
UNITED NATIONS AFRICAN MEETING ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

**Pretoria
9 and 10 May 2007**

Contents

	<u>Paragraphs</u>	<u>Page</u>
I. Introduction	1 - 6	
II. Opening statements	7 - 32	
III. Plenary sessions	33 - 64	
Plenary I	33 - 43	
Plenary II	44 - 56	
Plenary III	57 - 64	
IV. Closing session	65 - 71	
V. United Nations Public Forum in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace		
Opening statements	72 - 75	
Morning session	76 - 85	
Afternoon session	86 - 92	
Closing session	93 - 97	

Annexes

- | | |
|-----|----------------------|
| I. | Final document |
| II. | List of participants |

I. Introduction

1. The United Nations African Meeting on the Question of Palestine was held in Pretoria on 9 and 10 May 2007, under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolutions 61/22 and 61/23 of 1 December 2006. It was followed, on 11 May 2007, by a United Nations Public Forum in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, which was held at the University of Pretoria.

2. The Committee was represented by a delegation comprising Paul Badji (Senegal), Chairman; Victor Camilleri (Malta), Rapporteur; Dumisani Kumalo (South Africa); Esther Armenteros Cárdenas (Cuba) and Riyad Mansour (Palestine).

3. The theme of the meeting, which consisted of an opening session, three plenary sessions and a closing session, was "African solidarity with the Palestinian people for the achievement of its inalienable rights". The themes of the plenary sessions were "The situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem", "International efforts aimed at achieving a viable Israeli-Palestinian peace" and "African solidarity with the Palestinian people's aspirations for independence and statehood".

4. The Civil Society Forum consisted of an opening session, two plenary sessions and a closing session. The themes of the plenary sessions were

“Civil society in solidarity with the Palestinian people” and “Joining forces — African civil society and worldwide initiatives to support a peaceful solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict”.

5. During those events, presentations were made by 20 experts, including Palestinians and Israelis. Representatives of 58 Governments, Palestine, 1 intergovernmental organization, 4 United Nations bodies and 30 civil society organizations, as well as special guests of the host country and representatives of the media and academic institutions, attended the meeting.

6. The main points of the discussion were highlighted in the Final Document of the meeting, which is attached as annex I. The list of participants is contained in annex II.

II. Opening session

7. The African Meeting was opened by Essop Pahad, Minister in the Office of the President of South Africa. A message from the Secretary-General of the United Nations was delivered by Tuliameni Kalomoh, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs. Statements were also made by Paul Badji, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and by Samih Al-Abed, Minister for Public Works, the Palestinian Authority, and representative of Palestine at the meeting.

8. **Essop Pahad**, Minister in the Office of the President of South Africa, speaking on behalf of His Excellency President Thabo Mbeki, noted that the year 2007 marked the fortieth anniversary of the Israeli occupation, during which the conditions of the Palestinian people had continued to worsen. Mr. Pahad said that South Africa firmly believed that there could be no peace in the Middle East unless a sustainable solution to that conflict was found. He called attention to the recent regional and global efforts aimed at reigniting the peace process, especially the 2007 Arab Peace Initiative. He said that the Initiative would not be difficult to implement, adding that it involved the return of all Palestinian lands and the creation of a Palestinian States existing side by side with Israel in peace and security. On behalf of the government of South Africa, Mr. Pahad urged the international community to give unconditional recognition to and engage in dialogue with the newly established Palestinian Unity Government, to lift all restrictions and to take appropriate action to address the dire humanitarian crisis facing the Palestinian people. He said that his Government firmly believed in the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and that a military solution was not the way to resolve the conflict.

9. Mr. Pahad said that South Africa was troubled by the ongoing settlement activity and continued to believe that the separation wall did not represent a legitimate security measure, but was, in essence, an apartheid wall. He said that the situation on the ground demanded inspired and creative leadership on the part of the Palestinians and the Israelis and the sustained commitment of the international community. He noted that just as the Palestinian people were demanding an end to the occupation, the majority of Israelis were tired of being a nation at war. Mr. Pahad stressed that there must be a renewed and sustained commitment to an Arab-Israeli peace on all fronts, including the possibility of holding meetings under the aegis of the United Nations, and adherence to relevant Security Council resolutions based on the principle of land for peace. He stressed that South Africa was concerned about the humanitarian situation and the reports that an estimated one-third of the Palestinian population had no secure source of food, while key international donors had cut off aid after Hamas won the democratic elections last year. Mr. Pahad said that the situation was worse in the Gaza Strip and was further being exacerbated by Israel's restrictions on movement. He said that the resumption of aid to the Palestinian Authority was an absolute necessity to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people.

10. Mr. Pahad compared the situation of the Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory with that of the South Africans during apartheid. He noted that while Israel denied such a purpose, its oppressive actions, such as closures, checkpoints and extrajudicial killings, certainly belied that stance. He stressed that South Africa continued to condemn Palestinian rocket fire into Israel but also condemned Israel's ongoing military incursions into Gaza and other disproportionate and indiscriminate uses of force. Mr. Pahad expressed his Government's hope that the meeting would, among other things, demonstrate the alignment of Africa and the United Nations on the creation of a viable Palestinian State, based on the two-State solution, at the earliest possible moment; create more awareness among Africans and the international community of the seriousness of the conflict and its global implications; demonstrate and create greater sub-Saharan involvement in the global dialogue at a time when support for the rights of the Palestinian people by some African nations appeared to be declining at the United Nations; call for an end to the sanctions imposed by Israel, the United States of America and the European Union against the Palestinian Unity Government; and call for the inclusion of members of Hamas in United Nations meetings as part of the world body's efforts to ensure a viable solution to the conflict. Mr. Pahad concluded by saying that South Africa would work diligently to convince powers that this was an opportunity that should not be missed.

11. **Tuliameni Kalomoh**, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, on his own behalf, emphasized the importance of holding the meeting in South Africa and encouraged the leadership of both Israel and Palestine to draw on the courage of renowned South African freedom fighters and activists in their similar search for a viable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

12. **Ban Ki-moon**, Secretary-General of the United Nations, in a message delivered on his behalf by his representative, Mr. Kalomoh, noted that there had been some important recent developments as Israelis and Palestinians continued to search for a solution to end their conflict. He expressed the hope that the Palestinian Unity Government would work to curb the intra-Palestinian violence that threatened to destabilize the Gaza Strip. The Secretary-General said that he had encouraged the new Government to continue its efforts to move towards acceptance of the principles put forward by the Quartet and that he had also urged the international community to nurture that process, which he hoped would include new thinking on ways to alleviate the Palestinian fiscal crisis. He said that he had been encouraged by recent international efforts to get the Palestinians and Israelis back on the negotiating track, such as the recent Riyadh Summit of the League of Arab States, which had endorsed the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative and had established a Ministerial Committee to promote that process, the efforts by United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to promote dialogue between the parties, and the role of the Quarter in supporting those efforts and in ensuring that both parties were held to their commitments. He expressed the hope that Israeli Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas, who had begun to meet regularly to discuss a range of issues, would not be deterred from moving forward with discussions on the political horizon by the internal challenges they both faced.

13. The Secretary-General recalled that in his recent visit to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, he had seen first-hand some of the obstacles that had stalled progress in the peace process over the years, and admitted that many challenges remained. He said he had been deeply troubled by the network of checkpoints, by continued settlement activities and by the construction of the barrier on a route that deviated from the Green Line. In talking to ordinary Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the Secretary-General had noticed their deep longing for their own State and had been struck by the many frustrations they faced in their daily lives, with the deteriorating humanitarian situation and an economy that needed to be urgently revitalized. The Secretary-General said that he had also come to a better understanding of the security concerns facing Israelis during that visit and that rocket attacks and indiscriminate violence against civilians should be stopped without conditions. He added, however, that security was also an urgent need for the Palestinians, who faced a rising death toll as the result of Israeli Defense Force incursions and internal violence in Gaza.

