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GENERAL ASSEMBLY VOTES OVERWHELMINGLY TO ACCORD PALESTINE

'NON-MEMBER OBSERVER STATE' STATUS IN UNITED NATIONS

Objective to 'Breathe New Life' into Peace Process, Says Palestinian President; Israel's Delegate Counters, Without Direct Negotiations, Peace Remains 'Out of Reach'

Voting by an overwhelming majority — 138 in favour to 9 against (Canada, Czech Republic, Israel, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), Nauru, Panama, Palau, United States), with 41 abstentions — the General Assembly today accorded Palestine non-Member Observer State status in the United Nations.

"The moment has arrived for the world to say clearly: enough of aggression, settlements and occupation," said Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority, as he called on the 193-member body to "issue a birth certificate of the reality of the State of Palestine". Indeed, following Israel's latest aggression against the Gaza Strip, the international community now faced "the last chance" to save the long elusive two-State solution, he said, adding: "the window of opportunity is narrowing and time is quickly running out".

Palestine came before the Assembly because it believed in peace, and because its people were in desperate need of it, he said, speaking ahead of the vote. Its endeavour to seek a change in status at the United Nations did not aim to terminate what remained of the long stagnant peace negotiations; instead, he said, it was aimed at trying to "breathe new life" into the process. Support for the resolution would also send a promising message to millions of Palestinians "that justice is possible and that there is a reason to be hopeful", he stressed.

The text upgraded Palestine's status without prejudice to the acquired rights, privileges and role of the Palestine Liberation Organization in the United Nations as the representative of the Palestinian people, in accordance with the relevant resolutions and practice. The Palestine Liberation Organization was recognized as an observer entity in 1974. By other terms of the resolution — the adoption of which coincided with the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People and with the Assembly's annual debate on the Question of Palestine — Member States echoed the "urgent need for the resumption and acceleration" of the peace negotiations.

Israel's representative, also taking the floor before the vote, emphasized that the "one-sided" resolution did not advance peace, but instead pushed the process backward. "There is only one route to Palestinian statehood. There are no shortcuts. No quick fixes," he said. The route to peace ran through direct negotiations between Jerusalem and Ramallah. "Israel is prepared to live in peace with a Palestinian State, but for peace to endure, Israel's security must be protected," he added.

He said that certain vital interests of his country, including recognition of the Jewish State and an agreement to end the conflict with Israel once and for all, did not appear in the text. Indeed, the only way to achieve peace was through agreements that had been reached by the parties and not through United Nations resolutions. He added that, as long as President Abbas preferred symbolism over reality, as long as he preferred to travel to New York rather than travel to Jerusalem for genuine dialogue, any hope of peace would be out of reach.

"There can be no substitute for negotiations", agreed United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who also addressed the Assembly following the resolution's adoption. The decision to accord Palestine non-Member Observer State status was the prerogative of Member States, he said of the action, reiterating his belief that the Palestinians had a legitimate right to an independent State, and that Israel had the right to live in peace and security. "I call on all those concerned to act responsibly" and intensify efforts towards reconciliation and towards a just and lasting peace, he said.

General Assembly President Vuk Jeremić said that in today's interconnected world, "what happens between the River Jordan and the shores of the Mediterranean has become the key to the security and well-being of [all] mankind." Notwithstanding the efforts of some of the most courageous statesmen of the twentieth century, a negotiated comprehensive settlement that would enable Israel and Palestine to live side by side in peace and security had yet to materialize "[a]nd so we still witness [...] enmity, estrangement, and mistrust — as parents continue to bury their children".

He appealed to both sides to work for peace; to negotiate in good faith; and ultimately, to succeed in reaching a historic settlement. "I have no doubt that history will judge this day to have been fraught with significance — but whether it will come to be looked upon as a step in the right direction on the road to peace will depend on how we bear ourselves in its wake," he declared.

Among speakers who expressed their support for the resolution was Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey, who said that, for 65 years, the whole world had shut its eyes to the plight of the Palestinian people. During that time, no resolution towards a Palestinian State had been honoured. "The reality of Palestine", he said, "is a bleeding wound in the conscience of all humanity."

Further, he said, "our vision for justice, international order and human rights will not be achieved until the moment we [...] see the flag of the State of Palestine side by side with ours, as a full Member of the United Nations." The granting of non-Member Observer State status could act as a "booster" creating the long-needed momentum towards a negotiated, comprehensive solution. Calling today's vote a "first step", he urged all United Nations Members to fulfil their long overdue responsibility towards the Palestinians.

"The eyes of all the children of Palestine are directed towards us", said the representative of Sudan, who introduced the resolution. He called on all States to contribute today "to make history" and to "pave the way for the future" by casting their votes in favour. Doing so would be a victory both for the value of truth and for the Palestinian people themselves, he said.

However, other delegates, explaining their votes against the resolution, agreed with Israel's representative that the text would do nothing to advance positive relations between the two parties to the conflict. In that vein, the representative of the United States said that her delegation had voted against the "unfortunate and counterproductive" resolution as it placed further obstacles in the path to peace.

The United States felt strongly that today's "grand pronouncements would soon fade" and that the Palestinian people would wake up tomorrow "and find out that little about their lives had changed", save that the prospects of peace had receded. Therefore, the United States called on both parties to renew direct negotiations, and continued to urge all parties to avoid all provocative actions in the region, in New York or elsewhere.

Also speaking prior to this morning's action were the foreign ministers of Indonesia and Canada.

Speaking in explanation of their votes following action were delegates from France, Singapore, United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, Bulgaria, Serbia, Honduras, Denmark, Italy, Greece, Hungary, Austria, Australia, New Zealand, Czech Republic, Finland, Norway, United Republic of Tanzania, South Sudan, Netherlands, Japan, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Spain, Mexico, Georgia, Jamaica, Russian Federation, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Korea, Romania, Portugal and Mauritius.

Other speakers in the debate on the Question of Palestine were the representatives of Egypt, Iran (on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement), Djibouti (on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference), China, Kuwait, Nigeria, South Africa, United Arab Emirates, Brazil, Cuba, Venezuela, Malaysia, Syria, Morocco, Tunisia and Namibia.

The Head of the Delegation of the European Union also addressed the meeting.

The General Assembly will next convene on Friday, 30 November, at 11 a.m. to continue and conclude its debate on the question of Palestine and to take up the situation in the Middle East.

Background

The General Assembly met this afternoon to take up the question of Palestine. It had before it two reports for consideration.

The report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (document [A/67/35](#)) states that the reporting period, 7 October 2011 to 6 October 2012, was characterized by the deadlocked political process and the deteriorating socio-economic situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. According to the report, there has been no breakthrough in efforts towards resuming direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, owing to Israel's consistent refusal to freeze its settlement activity and adhere to the long-standing terms of reference of the peace process.

The report states that the Committee continued to work for the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to self-determination, and a negotiated settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in all its aspects, resulting in an end to the occupation and the independence of a sovereign, viable, contiguous and democratic Palestinian State based on 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, and a just solution for the Palestine refugees based on General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

A durable settlement of the conflict is a prerequisite for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. Thus, the report notes that the international community should maintain its focus on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, uphold its legal obligations in that regard, and present bold initiatives to break the current deadlock. With Palestinian membership in the Organization pending before the Security Council, the Committee believes that progress on Palestinian status at the United Nations will generate a new dynamic in the peace process and help safeguard the two-State solution.

According to the report, the Committee was also concerned by the ongoing violence and gross violations of humanitarian and human rights law, and reiterated its condemnation of all attacks against civilians, including rocket fire from the Gaza Strip, air strikes on populated areas, and settler violence, and calls upon the Security Council and the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to act urgently to guarantee the protection of civilians.

The Palestinian Authority advanced its State-building programme, the report notes, but a serious budget deficit, as well as restrictions and obstacles imposed by Israel on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, prevented the normal movement of persons and goods, economic activity and sustained growth. The Committee calls upon donors to meet their prior commitments and to provide emergency aid to buttress the two-State solution. Progress towards that goal also requires all Palestinian factions to unite behind the legitimate leadership of President Mahmoud Abbas. The Committee urges the speedy implementation, in good faith, of national reconciliation agreements.

