

UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL MEETING IN SUPPORT OF ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE

Action by European, Arab and other parliamentarians and their umbrella organizations for Israeli-Palestinian peace

Nicosia, 6 and 7 May 2009

Concluding Statement of the Organizers

1. The **United Nations International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian peace** was convened by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in Nicosia on 6 and 7 May 2009.
2. The objective of the Meeting was to emphasize the important role played by national parliaments and inter-parliamentary organizations at the regional and international levels in shaping public opinion, formulating policy guidelines and upholding international legitimacy in support of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine. Participants in the Meeting discussed ways in which lawmakers could be instrumental in helping Israelis and Palestinians resume the political dialogue. The Meeting also underscored the need to promote and apply the principles of international law to all efforts aimed at resolving the Middle East conflict and in particular, its core issue, the question of Palestine.
3. The participants expressed serious concern about the deteriorating situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. Participants were particularly alarmed about the status of the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians in the wake of Israel's military assault on Gaza. While the negotiations remained suspended and the prospects for their genuine resumption were considered bleak, the participants urged the new Israeli Government to declare its support for a two-State solution.
4. The participants were appalled by the lack of any tangible improvement of the situation in Gaza. The Israeli military invasion of December and January left some 1,440 Palestinians killed and over 5,300 injured, the majority of which were civilians. It also led to a massive destruction of and damage to Palestinian homes, property and infrastructure. The military onslaught followed many months of a suffocating Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip – a policy continued to date. As a result, the Palestinians were faced with severe shortages of all basic and essential supplies, including materials badly needed to commence reconstruction. The participants in the Meeting recalled and reminded that under the Fourth Geneva Convention Israel, the occupying Power, was obliged to protect the Palestinian civilian population under its occupation and to act within the ambit of international law. The participants noted that all efforts to achieve a ceasefire should be supported and lead to a permanent cessation of violence. They strongly condemned the killing of innocent civilians by either side. Violence proved to be affecting negatively any efforts at promoting political dialogue. Negotiations should not be held hostage to agendas of extremists. The participants called for an immediate lifting of the Israeli blockade of Gaza and the opening of all crossings in accordance with the Agreement on Access and Movement of 15 November 2005. They also called for the release of all prisoners, including Palestinian parliamentarians.
5. The participants expressed their appreciation for the immediate and continued engagement of the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council, Governments, national parliaments and their regional and international organizations, and many civil society organizations to achieve a ceasefire, provide basic services to the civilian population, investigate possible violations of international humanitarian law, and demand concrete steps to improve the situation. The participants commended Arab and European parliamentarians who had been among the first on the ground to collect first-hand information and to report back to their Governments and constituencies. They encouraged parliamentarians to stay involved on the issue and to engage their Israeli and Palestinian counterparts, as well as their own Governments with a view to promoting a political solution of the conflict.
6. The participants concurred that the situation in Gaza will only tangibly improve once progress in the Israeli-Palestinian political process has been achieved. In this context, all efforts towards the goal of achieving a negotiated final status agreement should be encouraged and fully supported. For this to be achieved, the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations must be resumed with the clearly stated goal of achieving a two-State solution. Negotiations needed to be buttressed by tangible improvements of the situation on the ground. Most importantly, the parties must fulfil their obligations under Phase I of the Road Map.
7. In this regard, the participants expressed serious concern over Israel's ongoing settlement activity, with the Government continuing to confiscate large areas of Palestinian land and issue thousands of tenders for new housing units in settlements in the West Bank. The participants reiterated that the presence of settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, was illegal under international law. They called on Israel to immediately cease settlement activity, including construction related to "natural growth" and to dismantle settlement outposts. Of particular concern was the expansion and consolidation of large settlement blocks in and around East Jerusalem, especially in the so-called "E-1" area. It was observed that the presence of settlements in that area had resulted in severing Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank, cutting the West Bank into two parts and prejudging the outcome of the permanent status negotiations. The participants were particularly alarmed by the continuing demolition of Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem, where currently close to 2,000 demolition orders were pending and many more Palestinian families were potentially at risk of losing their homes. In this connection, the participants endorsed the proposal of convening, as soon as possible, a special conference of parliamentarians on Jerusalem.
8. The participants denounced the continued construction of the wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and its effects on Palestinian communities. The participants recalled the 2004 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice, which had clearly stated that the construction of the wall was illegal under international law and insisted on its removal. Furthermore, they called for the removal of the many barriers and checkpoints in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the restoration of the situation to that, which existed before September 2000. They emphasized the need for a more serious action by the international community challenging the presence of the wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The participants commended the courageous advocacy actions of numerous parliamentarians who had participated in demonstrations against the wall, provided assistance to Gaza and kept their home constituencies informed about the harsh realities of the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem. They encouraged them to continue to support action on these issues at the regional and international levels.
9. The participants warned that taken together, the systematic policies and actions of the occupying Power towards the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip seriously endangered an internationally supported approach to the solution of the conflict and rendering the creation of a viable, contiguous and sovereign Palestinian State impossible. They called upon the parties to work for a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine based on the existence of two