14. The Secretary-General called on Palestinians to cease rocket attacks against Israel and for the immediate release of the abducted BBC journalist, Alan Johnston, and of the Israeli soldier being held captive. At the same time, he encouraged Israel to cease settlement activity and the construction of the wall, to ease restrictions on the movement of Palestinians, to release Palestinian revenues and to show progress on the release of Palestinian prisoners. He emphasized that Israel should also ensure that its military operations were in accordance with international humanitarian and human rights law so as not to endanger civilians. The Secretary-General reaffirmed that the United Nations would continue to actively support international efforts aimed at bringing an end to the forty-year occupation and achieving a two-State solution. A viable and independent Palestine and a safe and secure Israel would be not only a blessing for the two peoples, but would also help promote peace and stability in the wider region. He also urged the international community, including civil society and individuals, to intensify their efforts to bring about a

peaceful solution to the conflict.

15. **Paul Badji**, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, said that South Africa's long struggle against apartheid and its successful conclusion in 1994 had been an inspiration to everyone working on behalf of the just cause of the Palestinian people. Many peace advocates in South Africa had since redirected their work and support towards injustices in other parts of the world, particularly the Palestinian people. He also acknowledged the important role South Africa was playing in support of the Palestinian people at the United Nations as well, where that country had just assumed responsibilities as a non-permanent member of the Security Council. Mr. Badji said that he was convinced that South Africa would make an extensive contribution to the work of the Council, which was often paralysed, especially on the question of Palestine. He then went on to welcome the recent signs of increased momentum towards revitalizing peace initiatives, noting the reinvigoration of the Quartet and the involvement of regional Arab partners. He said that Israel was being called upon to seize the invigorated Arab Peace Initiative and other recent historic opportunities; rejecting it again would only lead to continued suffering, killing and retaliation by Palestinians and Israelis. He stressed that it was the duty of the international community to encourage the concerned parties to work towards the implementation of that important initiative.

16. Mr. Badji continued by saying that the increasing momentum in the overall peace process was being threatened, however, by the grave security and humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, which was the direct consequence of the occupation. He said that Israel continued, almost daily, to carry out military activities in the West Bank, including targeted assassinations, arrests, home demolitions, closures and curfews. The past few weeks had seen an intensification of those activities, all of which deepened the Palestinian people's despair and often triggered retaliation. Mr. Badji said that the indiscriminate targeting of civilians, whether by Israeli aircraft, tanks or artillery or by Palestinian rocket fire, was a violation of international law and had to be stopped, and he stressed that Israel needed to stop its excessive and indiscriminate use of force and extrajudicial killings and that the Palestinian leadership needed to impose its authority in the territory under its control and ensure compliance with the agreed upon ceasefire in Gaza.

17. Meanwhile, Mr. Badji said, Israel continued to expand settlements and to construct the separation wall in the West Bank, actions that contravened international law and resolutions adopted by the General Assembly and the Security Council. The Committee's position was that the wider international community must ensure that the occupying Power abided by the provisions of the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice and resolutions of the General Assembly on ceasing construction of the separation wall. Referring to the economic and social conditions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, he said they remained grim and that most Palestinians still lived in poverty. Mr. Badji said that the Committee had welcomed the formation of the new Palestinian Cabinet two months ago which, he hopes, would allow the international community to restore much-needed economic and humanitarian assistance. He stressed that the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people must not be held hostage to political constraints. He called on Israel to immediately release the remaining Palestinian tax revenues that were being withheld and to resume regular payments of collected monies in accordance with bilateral agreements. Mr. Badji warned that the isolation of the Palestinian people and the resulting humanitarian emergency only provided a fertile ground for radicalization of parts of the Palestinian population and stressed that the continuing occupation of the Palestinian Territory was the root cause of the conflict. He said that that military occupation, the longest in modern history, would mark its fortieth anniversary on 9 June 2007. Mr. Badji concluded by calling upon the leadership of both Israel and Palestine to take the necessary decision to resume a meaningful peace process and determine its final outcome.

18. **Samih Al-Abed**, Minister of Public Works of the Palestinian Authority and representative of Palestine, highlighted the importance of the traditional support and solidarity by African nations for the Palestinian cause. He said that the South African experience had demonstrated that justice, freedom, peace and reconciliation could indeed be achieved despite the many hardships along the way. He went on to say that for nearly 60 years the Palestinian people had been stateless, with the majority of them living as refugees, and that for 40 years the Palestinian people had been suffering under the oppressive and belligerent Israeli military occupation. Today, the Palestinian people continued to suffer from grave violations of all their human rights. Mr. Al-Abed said that in grave breach of international law, Israel continued to carry out military attacks against civilians, killing and injuring Palestinian men, women and children; to destroy homes, properties and agricultural lands; to construct, expand and entrench its illegal settlements and the monstrous apartheid wall throughout the Occupied West Bank, particularly in and around Occupied East Jerusalem, intensifying its siege and isolation of the Holy City; to detain and imprison over 11,000 Palestinians, including over 100 women and hundreds of children; and to impose all means of collective punishment, including restrictions on movement within the Occupied Palestinian Territory and to and from the outside world.

19. For more than a year now, Mr. Al-Abed said, Palestinians and the Palestinian Authority have suffered a debilitating international financial and political siege, imposed following the democratic election of the Palestinian Legislative Council in January of 2006. He said that it was tragic and ironic that sanctions had been imposed on the occupied rather than on the occupier. Together, Israel's illegal policies and the unjust international sanctions had resulted in the steep deterioration of the political, security, economic, social and humanitarian situation. Mr. Al-Abed said that the end to the Israeli occupation and the exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable right to self-determination in an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, were long overdue. He said that the international community must redouble its efforts at this critical time to promote the realization of the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security on the basis of the 1967 borders, and the realization of the right of return on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III). International law and justice must be permitted to prevail in order to allow peace to prevail. He said that there was a window of opportunity, noting the efforts that were being exerted towards reviving the peace process, including by the League of Arab States, the new Palestinian Authority National Unity Government and the members of the Quartet.

20. Mr. Al-Abed reaffirmed that the Palestinian side had repeatedly expressed readiness to resume the peace process. Palestinians had taken steps, such as forming a National Unity Government, which had given President Abbas an unprecedented mandate to negotiate a just and final peace settlement with Israel in the name of all Palestinian groups, including Hamas. He expressed the hope that the National Unity Government would receive the support of the international community, which in turn would put an end to the imposed international sanctions, allowing for the delivery of sorely needed aid to address the humanitarian crisis and poor socio-economic conditions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, particularly in the Gaza Strip. Mr. Al-Abed stressed the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative and the establishment of the Follow-up Arab Ministerial Committee that had decided on some practical steps to invigorate the Initiative, including the call for an international meeting under the auspices of the United Nations. Those developments provided an historic opportunity for peace efforts, which should be built upon and whose momentum should be given a coordinated push. The Palestinian side, with the support of the international community, including African nations, was committed to achieving that goal. Mr. Al-Abed said that if a partner for peace on the Israeli side existed and was ready to negotiate without conditions, the Palestinians would be ready to negotiate to bring an end to this tragedy and to make peace.

21. Statements were also made by representatives of Governments and intergovernmental organizations.

22. The representative of **Mauritius** noted that while the quest for peace had registered some progress, a final settlement had nevertheless been elusive. He said that the recent violence in Gaza had shattered the hopes of many Palestinians and had done much to undermine the serious efforts to reignite the peace process so far. He said his Government believed that the road map was one of the most certain routes to peace and encouraged both sides to adhere to their obligations under that diplomatic initiative. He concluded by saying that Mauritius also supported the recommitment to the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative.

23. The representative of Cuba, speaking on behalf of the **Non-Aligned Movement**, said that during the last few months, concerned regional parties had exerted efforts and that hopes had been rising that the long-stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace process would get back on track. She stated that, at the same time, Cuba and the Movement were concerned that the international community continued to withhold funds from the newly formed Palestinian Unity Government. She expressed the Movement's concern about the continued deterioration of the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The Movement called on Israel to accept the Arab Peace Initiative and on the wider international community to stand by its obligations to help bring about an end to the 40-year occupation of Palestinian lands.