Among numerous other actions urged in the report, the Committee also calls on the international community to take serious and concrete action to compel Israel to stop its illegal settlement activities and to genuinely commit to ending its 45-year military occupation and to making peace, and calls upon the Security Council to undertake a mission to the region to examine the situation first-hand.

The report of the Secretary-General on the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine (documents [A/67/364-S/2012/701](#) and [A/67/364/Add.1](#)), covering the period September 2011 to August 2012, contains replies received from the parties concerned to the notes verbales sent by the Secretary-General, as well as his observations on the current state of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and on international efforts to move the peace process forward.

It states that there has been little progress towards the peaceful settlement of the issue during the reporting period, and that confidence between the parties and in the political process continued to erode despite efforts by the United Nations, the Quartet and individual Member States. The unwillingness of the parties to engage in direct talks was due to a lack of trust and disagreement over the conditions that would allow them to do so.

The report also notes that the Palestinians had submitted an application for membership in the United Nations and acquired membership in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and that Israel continued to accelerate settlement activities in the West Bank. The situation on the ground remained challenging, in particular for the population living under closure in Gaza, while Israel, for its part, continued to face the threat of rocket fire. The situation on the ground presented a growing cause for concern over the viability of the two-State solution.

At the same time, the report states, the Palestinians continued to implement an ambitious State-building programme. They also briefly had resumed their efforts towards reuniting the West Bank and Gaza, albeit with limited success at reconciliation.

The report urges Israel to cease all settlement activity in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and to take concrete steps to further ease the numerous restrictions in place both in the West Bank and Gaza. It also strongly encourages all Palestinians on the path of non-violence and unity in line with past Palestine Liberation Organization commitments.

In conclusion, the report states that the Secretary-General will continue to ensure that the United Nations works towards the establishment of an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace with a secure Israel in the framework of a comprehensive regional settlement consistent with relevant Security Council resolutions, and in accordance with the Quartet road map, the Arab Peace Initiative and the principle of land for peace.

Status of Palestine at United Nations

DAFF-ALLA ELHAG ALI OSMAN ([Sudan](#)), introducing the draft resolution on "status of Palestine in the United Nations" ([document A/67/L.28](#)), said the text aimed at taking a historic decision granting Palestine the status of non-Member Observer State. Its preamble reaffirmed the unacceptability of the acquisition of territory by force, and reaffirmed the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, including to an independent State of Palestine. Several paragraphs of the text reaffirmed relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly concerning the peaceful settlement of the Question of Palestine, which mentioned, among other things, that Israel must withdraw from the Occupied Territory, including East Jerusalem.

Other references were made to the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, starting with the right to self-determination and that to an independent State, as well as the need for an equitable settlement for the refugees of Palestine and the complete cessation of Israeli settlement activities in the Occupied Territory, including East Jerusalem. It recalled a General Assembly resolution which took note of the 1988 proclamation of a State of Palestine. Those paragraphs also reaffirmed the right of all States in the region to live in peace within safe and internationally recognized borders, and the right of those States to live side by side in peace and security.

Independence and freedom were enshrined in the United Nations Charter, he continued, emphasizing that today's occasion was a chance to reaffirm those principles. Sixty-five years ago the United Nations had decided on the separation of two States, and one had waited until now, until this historic date. "The eyes of all the children of Palestine are directed towards us", he said, adding that the resolution before the Assembly today was an additional milestone along the path to establishing the international will to realize real peace. He called on all States to contribute today "to make history" and to "pave the way for the future" by voting in favour of the resolution. Doing so would be a victory both for the value of truth and for the Palestinian people themselves, he said.

MAHMOUD ABBAS, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestinian Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority, said that Palestine came before the Assembly at a time when it was "still tending to its wounds" from the latest Israeli aggression in the Gaza Strip, which had wiped out entire families, murdering men, women and children along with their dreams, their hopes, their futures and their longing to live an ordinary life in freedom and peace. It came before the Assembly because it believed in peace, and because its people were in desperate need of it.

The international community now faced "the last chance to save the two-State solution," he stressed in that regard. Indeed, the recent Israeli aggression had confirmed, once again, the urgent and pressing need to end the Israeli occupation and for the Palestinian people to gain their freedom and independence.

During the dark days of its past — which included one of the most dreadful campaigns of ethnic cleansing and dispossession in modern history — the Palestinian people had looked to the United Nations as a beacon of hope. It had appealed for an end to injustice, for the achievement of peace and for the realization of its rights, "and our people still believe in this and continue to wait".

Over the last months, the world had heard the "incessant flood" of Israeli threats to Palestine's peaceful, political and diplomatic endeavour to acquire non-Member Observer status in the United Nations. Some of those threats had been carried out in a "horrific and barbaric manner" in the Gaza Strip just days ago. The conviction that Israel was above the law and that it had immunity was bolstered by the failure by some to condemn and demand the cessation of its violations and crimes, and by the position that "equates the victim and the executioner". "The moment has arrived for the world to say clearly: enough of aggression, settlements and occupation," he affirmed.

He went on to say that Palestine did not seek to delegitimize a State established years ago, but rather to affirm the legitimacy of the State that must now achieve its independence. Nor was Palestine's endeavour aimed at terminating what remains of the negotiation process — "which has lost its objectivity and credibility". Instead, it was aimed at trying to breathe new life into the negotiations.

"We will not give up, we will not tire, and our determination will not wane", he emphasized, adding that the Palestinian people would not relinquish their inalienable rights, as defined by United Nations resolutions, including the right to defend themselves against aggression and occupation. They would continue their popular, peaceful resistance and their "epic steadfastness", and they would continue to build on their land. "We will accept no less than the independence of the state of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital", on all the Palestinian territory occupied in 1967, he stressed.

However, he warned, "the window of opportunity is narrowing and time is quickly running out". Indeed, "the rope of patience is shortening and hope is withering". It was time for action and time to move forward, he said, calling for support from those present in the Assembly today. That support would send a promising message to millions of Palestinians "that justice is possible and that there is a reason to be hopeful". It would show that the world would not accept the continuation of the occupation.

In its endeavour to acquire non-Member State status today, Palestine reaffirmed that it would always adhere to and respect the Charter and resolutions of the United Nations and international law, uphold equality, guarantee civil liberties, uphold the rule of law, promote democracy and pluralism and uphold and protect the rights of women. Sixty-five years ago on this day, the United Nations General Assembly had adopted resolution 181 (1947), which partitioned the land of Palestine into two States and had become "the birth certificate for Israel". It now had a moral and historic duty, as well as a practical one, to "salvage the chances for peace". In that regard, he asked the Assembly to "issue a birth certificate of the reality of the State of Palestine" on an urgent basis.

RON PROSOR ([Israel](#)) said he represented the world's one and only Jewish State; built in the Jewish people's ancient homeland, with its eternal capital Jerusalem as its "beating heart". He declared: "We are a nation with deep roots in the past and bright hopes for the future. We are a nation that values

idealism, but acts with pragmatism. Israel is a nation that never hesitated to defend itself, but will always extend its hand for peace.” The Bible stated “seek peace and pursue it”. It had been the goal of the Israeli people and every Israeli leader since the re-established of Israel 64 years ago. This week marked the thirty-fifth anniversary of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat’s historic visit to Jerusalem. In a speech just before that visit, that official had famously stood in the Egyptian Parliament and stated that he would go to the “ends of the Earth” to make peace with Israel.

Israel’s then-Prime Minister, Menachem Begin, had welcomed President Sadat to Israel and paved the way for peace. This morning, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had said of the resolution the General Assembly was about to act upon: “Israel is prepared to live in peace with a Palestinian State, but for peace to endure, Israel’s security must be protected. The Palestinians must recognize the Jewish State and they must be prepared to end the conflict with Israel once and for all.”

None of those vital interests appeared in the resolution, he said, and as such, Israel could not accept it. The only way to achieve peace was through agreements that had been reached by the parties and not through United Nations resolutions that had completely ignored Israel’s vital security and national interests. And because the resolution was so one-sided, it did not advance peace, but pushed it backwards. No decision by the United Nations could break the 4,000-year-old bond between the people of Israel and the land of Israel. The people of Israel waited for a Palestinian leader that was willing to follow in the path of President Sadat. For as long as President Abbas preferred symbolism over reality, as long as he preferred to travel to New York for United Nations resolutions, rather than travel to Jerusalem for genuine dialogue, any hope of peace would be out of reach.

