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Thursday, 26 September 2013, 10 a.m.

New York

President: Mr. Ashe (Antigua and Barbuda)

The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Donald Rabinranauth Ramotar, President of the Republic of Guyana, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

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Moreover, peace in the Middle East will not be realized until we have a just solution to the Palestinian tragedy. The Palestinian people have the right to their own country. We support them in their quest for the right to live in peace and in an independent, viable Palestinian State.

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The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Hifikepunye Pohamba, President of the Republic of Namibia, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

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The attainment of self-determination of peoples living under foreign occupation is one of the principles that this Organization was founded on. In that regard, we reaffirm our solidarity with the people of Western Sahara, and call for the implementation of the United Nations settlement plan for that country. Similarly, we call for the implementation of relevant United Nations resolutions on Palestine.

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The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. John Dramani Mahama, President of the Republic of Ghana, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

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Ghana is encouraged by the new initiative to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian issue. We are still firm in our belief that an independent Palestinian State, existing side by side with a peaceful and secure Israeli State, is a desirable outcome that we must all support and work towards. In working towards that goal, we must realize that the continuous construction of settlements in Palestinian territory increasingly shuts the door on a two-State solution.

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The Acting President (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Moncef Marzouki, President of the Republic of Tunisia, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

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The restriction of movement of goods and persons is increasing the difficulties faced by the struggling people of Gaza under Israeli occupation and colonization.

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The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Abbas (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate His Excellency Mr. Vuk Jeremić on his outstandingly successful presidency of the General Assembly at its previous session. I would also like to congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency at its current session and to wish you every success.

I am pleased, indeed honoured, to address the Assembly today for the first time in the name of the State of Palestine, following the Assembly's historic decision on 29 November of last year to raise Palestine's status to that of a non-Member Observer State. As representatives of their Governments and peoples, Members have championed justice, right and peace, while affirming their rejection of occupation and standing for principles and ethics and on the side of peoples yearning for freedom. For that, I once again offer my deepest thanks and gratitude today on behalf of Palestine and its people. The Palestinian people celebrated resolution 67/19.

They rightly felt that they were not alone in the world and that the world stood with them. They celebrated because they realized that the overwhelming result of the Assembly's vote meant that justice was still possible and there was still room for hope.

I assured the Assembly last year that our quest to raise Palestine's status was not aimed at delegitimizing an existing State, the State of Israel, but at consecrating — I repeat, consecrating — the legitimacy of a State that should exist, which is Palestine. I have also affirmed before the Assembly that our quest was not intended to affect the peace process, nor is it a substitute for serious negotiations. On the contrary, our quest is supportive of the choice of peace and has revived a process that was, in truth, moribund. As we have repeatedly affirmed and proved in practice, the State of Palestine, which abides by the Charter of the United Nations and resolutions of international legitimacy, will exercise its role and uphold its responsibilities within the international system in a positive and constructive manner that reinforces peace.

A new round of negotiations was launched a few weeks ago, thanks to the tireless and appreciated efforts of the President of the United States, Mr. Barack Obama, and of the United States Secretary of State, Mr. John Kerry. I affirm before the Assembly today that we have begun those negotiations and shall continue them in good faith and with open minds, strong will and determination and a sharp focus on success. I assure Members that we shall respect all of our commitments and foster the atmosphere most conducive to continuing the negotiations seriously and intensively, while providing guarantees for its success and aiming at a peace agreement within nine months.

As we engage in a new round of negotiations, we must remind everyone that we are not starting from a vacuum or from point zero, nor are we lost in a labyrinth without a map or a compass, at risk of losing sight of the destination. The goal of the peace that we seek is defined and the objective of the negotiations is clear to all, just as the terms of reference and the basis and foundations of the peace process and of the agreement we seek are longstanding and within reach.

As for the goal of peace, it is embodied in redressing the historic, unprecedented injustice that befell the Palestinian people in the Al-Nakba of 1948. It is the realization of a just peace, the fruits of which can be enjoyed by the Palestinian and Israeli peoples, as well as by all the peoples of our region.

The objective of the negotiations is to secure a lasting peace agreement that immediately leads to the establishment of the independence of a fully sovereign State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on all of the Palestinian land occupied in 1967, so that it may live in peace and security alongside the State of Israel. The negotiations must also resolve the plight of Palestine refugees in a just, agreed-upon solution, in accordance with resolution 194 (III) and as called for by the Arab Peace Initiative.

We reaffirm our refusal to be drawn into the whirlpool of a new interim agreement aimed at the perpetuation of an interim State with interim borders, or to enter into transitional arrangements that will become the fixed rule rather than an urgent exception. Our goal is to achieve a permanent and comprehensive agreement and a peace treaty between the States of Palestine and Israel that resolves all outstanding issues, answers all questions and allows us to officially declare an end to the conflict and to all claims.

The terms of reference and parameters of the negotiations, their goals and the basis of the agreement we seek are all found in the Assembly's historic decision to upgrade Palestine's status, as well as in the countless resolutions of this body and of the Security Council and those of the League of Arab States, the European Union, the Non-Aligned Movement, the African Union and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. In fact, over the years, the parameters have become the basis of an international consensus, indeed, near unanimity.