24. The representative of **Algeria** reading out a message on behalf of his Minister for Foreign Affairs, paid tribute to South Africa's fight against apartheid and for reconciliation. He said that Algeria, like South Africa, was aware of the suffering of people under occupation, whether in Palestine or in Western Sahara, and would continue to support all initiatives aimed at promoting dialogue and a negotiated settlement. He said the barrier that was being completed in the West Bank evoked the logic of apartheid, separating men from their land and students from their schools. He noted that there was a sad and ironic silence on the part of the international community and the United Nations Security Council, reflecting a double standard that had exacerbated the already dire situation of the Palestinian people. He went on to express concern about the boycott of the Palestinian Authority, which threatened to change the situation from a political issue into a humanitarian crisis, describing it as a dangerous slippery slope. He questioned how it was possible that the major powers could refuse to support the newly elected Palestinian Government when they had been pressing the entire Middle East region to embrace democracy.
25. The representative of **Malaysia** said that his Government's support of the right of the Palestinian people to an independent State was one of the backbones of the country's foreign policy. Malaysia would therefore call on all parties to return to the negotiating table and would urge all peace-loving countries to encourage Israel to accept the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, particularly on the principle of land for peace. Malaysia believed that all countries in Africa, particularly South Africa, could play a role in pressing Israel to end its illegal and illegitimate practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Malaysia called on Israel and all countries that had not done so to recognize the newly formed Palestinian Government; end the economic sanctions; alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people and recommit to efforts to find a final solution to the question of Palestine.
26. The representative of the **African Union** said that the question of Palestine had been a permanent item on the Union's agenda, deserving of serious consideration and broad African support. He said that the African Union's participation in the meeting was intended to stress the point that the Palestinian people - the only people today deprived of their homeland - were entitled to their own State, where they could exercise their sovereignty like everyone else. The African Union also stressed that Israel must be made to stop its killing and destruction in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and that Palestinians must be protected against those aggressions. Israel must be forced to abide by numerous international legal decisions, particularly those calling for the abandonment of its policy of colonial expansion, the growth of settlements and the construction of its apartheid wall and for it to act responsibly, in order to achieve just and lasting peace in the region. He said Israel's lack of interest in solving the Palestinian conflict in accordance with international law had failed the efforts of the African Union's Committee of Ten that was entrusted in 1971 with exploring the possibility of resolving the Palestinian cause. However, with African determination, a Committee of Ten had been formed again in 2002 to contribute to international efforts in search of peace.
27. The representative of **Pakistan** said that his Government and people had been extending ongoing support to the Palestinian people in their struggle to exercise their legitimate rights, including their right to self-determination. The denial of those rights was the root cause of tensions in the region. He pointed out that Israel's continued activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, such as the imposition of economic blockades and the construction of settlements and the separation wall, were the cause of much pain, hopelessness and disillusionment for the Palestinian people. He said that the recent formation of a Palestinian Unity Government had been a welcome development. The international community should not only engage with that Government but also come forward and play its role by encouraging Israel to start negotiating with the Palestinians in the interest of peace in the region.
28. The representative of the **Organization of the Islamic Conference** said that as the meeting was being held, the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory was at its most critical point. Israel had ratcheted up its aggression against the Palestinian people, increased the number of checkpoints and continued the construction of its apartheid wall. He opined that Israel's continued excavation beneath a mosque of historic and cultural significance to all religions had seriously escalated tensions inside the Occupied Palestinian Territory. He called on the international community to act in a just manner and to spare no effort to ensure that Israel abided by United Nations resolutions and worked towards a just solution to the question of Palestine.
29. The representative of **Tunisia** said that his Government considered the Palestinian issue as the core of the conflict in the Middle East. Tunisia had supported all efforts and initiatives aimed at finding a just solution to the Palestinian-Israeli issue, particularly the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet-backed road map peace plan. While welcoming the support of the European Union to the Arab Peace Initiative and the commitment of European countries to work with the Palestinian Unity Government, Tunisia called on the European Union and the wider international community to lift financial and resource embargoes on the new Government in order to alleviate the dire humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and to make progress towards relaunching peace negotiations.
30. The representative of the **Syrian Arab Republic** began by reading his Foreign Minister's message, saying that Israel continued its barbaric practices, particularly its abduction, ongoing detention and even targeted killing of democratically elected officials, and had now extended them to Gaza and the West Bank, which had been turned into virtual prisons. He called on the international community to seriously endeavor to stop Israel's policies of killing and destruction. The representative went on to say that the horrors of Israel's actions and its continued occupation of Syrian and Lebanese territories were supported by major superpowers, including members of the Security Council. Those powers continued to stymie the efforts of the international community to protect the peace-loving Palestinian people from the "Israeli arsenal" and perpetuated Israel's belligerent, discriminatory and irresponsible policies.
31. The representative of **Morocco** said that his Government was committed to supporting recent regional and international efforts to relaunch the peace process. It also supported all Arab initiatives for peace, particularly for their realism. As Chair of the Al-Quds Al Sharief Committee, Morocco called on Israel to abide by all Security Council resolutions regarding Al-Quds. He made reference to the earlier allusion by the representative of Algeria to Western Sahara, and asked whether it had really necessary been to bring that up. He said that the situation in Western Sahara was a bilateral issue that had no place in this forum. It needed to be solved through diplomatic means, he added.
32. The representative of the **Libyan Arab Jamahiriya** said that the Palestinian struggle was not terrorism; it was rather the 40-year occupation that was terrorism. He said that the status quo that Israel had created, with its land-grabbing, construction of the wall and other illegal activities, had severely undermined efforts to seek a two-State solution. He opined that the international community should also be concerned about Israel's weapons of mass destruction.

III. Plenary sessions

Plenary I

The situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem

33. Speakers in the first Plenary examined the following sub-themes: an overview of the situation on the ground; imperatives for the Gaza Strip, including an international protection force and implications for the West Bank; and the responsibility and accountability of the occupying Power under international law.
34. **Gideon Levy**, columnist for *Ha'aretz*, said that he had dedicated the past 20 years trying to relay to the Israelis the real story of the occupation, to which they were oblivious. He had been documenting the occupation first-hand by going to the homes of the victims and by spending hours at checkpoints. He said he had begun to realize that the dehumanization and demonization of the Palestinian population was the tool of the occupiers, recalling the recent killing of a young Palestinian girl in the Jenin refugee camp which had gone unreported in Israeli newspapers. Mr. Levy went on to say that the meeting should compare the occupation with apartheid. In that regard, he cited the examples of roads in the Occupied Palestinian Territory that were not really roads because they were impassable. Adding to that, he said, was Israel's legal system that meted out different punishments to different people. In Israel, different rules applied to different people. He stated that what was worse than the ongoing bloodshed was the way in which the occupation had broken the will of the Palestinian people.

35. Mr. Levy that another problem facing both Israelis and Palestinians was the lack of interaction. About 10 years ago, there had been at least some civil interaction between the two sides. The Palestinian and Israeli children growing up today know only violence with Israeli children seeing only “terrorists” in Palestinians and Palestinian children seeing only “brutal occupiers” in Israelis. He said that, sadly, he saw no hope on the horizon, and even though a big political push was under way, Israel’s response had not been forthcoming.

36. **Basem Khaldi**, Political Affairs Officer and Officer-in-Charge of the Gaza Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, said that years after the Madrid Conference, two years after the Israeli disengagement from Gaza, 16 months after democratic Palestinian elections, 11 months after the kidnapping of the Israeli soldiers that had sparked last year’s crisis in Lebanon, 8 months after bloody fighting between Palestinian factions, and two months after the formation of a Palestinian Unity Government, the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory was still bleak. One-fourth of the people did not have access to safe water, the gross domestic product in Gaza had fallen by 10 per cent, unemployment was at 40 per cent, and food insecurity was rampant.

37. He said that Palestinians had become dependent on aid because of lack of income. The World Food Programme was now providing food to some 600,000 Palestinians. Health workers had carried out a second strike in recent months because they had not been paid in nearly a year. In addition, Mr. Khaldi said that the Agreement of Movement and Access had gone largely unimplemented. He also said that people were lucky if the Rafah crossing was open once or twice a week. The separation wall in the West Bank was still under construction, and settlements were still being expanded. He stressed that unless those and other issues were urgently addressed by the Quartet and the wider international community, the situation would pose a grave problem for the region and the world.