He said that President Abbas had described today’s proceedings as “historic”. But the only thing historic about that official’s speech was how much it had ignored history. The truth was that 65 years ago today, the United Nations had voted to partition the British Mandate into two States: a Jewish State and an Arab State — two States for two peoples. Israel had accepted that plan. The Palestinians and Arab nations had rejected it and launched a “war of annihilation” to throw “the Jews into the sea”.

The truth was that from 1948 until 1967, the West Bank had been ruled by Jordan, and Gaza had been ruled by Egypt. The Arab States had not lifted a finger to create a Palestinian State. Instead, they had sought Israel’s destruction, and had been joined by newly formed Palestinian terrorist organizations. The truth was that to advance peace, Israel had dismantled entire communities and uprooted thousands of people from their homes in the Gaza Strip in 2005. Rather than use that opportunity to build a peaceful future, the Palestinians had turned Gaza into an “Iranian terror base”, from which thousands of rockets had been fired into Israeli cities. Last week, Gaza had been turned into a launching pad for rockets into Israeli cities, a haven for global terrorists and a munitions dump for Iranian weapons.

Three months ago, Israel’s Prime Minister had stood in the Assembly Hall and extended his hand in peace to President Abbas, reiterating that his goal was to create a solution of two-States for two-peoples — where a demilitarized Palestinian State would recognize Israel as a Jewish State. This afternoon, “I did not hear you use the phrase ‘two States for two peoples’ and, in fact, I have never heard you say that phrase because the Palestinian leadership has never recognized that Israel is the nation-State of the Jewish people,” he said, adding: “President Abbas, instead of revising history, it is time that you started making history by making peace with Israel.”

The resolution would not confer statehood on the Palestinian Authority, which clearly failed to meet the relevant criteria. The text would not enable the Palestinian Authority to join international treaties, organizations, or conferences as a State. The resolution could not serve as an acceptable term of reference for peace negotiations with Israel. “Let me tell you what his resolution does do,” he said, explaining that he believed it violated a fundamental binding commitment. It sent a message that the international community was willing to turn a blind eye to peace agreements. “Why continue to make painful sacrifices for peace, in exchange for pieces of paper that the other side will not honour?” he asked.

“There is only one route to Palestinian statehood. And that route does not run through this chamber in New York,” he said, adding that that route ran through direct negotiations between Jerusalem and Ramallah. “There are no shortcuts. No quick fixes. No instant solutions,” he said, recalling that United States President Barack Obama had said in 2010: “Peace cannot be imposed from the outside.” In closing, he said, “65 years ago the Palestinians could have chosen to live side by side with the Jewish State of Israel. They could have chosen to accept the solution of two States for two peoples. They rejected it then, and they are rejecting it again today.” The United Nations had been founded to advance the cause of peace. Today, the Palestinians were turning their back on peace. “Don’t let history record that today the world body helped them along on their march of folly.”

MARTY NATALEGAWA, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, said the time had come for the international community to set things right. “No longer can the world turn a blind eye to the long sufferings of the Palestinian people, the denial of their basic human rights and fundamental freedoms, the obstruction of their rights to self-determination and to independence,” he said. An independent State of Palestine with equal rights and responsibilities to those of other States would contribute to the attainment of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The recent cycle of indiscriminate violence and disproportionate use of force in the Gaza Strip served as a serious reminder of the need for an earnest resumption and acceleration of the peace process, he said. Conditions conducive for that progress were ending illegal settlement activities, lifting the blockade of Gaza and enhancing its intra-Palestinian dialogue at this historic moment. By according non-Member Observer State status to Palestine, “we are signalling the primacy of diplomacy and rejection of violence”, he said.

JOHN BAIRD, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Canada, spoke in opposition to the resolution before the Assembly, saying that it had undermined the core foundations of the decades-long commitment by the international community and the parties themselves to a two-State solution. Also speaking in opposition to unilateral actions by either side, he said Canada’s support for a negotiated settlement was rooted in the history of the United Nations and the sustained international effort to resolve the matter. Tracing the history of that sustained effort, from 1947 with the passage of Assembly resolution 181 to 2008, with the passage of Security Council resolution 1850 (2008), he said the path to peace had rested in direct negotiations between the two parties.

He said the successive Security Council resolutions and various international commitments and understandings over nearly seven decades had formed the building blocks of a collaborative peace process that remained unfinished, and the resolution would not advance the cause of peace, spur a return to negotiations or better the lives of the Palestinian people. Conversely, such a unilateral step would harden positions and raise unrealistic expectations. Any two-State solution must be negotiated and mutually agreed upon by both sides, he reiterated, calling on both sides to return to the negotiating table without preconditions.

AHMET DAVUTOĞLU, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey, said that for 65 years, the whole world had shut its eyes to the plight of the Palestinian people and for 65 years, no resolution towards a Palestinian State had been honoured. “The reality of Palestine”, he said, “is a bleeding wound in the conscience of all humanity,” one that he had witnessed on his recent visit to Gaza. He called on all to support a just, peaceful and harmonious future by coming together to “stand behind the Palestinian bid to become a non-Member Observer State”. The denial of the right of Palestinians to a State had no justification on moral, political or legal grounds.

Further, he said that “Our vision for justice, international order and human rights will not be achieved until the moment we [...] see the flag of the State of Palestine side by side with ours, as a full Member of the United Nations.” He said that that was a humanitarian and moral obligation, while the political and historical context saw the peace process “on ice” and daily deviation from the internationally accepted solution prescribing an independent Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital within its 1967 borders. The granting of non-Member State Observer status could be a “booster” creating the long-needed momentum towards a negotiated, comprehensive solution. Calling today’s vote a “first step”, he urged all United Nations Members to fulfil their long overdue responsibility towards the Palestinians.

VUK JEREMIĆ, President of the General Assembly, said that today's meeting had begun by hearing from representatives of two great nations, President Mahmoud Abbas of Palestine and Ambassador Ron Prosor of the State of Israel. "They are each the children of Abraham," he continued, "one a descendant of Ishmael, the other of Isaac." Both were from a land that had almost continuously been tormented by conflict for many centuries, with countless victims on all sides.

Strife had not abated during the 67 years of United Nations existence, despite the fact that the Organization had been created to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war", he said. Notwithstanding the efforts of some of the most courageous statesmen of the twentieth century, a negotiated comprehensive settlement that would enable Israel and Palestine to live side by side in peace and security had yet to materialize "[a]nd so we still witness [...] enmity, estrangement, and mistrust—as parents continue to bury their children".

"In today's [...] interconnected world, what happens between the River Jordan and the shores of the Mediterranean has become the key to the security and well-being of [all] mankind," he went on. "I have no doubt that history will judge this day to have been fraught with significance—but whether it will come to be looked upon as a step in the right direction on the road to peace will depend on how we bear ourselves in its wake."

In closing, he appealed to "my dear friends from Palestine and Israel [...] to work for peace; to negotiate in good faith; and ultimately, to succeed in reaching a historical settlement." That was a common and solemn duty to the whole world, but "first and foremost to the proud men and women who live in a land that is holy to so many of us". In asking delegates to cast their votes, he said, "I am sure each of you will do so with a veritable feeling in your heart that your choice is serving the cause of a righteous peace."

Following those statements, by a vote of 138 in favour to 9 against (Canada, Czech Republic, Israel, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), Nauru, Panama, Palau, United States) with 41 abstentions, the Assembly then adopted resolution A/67/L.28 (Annex).

Immediately after the vote, BAN KI-MOON, Secretary-General of the United Nations, said that the decision to accord Palestine non-Member Observer State status was the prerogative of Member States. His position on the matter had been consistent, that the Palestinians had a legitimate right to an independent State, and that Israel had the right to live in peace and security. "There is no substitute for negotiations" to that end, he said, stressing the urgency of the need to resume meaningful negotiations. Due impetus must be given to those goals, he said, urging the parties to renew their commitment to a negotiated peace. "I call on all those concerned to act responsibly" and intensify efforts towards reconciliation and towards a just and lasting peace.