Exactly 20 years ago, precisely on 13 September 1993, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people signed, together with the Government of Israel, the Declaration of Principles Agreement on the White House lawn in Washington, D.C. in the presence of our departed leader, Yasser Arafat, and Yitzhak Rabin, the late Israeli Prime Minister, the King of Jordan and former President Bill Clinton.

Some five years earlier, on 15 November 1988, the Palestinian National Council had adopted our programme for the achievement of peace, thereby taking an extremely difficult decision and making a historic, painful and harmful concession. However, as representatives of the Palestinian people, and having long been aware of our responsibilities to them, we mustered the necessary courage to accept a two-State solution, namely, Palestine and Israel on the borders of 4 June 1967 and the establishment of a Palestinian State on 22 per cent of the land of historic Palestine. Thus we realized our part in achieving a historic settlement, upheld our obligations and fulfilled all of the requirements from the Palestinian side as set by the international community, in order to attain peace.

At the same time that the PLO affirmed its choice of peace as a strategic option and a solution resulting from negotiations, the PLO firmly repudiated violence and affirmed an ethical, principled rejection of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations — especially State terrorism — while affirming respect of international humanitarian law and United Nations resolutions.

As a genuine historic breakthrough, the signing of the Oslo Accords led to an unprecedented political movement that fostered great hopes and generated high expectations. The PLO worked with dedication to implement the Accords in order to end the occupation and to realize a just peace. However, 20 years on, the picture appears dispiriting and bleak: great dreams have been shattered and goals have become more modest.

As much as we felt in those days that peace was at hand, today we realize how far we are from it, for the goal of the Accords has not been achieved, its provisions have not been implemented and its deadlines have not been respected. All the while, ongoing intense settlement construction, which aims to change the facts on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territory, has violated the spirit of the agreement, struck at the core of the peace process and caused a deep fracture in its cornerstone, that is, the two-State solution.

The start of a new round of negotiations is good news, but it cannot serve as grounds for complacency or an exaggerated sense of tranquility on the part of the international community. The negotiations we are undertaking today with the Israeli Government under the auspices of the United States require that the international community exert every effort to make them succeed, namely, through international and regional organizations and individual States upholding the international consensus on the goal of peace, the objectives of the negotiations, the terms of reference and the basis for a permanent peace agreement.

However, at the same time, the international community is asked to remain vigilant. The international community must condemn and put an end to any actions on the ground that would undermine negotiations. In that regard, I refer above all to the continuation of settlement construction on Palestinian land, particularly in Jerusalem. There is an international consensus among the countries of the world, international and regional organizations and the International Court of Justice on the illegality and illegitimacy of those settlements. The position of the European Union with regard to settlement projects is a positive model of what can be done to ensure an environment supportive of and conducive to negotiations and the peace process. It is also imperative that the near-daily attacks on the religious sites in occupied Jerusalem, the foremost of which is the Al-Aqsa Mosque, cease, as the continuation of such attacks will have dire consequences.

History is the best teacher. It teaches us that waging war, imposing occupation and building settlements and walls may provide temporary quiet and temporary domination, but they certainly do not ensure real security or guarantee sustainable peace. Such policies may create a specific reality on the ground, but they certainly do not create a right or provide legitimacy. Such policies may impose weak stability, but they cannot prevent the inevitable explosion, because such policies in fact fuel situations that are already inflamed and cause them to explode. Above all, such policies are incapable of extinguishing the aspirations of a people for freedom, and cannot eradicate their living memory or their narrative.

Therefore, what is required now is to heed the lessons of history, to abandon the mentality of force and occupation, to recognize the rights of others and to work on an equal footing and in full parity to achieve peace. What is required is to stop relying on exaggerated security pretexts and obsessions in order to consecrate occupation and to stop contriving demands that push the conflict out of its defined political arena and towards the abyss of religious conflict in a region burdened with such sensitivities. That is something that we categorically reject.

I am confident that the Israeli people want peace and that a majority of them support a two-State solution. We have always expressed our firm positions and have always explained them at the negotiations table with the Israeli Government and in the meetings and contacts that we have intensified in recent years with a wide spectrum of actors from Israeli society.

Our message is rooted in the idea that the two peoples, the Palestinians and Israelis, are partners in the task of peacemaking. That is why we keep reaching out to the Israeli side, saying: let us work to make the culture of peace reign, to tear down walls, to build bridges instead of walls and to open wide roads for connections and communication. Let us sow the seeds of good-neighbourliness. Let us envision another future, one that the children of Palestine and Israel enjoy in peace and security, where they can dream and realize their dreams, a future that allows Muslims, Christians and Jews to freely reach their places of worship, and a future in which Israel gains the recognition of 57 Arab and Muslim States, the States of Palestine and coexists in peace and each of their peoples can realize their hopes for progress and prosperity.