38. **Yasmin Sooka**, Executive Director of the Foundation for Human Rights in Pretoria, stated that the situation of the Palestinian people had huge resonance with South Africans. The world had expected the Israel-Palestinian conflict to be resolved long before the back of apartheid had been broken. She said, however, that she had hope, particularly since the world had witnessed old enemies in Great Britain and Ireland sitting down at the same table after so many years of tension. She stressed that the solution to the question of Palestine should be based on the search for justice and noted that the root of most wrongdoing was impunity. She went on to say that the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the construction of the separation wall had found that it impeded the rights of women and children and that it was not necessary to achieve security objectives. She described the dire humanitarian consequences, especially for women and children, owing to the ongoing construction of the wall. She said that some 70 per cent of the population of the West Bank was now separated from their jobs and families and that most of the water stations were located in the closed zone. She said, therefore, it was not surprising, that women and children were bearing the brunt of the deepening humanitarian crisis, which was further aggravated by the restrictions on movement.

39. Ms. Sooka also expressed concern about the desperate situation that had been brought about by the ongoing closure of crossing points into the Occupied Palestinian Territory. This situation, together with the ongoing settlement activity, the targeted assassinations and the summary executions reflected a growing impunity. She opined that pressure must be placed on the Israeli Government to abide by the decision of the International Court of Justice to cease the construction of the separation wall and to tear down those parts that were already standing. She stressed that Palestinians must be free to work and enjoy their lives and that the funds that were being withheld from the Palestinian Authority must be released in order to alleviate the humanitarian crisis. A true peace could only be built on justice. She stated that South Africa condemned rocket attacks, but it also condemned military incursions and road closures that would deny access for ambulances to care for those that had been injured in such military actions.

40. **Iain Scobbie**, Sir Joseph Hotung Research Professor in Law, Human Rights and Peacebuilding in the Middle East at the School of Oriental and African Studies, said that international humanitarian law encompassed the legal responsibility of an occupying Government or entity, asserting that a State operating in an occupied territory must act as the government of that territory. Looking at Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, he said, Israel was still responsible for the situation in the Gaza Strip even after disengagement, since Israel controlled a significant portion of Gaza’s tax revenues, its airspace, its offshore territory and, most importantly, ingress and egress from the area.

41. He said Israel had argued that because it was not subject to sovereignty in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, it was under no obligation to abide by or ensure the implementation of international human rights treaties in those areas. Another issue was the debatable international view that human rights law regulated peacetime while armed conflict dealt with the “allegedly” exceptional situation of war. Israel, as well as the United States, argued that once the rules of armed conflict were in force, they effectively replaced human rights law in particular situations. That was Israel’s second argument against the application of human rights obligations in the Occupied Territory. On whether there was a difference between accountability and responsibility under international law, Mr. Scobbie said that accountability was not a legal term, but one applied by some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and a number of human rights activists to assign liability.

42. **Samih Al-Abed**, Minister of Public Works of the Palestinian Authority, said that the current situation of the Palestinian people had been 40 years in the making. When it came to the Palestinians, he said, apparently no United Nations resolution would be implemented and action at the world body on behalf of the Palestinian people would be stymied by the use by the United States of its veto power. It was his opinion that Israel did not want to find a peaceful settlement.

43. He said that while there had been a disengagement from the Gaza Strip, Israel still controlled the entire infrastructure. Israel had vowed to defy international law and continued its construction of the wall. What could be done about that?, he asked. Mr. Al-Abed stated that all levels of Palestinian society were under siege, and after Hamas had won the democratic election that the major powers had called for, the situation had gotten worse, as the international community had turned its back on the new Government. He opined that the major powers were punishing the Palestinians for exercising democracy, and that they were destroying the institutions that they had helped to build. They were paying the price of the occupation. He wondered whether the international community wanted the occupied Palestinian Territory held in trusteeship.

Plenary II

International efforts to achieve a sustainable Israeli-Palestinian peace

44. The speakers in the second Plenary addressed the following sub-themes: international engagement-success or failure; the role of the Quartet; current international efforts to restart political dialogue; and the role of the United Nations Security Council and General Assembly.

45. **Sabri Saidam**, former Minister of Telecommunications of the Palestinian Authority and Executive Director of the Institute for Development Studies, introduced a video recounting the travails of the people of the tiny Palestinian town of Bil’in, who had been thrust into the international spotlight because of their sustained and vocal resistance to Israel’s construction of the separation wall in their neighbourhood.

46. He said it was apparent that the Palestinian and Israeli sides needed a third party to advance the peace process. He went on to describe the perception of current international players according to the Palestinian people, who saw European assistance as occasional and United States efforts to be fleeting, except in the waning days of American presidencies. They saw the United Nations playing a relief role, which had expanded somewhat after the Secretary-General took up his duties as a member of the Quartet. Continuing, Mr. Saidam described the grim daily existence of most Palestinians, particularly those living in the Gaza Strip where 87 per cent of the population lived below the poverty line. With those figures in mind, he said, serious Palestinians had given up the hope of finding an honest

broker to mediate for peace. He stressed that international engagement was needed to promote dialogue between Israel and the Palestinians.

47. **Ran Cohen**, Member of the Israeli Knesset (Meretz-Yahad), said that the Israelis and Palestinians were living in the worst of times. He described the 40 years of occupation, a period of almost constant aggression, as too much. But, he said, there was hope, particularly since the Arab leaders had revived the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative and the Palestinian Unity Government had been established, despite the troubling stance of Hamas on non-recognition of Israel. Most importantly, however, he said, polls were now showing that 70 per cent of citizens on both sides preferred the two-State solution to the conflict. Backed by such broad support on the ground, negotiators on both sides and the wider international community should seize the opportunity to revive peace talks.

48. Mr. Cohen noted that there were strong lobbies against a peaceful solution on both sides, and the mindset of the Israeli citizenry had been seriously influenced by the violence that had erupted in the wake of the intifada. He opined that people did not like to talk peace with those who killed civilians, stressing that the terror had had a very negative effect on Israeli's perception of its Palestinian neighbours. At the same time, he acknowledged that ordinary Israelis were not cognizant of the terrible conditions Palestinians faced under occupation, but he said that he was certain that a new party would be elected in the next Israeli elections, and if by then the bombings and other attacks had stopped, that new party could actually run and win on a two-State solution platform, negotiated with President Abbas and other Palestinian leaders. He said that he would try hard to press the current and the next Israeli Governments to open direct negotiations not only with the Palestinian side, but also with the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon.

49. **Henry Siegman**, President of the United States/Middle East Project at the Council on Foreign Relations and Research Professor at the Sir Joseph Hotung Middle East Programme at the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London, asked what was the "question" in the question of Palestine? Certainly, the issue was not the lack of regional and international initiatives, which ranged from the Oslo Accords, through President Bush's two-State vision and a revival of the Arab Peace Initiative to United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's benchmark initiative. It was necessary then to understand why each of those initiatives had not only failed but also left the Palestinian people worse off than the one before it. The answer was that none of those measures had repudiated an unstated Israeli assumption that the default position to peace was a continuation of the occupation. What was needed now was not another carefully calibrated plan to avoid the lie that underlined the present situation. What was needed was a clear international declaration, which emphasized that without a solid agreement on a date for a new negotiated settlement, the aforementioned default position would shift back to the pre-1967 border, which had been the basis of countless international agreements.

50. Mr. Siegman stated that another problem was the failure of Israel's moral imagination, or the inability of Israelis to picture themselves suffering the same fate the Palestinians were and how they would have reacted. He said that while he was not justifying Palestinian violence or any violent acts targeting civilians, it was important for Israelis, too, to take a serious look at their past history before they got up on their high horse. He said the bottom line was that there was no need for new peace plans; everyone knew what such a plan should look like. The only real question was whether the Israeli people would elect a Government that would pursue peace with the Palestinian side. Failing that, perhaps the international community would finally gather its courage and demand an immediate withdrawal of Israel to the 1967 position.

51. **Ronald Kasrils**, Minister for Intelligence Services of South Africa, said that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was seemingly intractable and that both sides seemed so far from the finish line. The reason this was the case was chiefly a failure to analyse the United Nations original partition resolution, which had given a small number of Israelis 56 per cent of the land and had given, without consultation with the Palestinians, the people that had lived on and worked that land for hundreds of years, 44 per cent.