Speaking in explanation of vote following action, the representative of the United States said that, for decades, her Government had worked to achieve an end to the long and tragic conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. Only through direct negotiations could the parties achieve the peace that they both deserved, she stressed, calling for "two States for two people". That remained the goal, and the United States would, therefore, measure any proposed action against that "clear yardstick". Indeed, it was necessary to ask if a measure would bring the parties closer to peace or push them further apart. Today's "unfortunate and counterproductive" resolution placed further obstacles in the path to peace; therefore, the United States had voted against it.

Backers of the text said that they sought a Palestinian State at peace with Israel—and "so do we", she stressed. But the only way to do so, and to resolve all status issues, was the crucial, if painful, work of negotiations between parties. The United States agreed strongly that today's "grand pronouncements would soon fade" and that the Palestinian people would wake up tomorrow "and find out that little about their lives had changed", save that the prospects of peace had receded. Therefore, the United States called on both parties to renew direct negotiations, and continued to urge all parties to avoid all provocative actions in the region, in New York or elsewhere. It would also continue to oppose all unilateral actions that circumvented or prejudged outcomes that could only be negotiated, including Palestinian statehood.

"Progress cannot be made by pressing a green button", she stressed; for that reason, the vote today could not be misconstrued as constituting United Nations membership, nor establishing a Palestinian State. Indeed, it ignored virtually all other core questions such as security. President Obama had been clear in stating a realistic basis for negotiations, and the United States would continue to base its efforts on that approach. "There are no shortcuts" to peace, she stressed. Long after the votes had been cast and the speeches forgotten, "it is the Palestinians and Israelis who must still talk to each other and listen to each other", and live side by side in the land that they shared.

The representative of France, speaking after the vote, said that, by voting to recognize Palestine as a non-Member Observer State, France had voted in favour of a two-State solution, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, within secure, internationally recognized borders. Since President François Mitterrand's appearance before the Knesset in 1982 and his call for the creation of a Palestinian State, France had promoted such a solution. It was in line with that heritage that President François Hollande supported international recognition of a Palestinian State.

The current meeting was a new stage towards the two-State solution, he continued. Only a few days after a new explosion of violence between Israel and Gaza, France had to give its full support to partners for peace, while those of armed struggle sought to win the day. He called upon the international community and the Arab world to contribute to prospects for peace, which included ending attacks on Israel and immediately returning to the negotiating table.

The representative of Singapore said that his delegation supported the right of the Palestinian people to a homeland and had, in the past, supported relevant Assembly resolutions. However, his country had abstained from today's vote because only a negotiated settlement, consistent with Security Council resolution 242 (1967), could provide the basis for a viable, long-term solution. Both sides had legitimate rights and shared responsibilities and must be prepared to make compromises to achieve the larger good of a lasting peace. Because of those interlinked rights and responsibilities, no unilateral move could result in a just and durable outcome.

Palestine's attempt to upgrade its status to non-Member Observer State, he continued, should be viewed in the context of its efforts last year for full United Nations membership. However, as facts on the ground had remained unchanged, its aspirations had not helped. He expressed the hope that the two parties would resume negotiations. Joining the international community in welcoming an end to the attacks on Gaza and southern Israel, he expressed regret for the loss of life on both sides.

The representative of the United Kingdom said he was gravely concerned about the action the Assembly had taken, saying that "the window for a negotiated solution was rapidly closing". Israel and Palestine must return to credible negotiations to save a two-State solution. The Palestinian leadership should, without precondition, return to the table.

Further, he said, United Nations entities should not take immediate action based on today's resolution, which in turn would make a negotiated solution impossible. In that regard, his delegation had abstained in voting on the resolution. Although Palestine had just become a non-Member Observer State, that would not change the situation on the ground. All possible efforts should be made in the coming weeks to restart peace negotiations.

The delegate of Germany said his nation firmly believed in "two States for two peoples" and shared the goal of a Palestinian State. However, such status must be achieved only through direct negotiations. There was doubt that today's action would be helpful for the peace process at this point in time. "It might lead to further hardening of positions instead of improving chances of a two-State solution through direct negotiations," he said. He explicitly welcomed that today's resolution called for a two-State solution and, hence, recognized the right of Israel to exist in peace. However, Israel's legitimate security concern had to be addressed in a credible manner.

The representative of Switzerland said that his delegation's decision to vote in favour of the resolution had been motivated by the desire to "unblock the current stalemate" and to re-launch the peace process. He called, in that regard, for a solution with two States — Israel and Palestine — living side by side in peace and security. He also recalled relevant Assembly resolutions, including a relevant 1988 text. He also recalled past references to the nature of Jerusalem as the "capital of two States".

Today's resolution was the "keystone" supporting a two-State solution "whose prospects are fading". The upgrade of status also endowed the Palestinians with obligations, including the obligation to refrain from the use of the threat of force and others. Bilateral recognition, however, depended on future negotiations.

The representative of Belgium said that true progress would be achieved when the Palestinians were able to enjoy, on the ground, a State with institutions, officials and infrastructure necessary to function smoothly. He agreed with the goal of a two-State solution, with a future State of Palestine that was democratic, viable and durable. The two-State solution was the only possible one, he stressed, and all efforts should be directed to that end. The resolution was not recognition of a State in full terms, he added.

In Belgium's view, there was no alternative to negotiations, difficult as they may be. Priority should be placed on a swift resumption of peace talks. Israel and the Palestinian Authority must both refrain from any unilateral act that would compromise the credibility of the peace process, and "the peace process must move faster". Calling for a swift resumption of the peace talks, he said that the parties must be brought to the same table.

The representative of Bulgaria said that his delegation had abstained because it was felt that the resolution would neither change the reality on the ground nor speed up the peace process. He called for an immediate resumption of peace negotiations without precondition. Bulgaria had consistently supported Palestine's sovereignty and its people's right of self-determination. In that regard, his country had bilateral diplomatic relations with both Israel and Palestine. Given the impact of the resolution adopted today on an early resumption of negotiations, he said he was sceptical that the text would advance the peace process. Any unilateral act was detrimental to the peace process.

FEODOR STARČEVIĆ (Serbia) said that, for the 132 United Nations Members that had so far recognized the State of Palestine, granting it the status of non-Member Observer State was a sign that their support for the Palestinian cause had brought results and strengthened the Palestinian right to self-determination. Serbia, and Yugoslavia before, had exhibited unwavering support for the Palestinian struggle towards independence, based on its own sense of justice. Serbia had diplomatic relations and maintained good and friendly cooperation with Israel as well.

Fully conscious of Israel's legitimate security concerns, he said Serbia had an interest in promoting a solution that would bring about statehood for Palestine and security and peace for both Israel and Palestine. Neither a nation that was a victim of the Holocaust, nor one that was still questing for its statehood deserved to live in the same precarious situation for more than 60 years. Both peoples were weary of conflict and should not be made to wait any longer for it to end. He, therefore, called for peace negotiations to be urgently resumed and accelerated so that a peace agreement based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Quartet Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative could be reached.

The representative of Honduras, voting in favour of the resolution, did so to support the fundamental rights of human beings and of nations large and small. Honduras supported a two-State solution, Israel and Palestine. The vote in favour would contribute to a just peace and justice for the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. There was a need for a comprehensive and negotiated solution to resolve all outstanding issues.

She understood that peace could not be imposed from outside, but must be found between the two States involved. A true peace could only be found through mutual recognition of the rights of both peoples. Israel and Palestine must go back to the table and negotiate all outstanding issues, with the support of the international community. Today's vote should not be seen as a vote for one and against the other, but as a way to open new paths to direct understanding and to get closer to the ultimate aim of the resolution, which was peace.

Denmark's representative said that 65 years ago, his delegation had voted for the establishment of two States in the former mandate of Palestine, and had voted in favour of today's resolution as reaffirmation of its commitment to a two-State solution. Denmark had consistently supported Israel's right to self-defence in accordance with international law and had also supported the Palestinians' right to statehood and the strengthening of the Palestinian authority. In that regard, he called on all Palestinians to support President Abbas in his efforts to promote intra-Palestinian reconciliation.

Welcoming last week's ceasefire agreement, he said that the sudden escalation of conflict in Gaza highlighted the urgent necessity for a comprehensive solution to the conflict and called on both sides to immediately resume direct bilateral negotiations without conditions on all final status issues, respecting previous agreements and understandings. He further appealed to the parties to refrain from any steps which could negatively affect the situation. The time to heed the call in resolution 181, adopted 65 years ago, was long overdue, he said. He further noted that Denmark's vote today was not formal bilateral recognition of a sovereign Palestinian State.