While we discuss the realization of peace between Palestine and Israel as an imperative to achieve a comprehensive peace between the Arab countries and Israel in accordance with United Nations resolutions, we bear in mind the current volatile reality and unprecedented dynamics besetting our region. Palestine does not interfere in the internal affairs of Arab countries, but we have clearly affirmed our stance in support of the demands of the peoples of our region, their choices and their peaceful popular movements to achieve those demands, along with the programmes and road maps they have adopted to reach their goals.

Furthermore, while we have condemned the crime of the use of chemical weapons in Syria, we have affirmed our rejection of a military solution there and stressed the

need to find a peaceful political solution to fulfil the aspirations of the Syrian people.

The overwhelming majority of the Palestinian people were born in Palestine and were sent into exile after the 1948 Al-Nakba. However, 65 years afterwards, they continue to be its direct victims. Since the start of this year, 27 Palestinian citizens have been killed and 951 have been wounded by the bullets of the occupation, and 5,000 fighters for freedom and peace are currently being held captive in occupation prisons. Does anyone deserve an end to this occupation and the realization of a just and immediate peace more than the Palestinian people?

This year and in the past few years, Palestinian refugees, despite their neutrality, have continued to pay the price of conflict and instability in our region. Tens of thousands have been forced to abandon their camps and to flee in another exodus, searching for new places of exile. Do the Palestinian people deserve justice less than the rest of the peoples of the world?

Since the beginning of the year, construction has been under way on thousands of settlement units by the occupation authorities, and construction tenders have been issued for thousands of others on our occupied land, even as additional vast areas of land are either expropriated or declared off limits; 850 homes and structures have been demolished.

Palestinians are forbidden to plant on their own land and to use the majority of the area of our country, which is only 22 per cent. They are prevented from using their own country's water to irrigate their crops. The wall and checkpoints continue to tear apart the lives of the Palestinian people and to destroy their economy. The siege is growing tighter, along with the attacks and oppressive discriminatory measures against occupied Jerusalem, its holy places and its citizens. In Gaza, for years an unjust blockade has been imposed on our people.

So is there any people more deserving of freedom and independence than the Palestinians? Since the beginning of the year, 708 terrorist attacks have been perpetrated by settlers against our mosques and churches, our olive trees, our agricultural fields and our homes and property. Is there the shadow of a doubt in anyone's mind that the Palestinian people have the most need of security?

Also, is there a nobler mission on the international community's agenda than realizing a just peace in the land of the monotheistic faiths, the birthplace of Jesus Christ, the site of the ascent of the Prophet Muhammad and the resting place of Abraham, the father of the prophets?

As they remain steadfast on their land, the Palestinian people also continue to build their institutions, to strengthen internal unity, to achieve reconciliation by returning to the ballot box, to wage a peaceful and popular resistance to counter the oppression of occupation and of settlements and settler terrorism, and to hold fast to their rights. The Palestinian people do not want to remain "out of place", in the words of Edward Said. Our people are waiting for the day when their cause ceases to be a fixed item on the agenda of the United Nations. Our people want to have freedom, God's gift to humanity, and to enjoy the grace of living an ordinary life. For we, as Mahmoud Darwish wrote, cultivate hope and shall one day be what we want to be: a free, sovereign people on the land of the State of Palestine.

I personally am one of the victims of Al-Nakba, one of the hundreds of thousands of my people who were uprooted in 1948 from our beautiful world and thrown into exile. Like hundreds of thousands of other Palestine refugees, I knew as a youth the pain of exile and the tragedy of the loss of loved ones in massacres and wars, as well as the difficulties of building a new life from zero. In refugee camps and the diaspora, in exile, we knew the bitter taste of poverty, hunger, illness and humiliation, and the challenge of affirming one's identity.

Our people have walked the path of armed revolution and have risen from the ashes of Al-Nakba. They have collected their shattered souls and identity to put their cause to the world and ensure that the recognition of their rights is enshrined. We have walked a long, difficult path and sacrificed dearly, and yet we have affirmed at all times our active quest for peace.

Twenty years ago, on behalf of the Palestine Liberation Organization, I signed the Declaration of Principles Agreement, and we have since worked faithfully and diligently to implement it, affirming to all our respect for our commitments and the credibility of our positions. The successive setbacks encountered have not shaken our strong faith in the objective of a just peace, and we shall continue to work tirelessly and unwaveringly to see it realized. My own personal hope is to see the day when a just peace reigns so that the generation of Al-Nakba can pass on to its children and grandchildren the flag of an independent State of Palestine.

Time is running out; the window of hope is narrowing and opportunities are diminishing. The current round of negotiations appears to be a last chance to realize a just peace. The mere thought of the catastrophic and frightening consequences of failure must compel the international community to intensify efforts to seize this opportunity.

The hour of freedom for the Palestinian people has rung. The hour of the independence of Palestine has rung. The hour of peace for the two peoples — Israeli and Palestinian — has rung.

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The President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

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In the Middle East region, a cornerstone for world peace and prosperity, Japan will continue its unique contributions towards the Middle East peace process.

The meeting rose at 2.50 p.m.

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