52. He stressed that the process could not succeed without negotiations with whomever the Palestinians had chosen as their leader. If Israel was not satisfied with the Palestinian leadership, then, as the most powerful partner, Israel should take the lead, not with tanks and bulldozers but with compromise and honest dialogue. What Israel should also know is that oppression breeds resistance. Mr. Kasrils also called on the United Nations to play its role in ensuring a mass mobilization of Governments and civil society on behalf of Palestinian-Israeli peace along the lines of the anti-apartheid movement.

53. **Ahmed Maher**, former Minister for Foreign Affairs of Egypt, said that the international community, particularly the United Nations, which had been created to open the door to a new world order, should be ashamed of the horror and depravation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. All international efforts and initiatives had failed, and the history of 40 wasted years had been tainted with countless deaths and ongoing humiliation and degradation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. He reiterated that literally hundreds of United Nations edicts and resolutions had gone unimplemented.

54. He noted that the Quartet seemed to be exerting no serious effort to address the concerns of either the Palestinian or the Israeli side, adding that the international community seemed to want to choose the Palestinian partners with which it wished to negotiate, allowing Israel to hide behind the lie that it had no negotiating partner. Mr. Maher suggested that the solidarity that had been shown at the meeting should become an active solidarity, particularly towards backing and supporting the revived Arab Peace Initiative. It should also lead the Security Council to express support for that initiative and seriously push for full respect of a ceasefire that included Israeli military activities inside the Occupied Palestinian Territory. All that should lead the wider United Nations to convene an international conference to create the framework for a negotiated settlement.

55. **Dumisani Kumalo**, Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations, said the fact that the question of Palestine was still so high on the United Nations agenda was itself some measure of the international community's successful engagement in the issue. The fact that this vigorous attention had not yet produced a State of Palestine did not necessarily mean failure. He quoted President Mbeki as saying last year that it was time for the United Nations to assume its rightful position, as a representative of all nations, and address all the complex and interrelated issues concerning the situation and peoples of the Middle East. Consequently, he said, South Africa would continue to fight in the General Assembly and the Security Council to keep the Palestinian issue on the agenda.

56. Mr. Kumalo said that he had started to ask serious and difficult questions about the work of the Quartet, of which the United Nations was a member, along with the United States, the Russian Federation and the European Union. However, he said, United Nations Member States had heard only about the Quartet's occasional meetings behind closed doors in fancy capitals. Member States were never consulted about the content of those meetings, nor were they allowed to give any instructions to the Secretary-General when he attended them. However, he said, the newly-elected Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, had, for the first time, briefed the Security Council on a recent Quartet meeting. He went on to say that the United States, as one of a permanent member of the Security Council, had said very clearly that the issue of Palestine was a bilateral issue that should not be discussed in the United Nations. Mr. Kumalo admitted, however, that there had been better success in the General Assembly and other United Nations forums. He concluded by reiterating the permanent responsibility of the United Nations on the question of Palestine until it was resolved in accordance with international law and stressed that he would stand by that principle as long as he held his post.

Plenary III

African Solidarity with the Palestinian people's aspirations for independence and statehood

57. The speakers in the Plenary addressed the following sub-themes: enhancing Africa's contribution to the Middle East peace process; the role of the African Union; and the role of the Pan-African Parliament in supporting a peaceful solution to the Arab Israeli conflict.

58. **Salman El Herfi**, Ambassador of Palestine to Tunisia, expressed sincere appreciation for some 40 years of solidarity by African States on behalf of the Palestinian people. He recalled how Africans had always been a part of the Palestinian people's struggle, from Oslo to Madrid. Palestinians had learned a lot from Africa about the importance of dialogue and opening direct negotiations with the opposition, he said, detailing his personal experience to that end as a well-known Palestinian expert on African affairs. With the peace process at an impasse, the Palestinian people would need to work even more closely with Africans to help restart the negotiations, he added.
59. **Garth Le Pere**, Executive Director of the Institute for Global Dialogue in Midrand, South Africa, said that the history of trying to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had been an affair that had taken place around negotiating tables, typically outside the region on the basis of generic, universal formulas. The role of social movements, protests and grass-roots activism as critical axes of peacemaking and conflict resolution had been largely neglected, giving the example of both Palestinian and Israeli women who had played a significant role in trying to end the Israeli occupation in the West Bank, and other groups, such as the Israeli-Palestinian Physicians for Human Rights, which provided medical care for Palestinians. Those alliances highlighted that official government-to-government interactions were not always sufficient to secure international cooperation for peace. He also touched on the role of the Jewish lobby in Washington, D.C., which had been at the fore, saying that the lobby's role was not unique to America.
60. Mr. Le Pere concluded that overall, ending the occupation was a precondition for working towards a better life for both sides, on the basis of "the three A's," he said, recalling the writings of Israeli historian Ilan Pappé, who had called for acknowledgement that grave wrongs had been committed against the Palestinian people; accountability by Israel that it bore responsibility for what had happened; and acceptance grounded in the normative imperative that Palestinians had the right to equality, freedom and self-determination.
61. **Soyata Maiga**, Chairperson of the Association of Women Jurists of Mali, said that African States had long held that the Palestinian people were undergoing the largest human tragedy in modern history, as evinced by Israel's imposition of random checkpoints and closures, its destruction of homes and infrastructure and its indiscriminate violence, which killed and injured innocent civilians in contravention of international law. The Organization of African Unity, now the African Union, had invited high representatives from the Palestinian Authority to its meetings and had included references to the situation in the Occupied Territory in many declarations.
62. She suggested that the Pan-African Parliament could perhaps play an important role in raising awareness about the grim situation, consider ways to boost commerce between the Palestinians and Africa, and identify ways to work with African civil society, which was participating more than ever in the United Nations, to mobilize even more continent-wide solidarity. She said that the African Union should also consider stepping in to provide assistance while the international community fretted over whether to cooperate with the new Hamas-led Government. Although Africa still had its own problems – wars, poverty, HIV/AIDS – African nations would nevertheless help the Palestinian people shoulder their burden right to the end, until the day they achieved independence.
63. **Saadi Altumaizi**, Ambassador of Palestine to Ghana, said that a few weeks ago, the Israeli people had been happily celebrating the 59th anniversary of their independence. For Palestinians, it marked just one more year of misery and dispossession. He stressed that it was time for change, drawing attention to the recent formation of a Palestinian Unity Government. He pointed out that the 22-member Arab League had also revived the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. With that in mind, he said that while Israel had in the past mocked Arabs as the "masters of missed opportunities," it appeared that this time, it was Israel that was about to miss a historic chance to change the legacy of the entire Middle East region.
64. He said the only way forward was to ensure that once political initiatives got underway, no unilateral activities took place or circumstances were created on the ground that undermined that diplomacy. On African solidarity, he said African Governments and civil society organizations had an urgent task to pressure Israel and the international community to revive the peace process, particularly at a time when Israel was attempting to strengthen its diplomatic ties with African countries.