The representative of Italy said that his country was strongly committed to peace as a fundamental interest of the European Union and the region. Italy's position was grounded in the commitment that peace must be based on the idea of two States living on agreed borders and in peace and security. He strongly supported the European Union's call to parties to ensure meaningful negotiations and to refrain from actions that undermined the credibility of the peace process. His delegation had supported the resolution, he said, but underlined the firm conviction that Palestine's new status should not be applied retroactively. Furthermore, it in no way should prejudice the necessity for a negotiated settlement.

The representative of Greece said that his positive vote today had been guided by a longstanding principle that the Middle East solution should be based on two States, living in peace and security, side by side with the State of Israel. An important provision was operative paragraph 5. The inalienable right to statehood should be fulfilled through negotiation between the two parties. Voting in favour of the resolution, he said, had contributed to the peace process. In that regard, he urged the Palestinian side to refrain from unilateral steps and the Israeli side to refrain from action on the ground that could jeopardize the two-State solution.

The delegate of Hungary said his country abstained after having given consideration to all factors that would affect peace and stability in the region. Today's action would not have a positive impact on the prospect of resumption of the Middle East peace process. The settlement must be based on a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security. Hungary supported all efforts towards direct negotiations in the coming months.

Taking the floor next, Austria's speaker stressed his country's full support for the resolution. It had voted in favour of the text as an expression of its confidence in the serious efforts to be taken by Palestinian leaders to build an efficient independent State. It was, however, crucial for the two parties to return to the negotiation table, he said, calling for unity towards a negotiated solution.

Australia's representative said that its decision to abstain in the vote balanced its support for the right of the Palestinian people to have a State with its concern for the need for a negotiated two-State solution. The resolution would confer the status of a non-Member Observer State on Palestine, not that of a Member State. He was concerned the resolution might make a negotiated solution more difficult. He urged both parties to return to negotiations, and said that it was important that neither side take actions now that would jeopardize that goal.

The representative of New Zealand said that his delegation's vote in favour of the resolution was consistent with its long-held support for the aspirations of the Palestinian people. At the same time, he fully supported Israel's right to exist in security, free from Hamas rockets, alongside an independent Palestine living within clearly defined borders. Noting that the resolution just adopted conferred non-Member Observer State status, he said that the question of recognition of a

Palestinian State was a separate issue.

He further expressed the hope that with today's decision both sides would do whatever was needed to return to the negotiating table. Whatever the significance of today's vote, "we must now turn to what happens tomorrow", he said. It was regrettable that today's solution had to be achieved by a vote at the United Nations rather than at the negotiating table, but that was the reality of the current state of affairs.

The representative of the Czech Republic reiterated his country's support for direct negotiations leading to Palestinian statehood, and he encouraged both parties to return to such talks. Costa Rica had long called on all concerned parties to avoid steps that might interfere with, or prejudice, that process. For that reason, the Czech Republic had voted against the present resolution. It fully supported aspirations for statehood in a fully negotiated solution, and living side by side with Israel in "mutual recognition".

The representative of Finland said his country had voted in favour of the resolution with the aim of showing support to the "moderate forces" that were committed to the peace process. Finland was committed to a two-State solution, with both States living side by side in peace and security. The world had witnessed that the Palestinian Authority now had institutions of a "model State", a fact which deserved recognition. He called on all sides to engage in negotiations immediately and without preconditions, and to refrain from actions that could inhibit that process. However, he stressed, the Assembly's vote did not entail a formal recognition of a Palestinian State. Finland's national position on the matter would be considered at a later date.

The delegate of Norway said he voted in favour of the resolution because Palestine was already involved in many institutions as a functioning State. Granting non-Member Observer State status was consistent with the efforts made so far. His country had supported the partition plan in 1947 and it had supported Israel's entry into statehood in 1949. Palestinian people had the legitimate right to self-determination.

It was time, he said, for Member States to recognize the serious efforts made by Palestine to establish an independent State. Conversely, such a status came with responsibility. Palestine should make efforts to promote the rule of law and improve the human rights situation. Norway was committed to a two-State solution. However, only a negotiated solution could bring a lasting peace, and he called on both sides to restart negotiations.

The representative of the United Republic of Tanzania said that today's vote in favour of the draft resolution was an illustration of support for the legitimate cause of the people of Palestine. The resolution presented yet another opportunity for the international community to recognize an independent State of Palestine as it had recognized the State of Israel. "We are optimistic that the enhanced status granted today by the Assembly to the State of Palestine will provide renewed impetus to the parties to pursue vigorously all efforts to create a conducive environment to the resumption of direct and meaningful negotiations as called for by the Secretary-General in his report before the Assembly," he said.

The representative of South Sudan said that, in voting for the resolution, his delegation had supported the right of self-determination for the people of Palestine. That principle accounted for the existence of many countries, he said, but it was "always contentious". South Sudan had achieved its independence from Sudan after a struggle that had lasted half a century. It believed that, in the context of a conflict between two identity groups, the most practical and viable outcome was a negotiated solution. While South Sudan had voted in favour of the resolution, it still encouraged the parties to pursue a negotiated settlement.

The representative of the Netherlands, aligning with the statement to be made by the European Union, said that his delegation strongly support a peace agreement based on the borders of 1967, with a viable independent State of Palestine and a secure State of Israel living side by side in peace and security. "The current status quo is untenable," he said in that regard. The Netherlands supported Palestinian efforts to achieve statehood, but would have preferred the resolution to be postponed, as it could threaten negotiations at this time. For that reason, the Netherlands had decided to abstain in the vote. It stood ready to support negotiations, and would support both parties bilaterally, taking into account Palestinian aspirations for statehood and Israel's need for security. He urged all parties to refrain from actions that undermined the prospect of a two-State solution, and particularly urged Israel to end its settlement activities.

The representative of Japan said that his delegation had long supported the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. It supported a two-State solution, and it had voted in favour of the resolution just adopted. Following today's action, however, Palestine bore a greater responsibility, he said, urging Palestine to exert more earnest efforts towards peace in the Middle East. He called on the parties to establish relationships of mutual trust and to return to the negotiating table.

Japan, he continued, would undertake active cooperation to move the process forward in cooperation with the United States and other partners. "It's not acceptable to use this resolution to act in such a way that would hinder direct negotiations with Israel", he stressed, calling on Israel, for its part, to freeze settlement activities. He called on Palestine to immediately resume direct negotiations in a tangible way, and asked for prudence with respect to accession to international organizations.

The representative of Costa Rica said that 65 years ago, the Assembly had adopted resolution 181 creating a partition plan for the territory of Palestine, held under British mandate. Costa Rica had voted in favour of today's resolution because it addressed the yearnings for peace of both peoples and would further the two-State solution. In addition, the text was in line with its recognition of a Palestinian State in 2008. There must be two States living securely, side by side within internationally recognized borders.

Costa Rica also believed in Israel's right to exist in security without fear of rockets being launched into its territory. He fervently appealed to the authorities of Israel and Palestine to restart negotiations based on the obligations they had already acquired and in accordance with international law, and the decisions of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

The representative of Guatemala said his delegation had abstained in the vote on the resolution in spite of the fact that it embraced the right of peoples to self-determination, and gave firm support to the establishment of an independent and sovereign State for the Palestinian people, living in peace, side-by-side, with Israel, behind secure borders. The reason for the abstention was that Guatemala was not prepared to grant the category of Observer State to that entity, which it had not yet recognized as a State, subjecting the latter to its conviction that the final status of the creation of the State of Palestine must be the outcome of a direct negotiation between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. Guatemala believed that that formulation was the only path to ensure peace, security and stability—not only between Israel and its immediate neighbours, but also for the whole Middle East.

The representative of Spain said his delegation had voted in favour of the resolution, describing the vote as an expression of the international community's firm and irreversible commitment to peace. However, if there had been a progress in the peace process based on the road map adopted by the Quartet, today's vote could have been avoided.

