobs and promote exports to surrounding areas. The project was based on a partnership between the public and private sectors of Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Jordan, Japan and other interested parties, he said.

Japan had been implementing its commitment of \$150 million, made at the Paris Conference last December, and had provided an additional \$10 million in the form of non-project grant aid to ease the budgetary burden of the Palestinian Authority. Japan's contribution since the conclusion of the Oslo Accords in 1993 had totalled \$1 billion, he said. It had also hosted the Fourth Conference for Confidence Building between the Israelis and the Palestinians in October, which

had aimed to deepen understanding and build mutual confidence between the two sides towards a two-State solution, based on peaceful co-existence between Israel and an independent Palestine. Japan fully expected the leaders of Israel and Palestine to continue talks with unchanged determination.

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For information media • not an official record