IV. Closing session

65. **Victor Camilleri**, Rapporteur of the Committee, presented the meeting's final document (annex I).
66. **Aziz Pahad**, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of South Africa, noted that participants over the past few days had demonstrated awareness of the regional and international threat that was brewing because of the daily inhuman treatment of the Palestinian people. He said that they also knew what was at the heart of that treatment, such as intractable positions and beliefs as, among others, strategic and oil interests; clash of civilizations; and the axis of evil. It was also clear that the Quartet could not effect the change wanted by the majority of the international community. He ascertained that participants at the meeting had expressed concern even to the Security Council about the make-up of the Quartet and the lack of transparency. Mr. Pahad said that it was his view that despite attempts to isolate the Palestinian leadership and disregard the outcome of the recent democratic elections, the Palestinian people and their leaders had demonstrated every willingness to compromise.
67. He noted that the meeting had provided an excellent opportunity to address the unrealistic distortions of the Middle East issues. He said the meeting, as well as the Public Forum that would be held on 11 May, must look at ways to mobilize support for the revived Arab Peace Initiative. The power wielded by some Governments demanded a massive mobilization of all sectors of civil society. Civil society and the wider international community must intensify efforts to convince the Israeli public, and in turn the Israeli Government, that acceptance of the Arab Peace Initiative was a constructive and tangible way to move towards a two-State solution. Those actors must also drive change at the United Nations to counter the Security Council's intransigence and to ensure that the world body's resolutions were fully enforced. Governments and people must be mobilized to press for the changes that would ensure that once and for all the Middle East could be at peace with itself.
68. **Riyad Mansour**, Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations in New York, said that the Palestinian people and their leadership profoundly appreciated the hospitality and show of solidarity demonstrated by the great people of South Africa. He said that all the participants had agreed that this was perhaps the most difficult moment the Palestinian people had faced. He encouraged participants to visit the Occupied Palestinian Territory to witness the humiliation and degradation of the Palestinian people as they waited in endless lines at countless checkpoints or eked out a meager survival in refugee camps. He said that the people of South Africa knew that feeling for they had lived it. He urged the international community to recognize and support the new National Unity Government, lest not doing so would lead to the collapse of all Palestinian institutions. He said there was a small window of opportunity. The Palestinian people had begun to put their house in order by establishing a Unity Government, putting an end to Palestinian infighting and respecting previous agreements between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization.
69. Mr. Mansour said an important fact that is being overlooked was that all political parties, including Hamas, had authorized President Abbas to negotiate with Israel on behalf of the Palestinian people. The international community should also recognize the true opportunity provided by the Arab League's revival of the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. If Israel did not accept the opportunity offered, the Palestinian side would continue to test the Security Council and take advantage of every mechanism within the United Nations. At this historic moment, Africa could help by mobilizing maximum political pressure on the United States and Israel to pressure Israel to begin direct negotiations, without condition. He reaffirmed that the Palestinians were ready without conditions, and that they were willing to negotiate anywhere.

70. **Paul Badji**, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, said in his closing remarks that the Committee and all the participants in the meeting were grateful to all those who had made the journey from the Occupied Palestinian Territory to share their experiences and give first-hand accounts of the situation on the ground 40 years after the outset of the occupation, the conditions in which the Palestinian people live, and their aspirations for the future.

71. Summing up the work of the meeting, he said that the experts had looked to the ways to return to the hard-won achievements of the peace process and put them to use in the current situation. Speakers had discussed Israel's unrelenting campaign to create facts on the ground, including ongoing settlement activity and the continued construction of the separation wall. Speakers had also painted a grim picture of the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and had agreed on the need for the international community to help alleviate the deepening humanitarian crisis. They were adamant that the end of the Israeli occupation was absolutely indispensable for achieving peace in the region. It was also emphasized that the dynamic of the whole Middle East region would gain from a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in accordance with international legitimacy.

V. United Nations Public Forum in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace

Opening statements

72. **Khorombi Dau**, Speaker of the Pretoria City Council, said that 40 years of occupation was far too long to stop thinking about lasting peace and finding a negotiated solution to the conflict. He called on members of civil society to restore the faith of the Palestinian people – and the people of the world – that a peaceful solution could be found.

73. He expressed South Africa's serious concern about the situation on the ground and Israel's ongoing collective punishment of the Palestinian people. He said they could not stand silent, stressing that no country would be immune from the very serious consequences of continued violence, tension and unrest in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the wider Middle East region. South Africa called on the international community to fully support the new Palestinian Unity Government and the full implementation of relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions aimed at achieving a peaceful resolution of the decades-long conflict.

74. **Paul Badji**, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, said that a substantial part of the Committee's work programme was dedicated to coordination and cooperation with civil society. Most recently, it had held consultations with representatives of civil society organizations following the United Nations Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, which had been held in Rome in March 2007. During that meeting, the Committee and representatives of civil society had briefed each other on current and future work, with much of the discussion focused on the upcoming 40-year anniversary of the hostilities of June 1967 and the subsequent occupation by Israel of Palestinian and other Arab territories, bringing about an impressive amount of activities that were planned around the world for 9 June. He said he was sure that today's forum would produce such energy.

75. Mr. Badji briefed the Forum on the work of the United Nations African Meeting on the Question of Palestine. He said that the Meeting's discussions had often touched on the role of civil society in many aspects of the question of Palestine. He said that resolution of that conflict would be impossible without informing and mobilizing public opinion and that civil society organizations, including the media, were at the forefront of that effort. Their non-violent actions, bringing together Palestinian, Israeli and international activists, was the best example of fighting for peace by peaceful means, he said. Less noticeable, but no less important, was the everyday work done by civil society organizations to help ordinary Palestinians cope with the difficult conditions of occupation, he added. Such assistance also preserved and strengthened human links between Israeli and Palestinian societies, laying the groundwork for the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side-by-side in peace and security.

Morning session

Civil society in solidarity with the Palestinian people

76. The morning session addressed the following sub-themes: public perceptions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; the impact and educational responsibility of academic institutions and think tanks; and the South African experience in reaching a solution through negotiations. The session was moderated by Roelf Meyer, Consultant to the South African Government on peace processes.

77. **Amjad Atallah**, President of the Strategic Assessments Initiative in Washington, D.C., said that the crux of the Israeli-Palestinian issue was, without a doubt, the 40-year occupation of Palestinian lands. He ascertained that the issue of legislative or political advocacy in support of Israeli-Palestinian peace, and ultimately, reconciliation, was not possible without a sustained systematic effort by Palestinians or Israelis to promote an end to Israel's occupation of the Palestinian Territory, or to end the "state of belligerence" between Israel and most of the States in the Middle East. At the risk of oversimplifying this complex issue, the answer today would be the role of the United States.

78. He said that it would be impossible for Israel to indefinitely continue to occupy territories it had taken in the war in 1967 without the political, economic and military support of the United States, adding that other hindrances included the collapse of the Palestinian national movement, the failure so far of the American Jewish community to provide a counterweight to the minority voices that tended to dominate the American political landscape, and the failure of both American Arabs and Jews to launch a coherent unified counterstrategy on their own.

79. Mr. Atallah noted that advocates on all sides had not yet tried in a comprehensive and systematic manner to promote freedom, self-determination and peace as national interests of the United States. He outlined a potential model for such efforts that included, among others, the launching of coalitions that would demand support for a peace agreement and policies that would end support for steps that hindered such an agreement, and the creation of an alliance of grass-roots groups in the United States in support of a public campaign to demonstrate that it was in the interest of the United States to end the conflict caused by the occupation.

80. **Vasu Gounden**, Executive Director of the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes in Durban, speaking on the impact and responsibility of academic institutions and think tanks, said there was no doubt that such institutions had an impact on conflict, as well as conflict resolution. As for the responsibility of such institutions, he noted that the key challenge was to understand the uniquely distinct roles played by those agencies that "reported the truth and the facts," and those that reported the positions of either side of a specific situation.

81. He said that both were equally important, as it was essential to have advocates for a particular cause to present their views in a clear and concise

manner, just as it was for middle ground actors to truthfully and accurately portray the full picture. He recalled his first visit to Gaza, where he had arrived with the CNN version of the area seared into his memory, only to discover that people were not running around throwing rocks and shooting guns, but were actually trying to go on about their daily lives under very difficult circumstances.

82. So with that in mind, Mr. Gounden said it was the responsibility of think tanks and academic institutions to get first-hand information and present it -- even in advocacy -- in a clear and concise manner. There are too few institutions prepared to straddle the middle ground and present alternatives to wider society, he added. On the situation in the Middle East and the relevance of South Africa's experience, he said that one of the critical issues was that there had been an almost total international rejection of the apartheid regime. That was certainly not the case with the situation in the Occupied Territory, on which there was almost no consensus on the way forward.

83. Mr. Gounden said that it was also important to generate more civic action on the ground in the Middle East to drive public opinion. That was where think tanks and academia could play a role. Those institutions could also play an important role by showing negotiators on both sides that negotiations and dialogue did not mean selling out, he added.

84. **Roelf Meyer**, speaking as an expert, reminded the forum that although he had been introduced as a renowned negotiator, he had also been a high official and Chief Negotiator in the South Africa's Apartheid Government. He said that South Africans were steadily trying to complete the changes that had begun in the 1990s. He noted that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission had been created only after the political settlement had been reached. Mr. Meyer said that he was practically certain that if the Commission had been set up first, there would have been no settlement. It had been important for South Africa to set the course for its future before delving into its past.