He went on to say that he was convinced a sovereign, independent viable Palestine State was a key element to regional stability and to the international community as a whole. There were many tools agreed upon, such as the Quartet's road map, to achieve the two-State solution. In that context, he called on both sides to "urgently go back to the negotiation table without any preconditions".

Mexico's speaker said he voted in favour of the resolution. His delegation reiterated its support for two States living side by side in peace and security. Today's resolution would not significantly change the condition on the ground, but would at least give vigorous impetus to a long-sought yearning for a two-State solution. He called for the resumption of the peace process, including issues of security arrangement, and the status of Jerusalem.

The representative of Georgia, aligning with the upcoming statement of the European Union, said that, as a country in close proximity to the Middle East, Georgia was sympathetic to the aspirations of the people of the region, including those of Palestinians for statehood and those of Israelis for security. Ending the conflict was of paramount importance and could only be based on a negotiated settlement between the parties. The resolution adopted today could be understood as conferring privileges and rights in line with those of Non-Member Observer States; it did not imply an automatic right for Palestine to join international organizations as a State.

The representative of Jamaica said that his delegation had voted in favour of the resolution based on a firm commitment to a just and lasting peace in the Middle East region. Such a peace could only be brought about by a negotiated settlement, he stressed. Jamaica sought a balanced approach to the issue, which recognized, among other things, Israel's right to exist. In its view, the granting of Non-Member Observer State status was on the same level as the status afforded to the Holy See delegation; it was not equivalent to membership in the United Nations.

The representative of the Russian Federation said that it had voted in favour of the resolution. In 1988, his delegation had decided to recognize the declaration of Palestinian statehood. There had been a Palestinian embassy operating in Moscow for some time. Today was an important milestone in reinstating historic equality, he continued. The primary issue hampering the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people was that of foreign occupation. The step taken today did not target Israel or isolate it, he said, emphasizing the need for a "responsible and measured reaction" from Israel and other parties. Any activities to "avenge" the resolution would be categorically unacceptable, he stressed in that regard. In addition, the upgrading of Palestinian status should lead to a resumption of negotiations. The Russian Federation would continue to do its utmost to foster such resumption of talks.

The representative of Papua New Guinea said that his Government recognized both Israel and Palestine and would continue to do so. Papua New Guinea had often abstained from votes on issues pertaining to the parties. It was only those two parties who could resolve the issues between them. He expressed regret over the recent loss of life on both sides and was pleased to see that the Gaza ceasefire was holding up. He said that his own country's history of bloody conflict had been ended through a negotiated peace process. That was the only way such a conflict could be resolved, he said, and urged both Israel and the Palestinians to go back to the negotiating table.

The representative of the Republic of Korea said his Government fully understood the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people, but had abstained in the vote, owing to a lack of meaningful progress in the political process. At the same time, he expressed sincere hope for meaningful negotiations to begin in earnest. The Republic of Korea was deeply saddened by the deaths caused by recent fighting in Gaza. In that regard, his delegation welcomed the ceasefire, which however, remained fragile, and he called for the resumption of peace negotiations.

Romania's speaker said his delegation had abstained in the vote because it had consistently supported multilateralism and could not concur with any form of unilateralism. The Palestinian's objectives were legitimate, but a two-State solution must be forged through the resumption of peace negotiations. The only viable tool was the Quartet-backed road map, which provided internationally recognized borders, among other objectives.

The representative of Portugal said that his delegation had long defended the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination through the establishment of a sovereign State. It had done so bilaterally and within the context of the European Union, he said. Portugal supported the right of all States in the region to live in peace and security, and endorsed the two-State solution, based on negotiations. Portugal had voted in favour of the resolution just adopted owing to its unwavering commitment to dialogue on the part of the Palestinians and in light of progress made in establishing functioning State institutions. He hoped that the Assembly's action would provide a much needed impetus to the peace process and urged both parties to resume credible negotiations without precondition and without delay.

The representative of Mauritius said that his country had always supported the establishment of the long-overdue Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security with Israel. His country maintained strong relations with the Palestinian Authority, and hoped that the Palestinian's long-standing aspirations for statehood would be materialized soon. Mauritius firmly believed that the question of Palestine could and must be resolved by dialogue. It was unfortunate that there had been little headway in the peace process. Israeli settlements remained an obstacle to that process, he stressed, issuing his support for the full admission of Palestine as a Member State of the United Nations, a bid for which had been presented last year. He also called for the issue to retain primacy on the international agenda.

Statements on Question of Palestine

MOOTAZ AHMADEIN KHALIL (Egypt) congratulated the Palestinian people for having obtained the status of Non-Member Observer State. The adoption of the resolution by an enormous majority showed the international community's recognition of the right of Palestine to have a Government and a territory with secure borders, in spite of the occupation and the occupying Power's continuing acquisition of territory. The international community had affirmed that it was able to take the "right decision" when political will was present. He hoped that, in the near future, the Security Council would be able to undertake its responsibility through a similar decision, making Palestine a full Member State of the United Nations.

"It is clear that Israel is not serious when it comes to achieving peace," he continued. Indeed, Israel based its methods on a strategy of negotiation "that leads nowhere". Egypt, therefore, reaffirmed the importance of returning to the negotiating table on a stable basis and in agreement with the resolutions of the General Assembly. Those negotiations needed clear timelines, he said, adding that recent decisions leading to a cessation of hostilities in Gaza showed that it was possible to achieve peace "if all parties live up to their responsibilities". Finally, he advised all parties, particularly Israel and the major donor countries, to not take unilateral measures or put pressure on the Palestinians to deter them from claiming their rights.

Speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, MOHAMMAD KHAZAEI (Iran) condemned Israel's prolonged military occupation and illegal policies and practices, including its military raids and attacks against the Palestinian civilian population. Today's meeting had occurred as Israel had escalated its military campaign against the Palestinians. While the Movement welcomed the Gaza ceasefire agreement, it had called on Israel to end its illegal blockade of the Strip and open all crossing points, in accordance with its obligations under international law, Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and all other relevant United Nations resolutions.

He said that the Movement remained firm in its condemnation of Israel's illegal settlement policies and practices and stressed that all such unlawful attempts to alter the status of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, should not be recognized by the international community. It stressed the need for intensified efforts to compel Israel to cease its illegal policies and genuinely commit to the peace process. It stressed the need for the international community to remain united in its demand that Israel had to respect its legal obligations as an occupying Power and cease all its violations, he said.

Speaking in his national capacity, he congratulated the Palestinian people on their historic achievement. For more than 60 years, the question of Palestine had been one of the main challenges facing the international community. The crisis in the region, which had lasted for decades, had been one of the "unpleasant consequences" of the occupation of Palestine by the Zionist regime. That regime had persisted with its aggression and uncivilized behaviour, disregarding the calls of the international community for it to cease such actions. Iran believed that ignoring the legitimate demands of the Palestinian people would hinder the steps towards a just solution to the question.

THOMAS MAYR-HARTING, Head of the Delegation of the European Union, said today's decision to accord Non-Member Observer State status came as the latest escalation in the on-going Israeli-Palestinian conflict had caused the death of a large number of innocent civilians. "This is a bitter reminder of the urgent necessity to move forward towards the end of the conflict. Only a political solution to the conflict can bring lasting security, peace and prosperity to the Palestinians and Israelis," he said. A comprehensive negotiated peace must and could be achieved on the basis of a two-State solution with the State of Israel

and a sovereign, democratic, contiguous and viable State of Palestine, both living in agreed borders and enjoying peace and security.

The European Union had repeatedly expressed its support and wish for Palestine to become a full member of the United Nations as part of a solution to the conflict. It had also consistently worked to advance the Palestinian Authority's State-building efforts and would continue to do so. Recalling the Berlin Declaration of March 1999, the European Union reiterated its readiness to recognize a Palestinian State, when appropriate. After today's vote, it was important for all to work towards a settlement of the conflict with renewed purpose and sense of urgency. He called on all parties to pursue actions conducive to an environment of confidence necessary to ensure meaningful negotiations and to refrain from actions that undermined the credibility of the process.