States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. The participants reiterated that a comprehensive, just and lasting solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could only be found in accordance with international law and based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003), and 1850 (2008) and all other relevant United Nations resolutions. The participants agreed that a negotiated solution to the question of Jerusalem, based on international law, was key not only for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but also for a lasting peace in the whole region. In this connection, the participants recalled that the status of Jerusalem could only be resolved through negotiations and in full accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions. The participants agreed that the continued support of the international community was crucial for moving forward the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations on all core issues. They reiterated that the Arab Peace Initiative remained an important element for advancing peace in the region and should be seized upon.

10. The participants expressed serious concern that Israel was not abiding by its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention to provide protection to the civilian population under occupation. The applicability of the Convention to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, had been repeatedly confirmed by the Conference of the High Contracting Parties, as well as by the United Nations General Assembly, Security Council and the International Court of Justice. It was pointed out that parliamentarians had a special responsibility to ensure that their Governments took a principled action under the Convention to ensure respect of and adherence to norms of international humanitarian law.

11. The participants voiced their concern about the internal Palestinian divisions blocking national unity of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip under the Palestinian Authority. They expressed support for all efforts of Arab and other countries, in particular for the efforts by Egypt, as well as for the initiatives of President Abbas, aimed at promoting reconciliation and restoration of Palestinian national unity, which were essential for progress in achieving a permanent settlement of the question of Palestine. They encouraged the Palestinian factions to put the national interests and aspirations of the Palestinian people ahead of any partisan concerns and to bring the current rounds of talks to an early and successful conclusion.

12. The participants of the Meeting, hosted by Cyprus, a European Union Member State, appreciated the absolutely critical role played by the European Union and other European States in support of the Palestinian people. They appreciated the profound interest and wide involvement of European institutions, its Commission, the Parliament and other structures in efforts at supporting a solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They encouraged the policy-making organs of the European Union continue to play a more supportive and proactive role in various aspects of the political process, thus complementing European Commission's substantial economic assistance.

13. The participants were of the view that national parliaments and inter-parliamentary organizations had a special role to play in advancing the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Such organizations as the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, the European-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, the European Parliament, and the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union worked towards upholding international law and promoting an effective political dialogue aimed at resolving all permanent status issues. The participants encouraged these inter-parliamentary organizations to develop closer cooperation among themselves, with Israeli and Palestinian lawmakers, and with the United Nations and its Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, with a view to supporting a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the region, including a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine. In this context, the participants noted the valid recommendations and suggestions made during the Meeting in Nicosia to strengthen the role of parliamentarians at the national, regional, and international levels in contributing towards the resolution of the question of Palestine. They called on the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in collaboration with the above-mentioned inter-parliamentary organizations, to examine those proposals with a view to their eventual implementation.

14. The participants commended Cyprus for its constructive role in the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and encouraged its continuation. They welcomed the personal interest of the President of the Republic of Cyprus in the United Nations Meeting and appreciated his message in support of Israeli-Palestinian peace. They commended the many members of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Cyprus for their vivid interest and engagement in the question of Palestine, thus contributing to efforts at resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The participants expressed gratitude to the Government and Parliament of the Republic of Cyprus for hosting the Meeting and the generous hospitality extended to them.

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