85. He said that at the beginning of the negotiations in South Africa, the white Government had made strong calls for minority rights. There had even been proposals for a rotating Black/White presidency, but the negotiations had broken down over that and other constitutional issues in 1992. That stalemate lasted until the then-Government had accepted the paradigm shift and had backed the principle of individual rights over group rights and exclusivity. Mr. Meyer also noted that the negotiations had gone a long way as well towards promoting tolerance, respect and trust among the participants, which started to spread to the wider society. The talks had also engendered an ownership of the process that had been crucial to its ultimate success, he added.

Afternoon session

Joining forces - African civil society and worldwide initiatives to support a peaceful solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

86. The forum's afternoon session addressed the following sub-themes: the African experience of ending occupation and nation-building -- the role of civil society; mobilization for international protection of the Palestinian population -- international grass-roots movement; participation in international campaigns to end the occupation; and legislative and political advocacy -- reaching decision makers and politicians. The session was moderated by L.S.T. Pekane, the representative of South Africa to the Palestinian Authority.

87. **Phyllis Bennis**, Fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C., said that Africa's experience with colonialism, apartheid and solidarity could provide some insight into the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The solidarity movement with the Palestinian people could take from the South African struggle the importance of building strong coalitions and mobilizing first citizens, then governments, and finally the international community, in the form of the United Nations, to bring about a settlement. She went on to describe the context of the Palestine debate today, particularly in the light of the operation in Iraq led by the United States, which has stated its desire to remake the Middle East. Ms. Bennis stressed that the Palestinian Territory was being doubly occupied: Israel was occupying the land, and the United States was using that occupation to promote its aims in the region. Indeed, the United States saw a heavily weaponized Israel as its *de facto* military outpost and base of operations in the Middle East.

88. She returned to the lessons learned from the struggle against apartheid, saying that ordinary people were the most important factor in the mobilization effort because they operated on the basis of principle in ways that no government ever would. People on the streets could demand and win changes in centres of power that would change history. Ms. Bennis emphasized that the international civic efforts against the occupation were not about standing with the Palestinians and against the Israelis, stressing that it was rather about standing for justice, international law and human rights. She said that it was about standing for the United Nations rather than the United States as the guarantor of the international order. She said that once people and Governments were mobilized, the United Nations could then play the role it almost never got to play: stopping the scourge of war.

89. **Diana Buttu**, former Legal Adviser to the Palestinian Liberation Organization/Palestinian Negotiating Team and former Communications Director to PA President Mahmoud Abbas, described her personal experience growing up as a Palestinian Canadian, living outside the Occupied Territory. She said that she had lived such a sheltered existence, that she never even heard the word "Palestinian" until she was 16 years old and had visited the region. Turning to the situation today, she said that there were almost too many fires to put out. Attempts for mass mobilization on the ground were stymied by the situation of not knowing whether to call for action against human rights violations, or for the wall to be torn down or the for the return of refugees.

90. She said that the key issue around which all actors should be mobilizing was Israel's attempt to replace one people with another, chiefly through its expansion of settlements. Ms. Buttu stressed that the lack of a strong voice of Palestinian leadership in the past had also hindered mobilization. She also noted that many Palestinians were too fearful to mobilize against Israel. She urged the forum not to depend too much on the Palestinian people for mobilization. They could not, for instance, boycott Israeli goods, having no industry of their own. Palestinians depended on Israeli goods and international humanitarian assistance. She reaffirmed that it was very difficult for Palestinians to mobilize, adding that the Palestinian Government could not be counted on either, because it was a Government under occupation. Indeed, even President Abbas, who had been democratically elected, had to apply for travel permits.

91. **Gideon Levy**, columnist for the *Ha'aretz*, described a childhood spent largely in unawareness of the truth and behind the lie about the occupation. He said that it was only in 1987, during the first intifada, that he had started to see the truth. He had since learned that Israel seemed never to learn lessons without violence. Israel would never have left Lebanon, for instance, if the body count over the years had not begun to rise. Make no mistake, he said, that each and every Israeli was involved in the occupation, either because of blindness or ignorance.

92. He said that one of the main responses to that attitude was perhaps to be found in the Israeli media, which was, in most circumstances, remarkably determined to get at the truth. However, when it came to the occupation, the media's blithe dismissal of the situation was criminal. Mr. Levy said that even his own newspaper, *Ha'aretz*, one of the bravest in the Middle East, had recently run an editorial on the territories with the word occupied in quotes, as if only a few people referred to Arab lands as occupied territories. He also said that Israeli news agencies never put stories about the conflict in context. Newspapers generally heavily reported every rocket attack, but rarely told the public that such attacks were most often in response to Israeli actions. What was even worse was that the media was censoring itself. He added that the final decision on that conflict would be made in Washington, D.C., and Tel Aviv.

Closing session

93. **Zola Skweyitya**, Minister for Social Development of South Africa, on behalf of the Deputy Secretary-General of the African National Congress, said that the forum had provided an excellent opportunity for the people of Africa to consider ways in which they could bolster their support for the cause of the Palestinian people. Though many miles separated them, the people of Africa knew, like the Palestinian people, the struggle of reclaiming history and culture from people trying to erase and dehumanize them. He said that the people of Africa identified with the Palestinian people in their struggle for self-determination and challenges of fighting against colonial rule, poverty and depravation.

94. He said there was a powerful sense of the value of solidarity on the continent, and so it was appropriate that Africa would want to extend a hand to the Palestinian people and participate in the search for ways to mobilize broad international action on behalf of their ongoing struggle. He said that South Africa believed wholeheartedly in the right to self-determination. To believe otherwise would be to accept the notion that some people were deserving of less than others. He said that the meeting had made plain that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict required a comprehensive solution, one which addressed not only political issues but the social and economic aspects of more than half a century of occupation.

95. **Riyad Mansour**, Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations in New York, said that his morning visit to Soweto had moved and inspired him and flashed images of Gaza through his mind. He said that the visit had made clear that suffering was universal. Turning to the discussions during the forum, he said that the Palestinian people would be able to benefit from the experience of South African civil society. From those actors, he called for lessons on how a movement could be built in the United States and Europe to pressure those Governments to change their positions on the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. He drew attention to a small group that gathered every Friday to protest the construction of the wall in the village of Bil'in. Mr. Mansour said that it was his understanding that Palestinians at that gathering were usually outnumbered by Israelis and international activists. He encouraged South Africa to consider sending activists to join that demonstration and spread the word that a vocal non-violent resistance was building inside the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

96. He went on to urge Israel to negotiate with President Abbas. He recalled that all Arab nations had also agreed to negotiate with Israel. If Israel was really ready to end its fear of the Palestinians, which was in reality a manifestation of the twisted logic of all occupiers, it would seize those opportunities to help move the peace process forward. Mr. Mansour warned that if Israel missed the opportunities, then they were heading for very rough times. That was why the Palestinian people needed civil society to waste no effort to generate international momentum to change the situation on the ground.

97. **Victor Camilleri**, Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, said that this had been a very productive day and that the Committee was fully committed to further expanding its cooperation with civil society. He said that while that would be a challenging task, once difficulties such as differences in working methods, objectives and means at one's disposal were overcome, the mutual benefits would be quite significant. He thanked the participants and experts for their contributions to the forum.

Annex I

Final Document

(Adopted by the United Nations African Meeting on the Question of Palestine)

1. The United Nations African Meeting on the Question of Palestine was held in Pretoria, on 9 and 10 May 2007, under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. Participants in the Meeting included internationally renowned experts, including Israelis and Palestinians, representatives of United Nations Members and Observers, parliamentarians, representatives of the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations, representatives of civil society and the media. The theme of the Meeting was "African solidarity with the Palestinian people for the achievement of its inalienable rights".

2. The objective of the Meeting, taking place against the background of renewed regional and international efforts at restarting the Israeli-Palestinian political process, was to encourage broad international action, especially by African States, in support of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and in support of achieving a solution to the conflict based on an internationally endorsed vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security within pre-1967 borders. The Meeting took stock of the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and looked from the African perspective into ways of consolidating and synergizing current international peace efforts. The Meeting also considered how African States could effectively contribute to these efforts through their action in national and intergovernmental, both regional and international, mechanisms, noting long-standing African solidarity with the Palestinian people's aspirations for self-determination, independence and statehood.