He urged both sides to seek constructive ways to overcome the current obstacles for a resumption of direct negotiations without delay or preconditions, and welcomed in that regard the positive statements previously made by President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu, urging them to maintain these commitments. Clear parameters defining the basis for negotiations were key for a successful outcome, together with avoiding unilateral measures and acts on the ground which undermined the viability of the two-State solution. The European Union reaffirmed it would not recognize any changes to the pre-1967 borders, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties. It would work actively, within the diplomatic Quartet on the Middle East peace process and with international partners, in support of efforts to bring about substantive negotiations in the coming months.

KADRA AHMED HASSAN (Djibouti), on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), said that the international community had an historic opportunity — and responsibility — to support Palestinians' just cause for independence. Palestinians had been negotiating with Israel in good faith to live in peace in security, a goal which had not been achieved and did not appear to be within Palestinians' grasp, given Israel's policy of "shifting the goal posts". The prospects for peace had been challenged by Israel's settlement building, apartheid wall, escalating acts of violence by settlers against Palestinians and confiscation of Palestinian homes and lands. Such international law violations had systematically undermined prospects for a two-State solution.

She expressed the Group's grave concern about the situation in East Jerusalem, where Israel's settlement campaign was most intense. She called for an end to that construction, and condemned terrorist activities by extremist settlers against Palestinian homes, agricultural lands and holy sites. Further, Israel's military aggression and illegal blockade constituted a collective punishment against 1.5 million Palestinians and a war crime. The international community, especially the Security Council, needed to take measures for a permanent cessation of Israeli aggression against Palestinians.

She said Palestinians' accession to full membership to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was an international recognition of their rights. Similarly, the positive assessment by the United Nations, World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) on the Palestinian Authority's Implementation Plan for building the institutions for a State was another strong sign of their readiness for statehood. A permanent peace between Israel and Palestinians was essential for both peoples. Palestinians' improved diplomatic status would bring Israelis and Palestinians a step closer to achieving a sustainable solution on the basis of two States living side by side in peace and security.

LI BAODONG (China) said the resolution adopted today was another positive step in Palestine's progress towards statehood. Its adoption was the result of long-term efforts by the Arab community. He congratulated Palestine on becoming an Observer State of the United Nation. His country had long supported the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and an independent State of their own, with East Jerusalem as its capital. As early as 1988, China announced its recognition of the State of Palestine and established diplomatic relations with it.

Only when the question of Palestine was appropriately resolved, he continued, could the two-State solution be achieved. He expressed concern over the stalemate in that regard. Re-launching the peace talks between Israel and Palestine was all the more important. The international community must push Israel to return to the negotiating table in good faith. Concluding, he said that China would continue to play an active and constructive role to push for a just, comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian question.

MANSOUR ALOTAIBI (Kuwait) said today's adoption of the resolution was a landmark achievement at the crossroads of Palestinians' struggle. It was an extremely important stage in the lives of Palestinians, especially in recognition of independent Palestinian State along the 1967 borders. It sent a clear message of international support of their rights, as it called for the resumption of talks in line with the aims of the Madrid Conference, Arab Peace Initiative and other measures to address refugee return, the status of Jerusalem, settlements, security, water and other issues. He urged continuing moral and political support to Palestinians until their State was established with East Jerusalem as its capital.

He said Israel's 14 November military aggression against Gaza had resulted in huge losses in life and property. The United Nations' inability to bring Israel to bear its obligations had encouraged that country to continue its intransigence and apply hostile expansionist policies. There was no better example of that than its military campaign, a policy that flouted international norms and laws. Israel's blockade against Gaza, continued arrests of Palestinians and limits on goods and persons were the main cause of instability in the region, and he renewed the call to pressure Israel to end such hostile practices. He urged Israel's implementation of resolution 497 (1981) and return to 1967 borders, reaffirming its occupation of Syrian land was another obstacle to establishing peace in the Middle East.

U. JOY OGWU (Nigeria) noted the dawn may be closing on the two-State solution. Continued settlement-building by Israel threatened that objective. That impasse must be broken. Self-determination was the sole embodiment of the just, conscious expression of people to their dignity. To deny that right was to deny all other rights. She supported the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination and statehood. Nigeria had recognized the State of Palestine and it had established diplomatic relations with it. Nigeria voted in favour of the admission of Palestine into UNESCO as a full Member State. She underscored the right of the Palestinians to live in freedom. It was fitting that today the international community had given Palestine non-Member Observer State status in the United Nations. "It was not only timely, it was right and it was just," she said, pledging Nigeria's commitment to work towards Palestine's admission to the United Nations as a full Member State.

ZAHEER LAHER (South Africa) said that while his Government supported full membership of Palestine, it was satisfying that the United Nations had cemented that "Palestine is indeed a State". He was certain that Palestinians would prevail in the quest for a viable State of their own and he urged the international community to avoid retributive actions that could stifle the existence of such a State. The Middle East peace process had been an agenda item for 65 years and he regretted there had been no significant movement in the long, drawn-out process towards a solution. The prospect for negotiations grew dimmer by the day amid Israel's settlement building and restricting of Palestinians' movement, among other measures. Settlements continued to threaten feasibility of a contiguous Palestinian State.

He went on to say that events in Gaza were a reminder of the fragile security situation, expressing pleasure that the ceasefire was holding. He welcomed mediation by Egypt, the League of Arab States and the Secretary-General that had led to the restoration of calm. He wondered where the Quartet had been during the crisis. Its silence showed its legitimacy should be addressed, perhaps by disbanding it. He was also disappointed the Security Council did not act at an appropriate time. He called for redoubled efforts for the implementation of a viable two-State solution, providing for a Palestinian State living alongside Israel based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The blockade of Gaza had resulted in delays in the provision of humanitarian assistance and he called on Israel to end it. Conflict between Israel and Palestine had impacted regional stability. In closing, he recalled that resolution 181 had been a promissory note guaranteeing the creation of two States. Today's text was a further fulfilment of that promise.

AHMED AL-JARMAN (United Arab Emirates) congratulated Palestine for being accorded non-Member Observer State status. The historic recognition was an important step towards the settlement of the Palestinian question and the consolidation of the right of the Palestinians to self-determination. "It represents a historical opportunity to overcome the present political crisis that has resulted from Israel's continued occupation of the Palestinian lands, and should also be an exit out of the no-peace situation in the Middle East," he said.

He went on to say that he hoped that an international move towards the formal acceptance to full membership would follow, since the Palestinian State now enjoyed the recognition of the overwhelming majority of Member States. He strongly condemned all hostile policies by Israel, emphasizing security for Israel and permanent cessation of violence in the region could not be achieved without imposing a just solution based on principles of international law. He also expressed deep concern over the current deadlock in peace negotiations, whose credibility was at stake due to breaches by the Israeli Government of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and terms of the peace process.

The international community should use influence on Israel, he said, to compel it to immediately stop all its unilateral policies which resulted in the freezing of peace negotiations. The United Arab Emirates would continue its political support and development aid to the Palestinian Authority, led by President Abbas. Israel must immediately end all its aggressive policies against the Palestinian people, and fully withdraw from all Palestinian and Arab territories, occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, the Syrian Golan Heights and the remaining occupied Lebanese territories.

MARIA LUIZA RIBIERO VIOTTI (Brazil) firmly supported Palestinians' legitimate aspiration for a sovereign, independent democratic and viable Palestinian State on the basis of 1967 borders, living in peace and security alongside Israel. To this day, the question of Palestine was among the most important threats to international peace and security, and, as the Brazilian President had stated in September, only a free, sovereign Palestine could fulfil Israel's legitimate desires for peace with its neighbours. The establishment of a Palestinian State had become more urgent in light of the expansion of Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.

Establishing such a State was also the right response to the violence that had shortened the lives of innocent civilians, she said, citing the recent violence in Gaza as a reminder of the high human and political costs of a paralysed peace process. She called on all actors to fully commit to non-violence, dialogue and effective negotiations, as well as a lifting of the Gaza blockade. Reiterating that the Security Council must carry out its duties, she said an "inoperative Quartet and silent Security Council" did not serve the interests of peace. Turning to the United Nations, as President Abbas had done today, was consistent with Council and Assembly resolutions. Given the obstacles to the immediate admission of Palestine as a full United Nations Member, Brazil supported, as an interim measure, that Palestine be accorded non-Member State Observer status.

OSCAR LEÓN GONZÁLEZ (Cuba) lamented the absence of an effective solution to end Israel's crimes against the Palestinian people and its occupation of their land. He said that Israel continued to defy the international community and United Nations resolutions. It also continued to intensify settlement activity in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Israel's acts of violence against Palestinian civilians had increased. Palestinians lived in dire socio-economic circumstances. The situation of women and children in the region was alarming. Those were reasons enough to adopt political measures of condemnation. There should also be binding Council decisions to punish the perpetrators.

He asked why the Council was so inactive in the face of overwhelming evidence. He asked why the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) had taken no action. Such silence had laid bare the hypocrisy of several developed countries. During its recent siege of Gaza, Israel had once again used its military and technical superiority to brutalize the Palestinian population. He strongly condemned that aggression and called on international community to take firmest support for Palestine. He firmly supported an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. He supported today's resolution and backed Palestine's bid for full membership in the Organization, as well.

JORGE VALERO BRICEÑO (Venezuela) said Lebanese, Sephardic Jews and others had made his country their home and the three monotheistic religions existed there in peace. Some 1.5 million people in the Arab immigration lived in Venezuela. His country was committed to liberty, sovereignty, territorial integrity and respect for international law, which was why his Government supported the Palestinian cause. He hoped for a new era in which "swords would be beaten into plough shares". The Gaza Strip was the "largest open air prison in the world", he said, citing Noam Chomsky. The State of Israel had been proclaimed unilaterally in 1948 and al-Nakba had begun for Palestinians.

He said inhumane policies were used to control Palestinians within the colonized territory. Institutions had been created to undermine Palestinian rights to their land and property. Some 4,500 Palestinians were in Israeli prisons and he called for their release. The Israeli political and military elite had implemented apartheid, carried out ethnic cleansing, and used weapons banned by international law on civilians. Israel must be held accountable for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed against Palestinians and the Assembly could not remain indifferent to Palestinians' suffering. Today's resolution marked an important step on the road to recognizing Palestine as a full United Nations Member State.

Mr. HASSAN (Malaysia) said he was appalled that the global community took one week to stop Israel's brutal, aggressive attack two weeks ago in Gaza, which killed 165 Palestinians and injured countless others. On 19 November, Malaysia's Parliament passed a resolution condemning those attacks and stating its unwavering support for the Palestinians. The Parliament also called on the Council to fulfil its Charter responsibility and for Israel to be held accountable for the crimes committed against the Palestinians. He expressed sincere condolences to Palestinians who had died defending their homeland.

The report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People illustrated that the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory had not improved and Israel continued to violate international law, including humanitarian and human rights law. The occupying Power systematically continued to demolish Palestinian homes, displace Palestinians and intensify settlement building. In 2011, it had destroyed 110 homes. Israel clearly intended to change the demographic reality on the ground. It had further revoked the residency status of more than 14,000 Palestinians from Jerusalem without reason or discourse. He was equally appalled by the increasing number of settler violence incidents.

Israel's blockade of Gaza had rendered 80 per cent of the population there dependent on humanitarian aid, he said. Another 44 per cent was food insecure; 39 per cent lived in poverty. He expressed concern over the Committee's findings. If Israel was committed to a two-State solution, it must stop building settlements, dismantle existing ones, lift the blockade of Gaza, and allow aid to reach people. The international community must continue to support all recommendations in the Committee's report to achieve the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination and a negotiated settlement of the Israel-Palestinian conflict that resulted in creation of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. He paid respect and tribute to the Palestinian people's courage and strength in the face of immense hardship. He fully supported Palestine's application as a Member State and welcomed adoption of today's text enhancing its status to Observer State.

BASHAR JA'AFARI (Syria) said today's adoption was further proof of the legitimacy of the Palestinian cause. "This is justice served," he said, noting Syria's support of Palestinian rights for the creation of a sovereign State with East Jerusalem as its capital, along borders decided upon in 1967, as well as the return of Palestinians to their homes and payment of reparations. He recalled resolution 2073 in that regard, which defined Israel's United Nations membership, calling on Israel to uphold its Charter obligations. Israel's accession to the United Nations was contingent on its commitment to the creation of a Palestinian State and the return of refugees. But that commitment had been left aside.

Israel continued its hostile practices, refusing peace and viewing itself as a State above the law. Those protecting Israel had affirmed Israeli authorities would be protected at the United Nations, he said. Israel had applied an unjust settlement policy against Palestinians. It was the Palestinians' right to live in freedom but that was impossible with Israel's flouting of United Nations resolutions and pressure by some States to hamper the Palestinians' full enjoyment of their rights. The Palestinian cause was a just one. Those that had voted against the resolution had failed the Palestinian people, as well as the "Palestinian Gandhi", President Abbas. He asked how those States could be trusted when they talked about upholding international law, sovereignty and the rule of law. True justice required Palestine being accorded full Member status.

MOHAMMED LOULICHKI (Morocco) welcomed the adoption by the great majority of Member States of the resolution providing Palestine the status of non-

Member Observer State. Further, Morocco considered that negotiations were the only way to restore the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and the establishment of a sovereign State. Passage of the resolution was a logical result of the stalemate in the peace process. The time allocated to reach a peaceful settlement for a two-State solution had expired. The resolution was supported by all Palestinians and thus was a step towards Palestinian reconciliation.

Welcoming the ceasefire between Gaza and Israel, he commended the efforts of the international parties who had helped to achieve it, and expressed the hope that the international community would work to prevent Israeli aggression and that there would be a new approach that would lead to the opening of the crossings and ending the blockade of Gaza. While condemning Israel's continued settlement activity, which further annexed Palestinian lands, he said that, nevertheless, the path to peace should not be abandoned.

MOHAMED KHALED KHIARI (Tunisia) reiterated his full support for the "heroic struggle of the Palestinian people to put an end" to the Israeli occupation. He noted that this was the Day of international Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Tunisia had supported an independent Palestine State with East Jerusalem as its capital. Congratulating on the "historic decision" taken by the General Assembly to grant Palestine non-Member Observer State status, he said that status would help Palestine play its role as a peace-loving nation internationally. However, he warned against complacency and the silence of the international community, saying that the Palestinian people continued to live under occupation.

Israeli settlers were trying to change the nature of Jerusalem by removing Arabic characteristics. The absence of a firm position by the international community could not continue. Given that the Palestinian people could not endure the ongoing situation, the international community was called on to take steps to break the stalemate in the negotiations. Efforts needed to be made to create a new dynamism to deal with the substantial issues. A two-State solution was essential.

JEROBEAM SHAANIKA (Namibia) said his country had followed the issues surrounding the confiscation of land and destruction of homes to make room for new Israeli settlements on Palestinian land. Thus, it was puzzling how support for a resolution seeking Palestine's recognition by the United Nations could be considered counterproductive to the two-State solution. Support for the resolution was meant to enhance efforts leading to the creation of an independent, sovereign, contiguous and viable Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and to coexist with Israel on the basis of the 1967 borders. Therefore, he did not consider voting for the resolution to be counterproductive to the peace process, which had been suspended for the past few years.

Namibia would continue to extend its unwavering support and solidarity with the people of Palestine as long as they were denied their right to self-determination, he said. His country fully supported the aspiration of Palestine for what the resolution had sought to achieve, and looked forward to the day when the State of Palestine finally joined the family of sovereign and independent nations. The United Nations Charter called on the international community "to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security"; it did not call for division through weakness and fear.

ANNEX

Vote on Status of Palestine at United Nations

The draft resolution on the Status of Palestine at the United Nations (document A/67/L.28) was adopted by a recorded vote of 138 in favour to 9 against, with 41 abstentions, as follows:

In favour: Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Bhutan, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, China, Comoros, Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Cyprus, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Gabon, Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Honduras, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Lesotho, Libya, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Qatar, Russian Federation, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Sao Tome and Principe, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Tuvalu, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

Against: Canada, Czech Republic, Israel, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), Nauru, Palau, Panama, United States.

Abstain: Albania, Andorra, Australia, Bahamas, Barbados, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Colombia, Croatia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Estonia, Fiji, Germany, Guatemala, Haiti, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malawi, Monaco, Mongolia, Montenegro, Netherlands, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Poland, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Rwanda, Samoa, San Marino, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Togo, Tonga, United Kingdom, Vanuatu.

Absent: Equatorial Guinea, Kiribati, Liberia, Madagascar, Ukraine.

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