3. The participants welcomed the many points of principle and practical suggestions contained in the statement delivered in the opening session by H.E. Mr. Essop Pahad, Minister in the Office of the President of the Republic of South Africa.

4. The participants were encouraged by recent positive political developments. They noted, in particular, the formation of the new Palestinian National Unity Government, based on the Mecca Agreement and National Reconciliation Document, regular meetings that had started taking place between President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert; the reaffirmation of the Arab Peace Initiative by the League of Arab States at the Riyadh Summit and its decision to establish working groups tasked with engaging international partners in this regard; and efforts of the Quartet to broaden the scope of its work by engaging regional actors.

5. The participants expressed great concern at the continuing deterioration of the economic and humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. This crisis, in their view, was a direct consequence of the continuing occupation, further compounded by the withholding of direct donor assistance to the Palestinian Authority. While observing the positive effect produced by the introduction of the Temporary International Mechanism, the participants felt that it was neither commensurate with the Palestinian development requirements, nor sufficient to address current humanitarian emergency needs. They deplored also that much of the Palestinian budgetary shortfall was caused by Israel's illegal withholding of the customs and tax revenues collected on behalf of the Palestinian Authority and called on the Government of Israel to immediately and unconditionally release to the Palestinian Authority the remaining funds and resume regular monthly payments in accordance with bilateral agreements. The participants called on the United Nations and international community to recognize the National Unity Government of the Palestinian Authority and immediately lift the embargo against the Palestinian people.

6. Participants noted with deep concern the bleak account of the humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory presented by the Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Assessment in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip recently prepared by the World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, as well as the report submitted by the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict following her recent visit

to the region. They also took note of the latest report by Professor John Dugard, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, detailing the systematic human rights abuses and discriminatory practices committed against the Palestinian people and accusing Israel of violating the most fundamental rules of international humanitarian law, which constitute war crimes in terms of the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Protocol I Additional to the Geneva Conventions.

7. The participants were highly critical of Israel's routinely disproportionate and indiscriminate military operations in Palestinian population centres. In this regard, they reminded Israel, the occupying Power, of its responsibilities and accountability under international law. The participants noted that significant Israeli settlement activity continued across the entire occupied West Bank and in and around occupied East Jerusalem, in violation of the Road Map provisions calling for settlement freeze and dismantlement of settlement outposts. They further noted that construction of the wall inside the West Bank continued at accelerated pace in complete disregard of the International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion and relevant United Nations resolutions. They called upon all Governments, intergovernmental organizations and others to meet their legal obligations faced with Israel's non-compliance, and take appropriate actions.

8. While noting with grave concern the disturbing security situation on the ground, the participants expressed support for the President of the Palestinian Authority and his new Palestinian Government in the effort at restoring law and order under the difficult conditions of continuing occupation. They called for upholding the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and its extension to the West Bank.

9. The participants whole-heartedly welcomed increased international efforts to achieve a viable peace between Israel and Palestine, seeing in these efforts the renewed determination of the world community to bring to a close this decades-old conflict. They were, however, less optimistic as regards the pace and effectiveness of this international engagement. It was successful, in their view, in generating a global consensus on both the necessity of achieving a permanent settlement and on the shape that such a settlement should take. However, it was seen as much less successful when it came to restarting a meaningful political process for realizing this consensus. The participants also discussed the role and *modus operandi* of the Quartet, the special role of the United Nations Security Council and General Assembly and the International Conference suggestion.

10. The participants expressed the view that an independent State of Palestine could benefit from the experience of African States in their quest for decolonization, independence, sovereignty and ending Apartheid, as well as the experience of Africa on the path to economic independence and sustainable development. They further stressed the important role played by African States in wider efforts aimed at the resumption of the political process and the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this context, the participants called for enhancing Africa's contribution to the Middle East peace process and encouraged increased African action in regional and international forums. The role of the African Group at the United Nations, especially in the Security Council and General Assembly, was accorded special attention, as did the role of African parliaments and parliamentarians and, in particular, the role of the Pan-African Parliament in supporting a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

11. The participants reaffirmed the permanent responsibility of the United Nations with respect to all aspects of the question of Palestine and singled out the special role of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. They extended special thanks to the United Nations staff who worked under increasingly difficult and often dangerous conditions on the ground, and called on all concerned to respect their special status.

12. The participants expressed their appreciation and gratitude to the Government of the Republic of South Africa for hosting the United Nations African Meeting on the Question of Palestine and for the assistance and support extended to the Committee and the United Nations Secretariat in its preparation.

Annex II

List of Participants

Speakers

Samih Al-Abed
Minister of Public Works, Palestinian Authority
Ramallah

Saadi Altumaizi
Ambassador of Palestine to Ghana
Accra

Ran Cohen
Member of Knesset, (Meretz-Yahad)
Tel Aviv

Salman El Herfi
Ambassador of Palestine to Tunisia
Tunis

Ronald Kasrils
Minister for Intelligence Services
South Africa

Basem Khaldi

Policy Analysis Officer, Officer-in-Charge, Gaza Office
Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process
Gaza

Ahmed Maher
Former Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Arab Republic of Egypt
Cairo

Garth le Pere
Executive Director, Institute for Global Dialogue
Midrand

Gideon Levy
Columnist, *Ha'aretz*
Tel Aviv

Willy Madisha
President, Congress of South African Trade Unions
Johannesburg

Soyata Maiga
Chairperson, Association of Women Jurists of Mali
Bamako

Iain Scobbie
Sir Joseph Hotung Research Professor in Law, Human Rights and Peacebuilding in the Middle East
School of Oriental and African Studies
London

Sabri Saidam
Former Minister for Telecommunications, Palestinian Authority
Ramallah

Henry Siegman
Senior Fellow and President of the United States/Middle East Project
Council on Foreign Relations
New York

Yasmin Sooka
Executive Director, Foundation for Human Rights
Pretoria

Speakers on the United Nations Public Forum in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace

Anjad Atallah
President, Strategic Assessment Initiative
Washington, D.C.

Phyllis Bennis
Fellow, Institute for Policy Studies
Washington, D.C.

Diana Buttu
Former Legal Advisor to the Palestine Liberation Organization/Palestinian Negotiating Team
Former Communications Director to President Mahmud Abbas
Ramallah

Gideon Levy
Columnist, *Ha'aretz*
Tel Aviv

Roelf Meyer
Consultant on peace processes
Pretoria

Vasu Gounden
Executive Director, African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes
Durban

Delegation of the Committee on the Exercise of
the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

Paul Badji
Permanent Representative of Senegal to the United Nations

Chairman of the Committee

Victor Camilleri
Permanent Representative of Malta to the United Nations
Rapporteur of the Committee

Esther Armenteros Cárdenas
Ambassador of Cuba to South Africa

Dumisani Shadrack Kumalo
Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations

Riyad Mansour
Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations

Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations

Tuliameni Kalomoh
Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs

Governments

Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Botswana, Brazil, Cameroon, China, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, France, Gabon, Hungary, Iceland, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Mali, Malaysia, Mauritius, Morocco, Myanmar, Namibia, Oman, Pakistan, Poland, Philippines, Qatar, Senegal, Serbia, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Slovak Republic, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Sweden, Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen

Entities having received a standing invitation to participate as observers in the sessions
and the work of the General Assembly and maintaining permanent observer missions
at Headquarters

Palestine

Intergovernmental organizations

African Union
Islamic Development Bank
League of Arab States
Organization of the Islamic Conference

United Nations organs, agencies and bodies

International Labour Organization
United Nations Development Programme
United Nations Information Centre
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Civil society organizations

Association des Juristes Maliennes, Mali
Congress of South African Trade Unions, Johannesburg
Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria
Media Review Network, Laudium
Palestine Solidarity Alliance, Pretoria
South African Human Rights Commission, Pretoria
South African Zionist Federation, Sandringham
University of Pretoria

Media

Foreign Exchange
Independent newspapers
Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting
Islamic Republic News Agency
ITV News
South African Broadcasting Corporation Radio News
South African Press Association

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