

UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL MEETING IN SUPPORT OF ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE

United Nations Office at Vienna
27 and 28 June 2006

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I. Introduction

1. The United Nations International Meeting in Support of the Israeli-Palestinian Peace was held at the United Nations Office at Vienna on 27 and 28 June 2006, under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolutions 60/36 and 60/37. It was followed, on 29 June 2006, by consultations of the Committee with civil society organizations on the question of Palestine.

2. The Committee was represented at the meeting by a delegation comprising Paul Badji (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee; Victor Camilleri (Malta), Rapporteur of the Committee; Ravan A.G. Farhâdi (Afghanistan), Vice-Chairman of the Committee; Norma Goicochea Estenoz (Cuba), Permanent Representative of Cuba to the United Nations Office at Vienna; Dato' Hamidon Ali (Malaysia), and Riyad Mansour (Palestine).

3. The International Meeting consisted of an opening session, three plenary sessions and a closing session. The themes of the plenary sessions were “The situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem”, “The peace process and challenges ahead” and “International efforts in support of Israeli-Palestinian peace”.

4. Presentations were made by 14 experts, including Palestinians and Israelis. Representatives of 57 Governments, Palestine, six United Nations bodies, three intergovernmental and 23 civil society organizations, as well as special guests of the host country and representatives of the media and academic institutions attended the Meeting.

II. Opening statements

5. **Kofi Annan**, Secretary-General of the United Nations, in a message read out on his behalf by his representative, Angela Kane, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, said that the event was taking place at a time of continuing tension and uncertainty on the ground. Acts of violence, often taking the lives of innocent civilians, were an almost daily occurrence. The current period was also one of considerable change and transition for Israelis and Palestinians alike. The Palestinian people, through debate and a referendum planned for July, were trying to agree on a common platform to bolster national unity. Hopefully, in that process, the Palestinian Government would move closer towards the principles outlined by the Middle East Quartet in 2006. Israel was considering a withdrawal from the West Bank, she continued. If the process was negotiated and coordinated with the Palestinian side, that might help achieve the objective of a two-State solution. If not, that might complicate efforts to achieve that goal and prejudice final status issues.

6. Parallel commitment by the parties to advancing key issues was essential, the Secretary-General said in the message and welcomed the determination of President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to pursue peace. Clear majorities of Israelis and Palestinians wanted a negotiated, two-State solution. It was the responsibility of all parties to respond to that urgent and deeply felt need. Regional partners had an important facilitating role. A two-State solution was crucial not only for the security and prosperity of both parties, but for regional stability as a whole.

7. The humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory was also deeply troubling, the Secretary-General said. The Quartet had recently endorsed a European Union proposal to set up a temporary international mechanism to deliver assistance to the Palestinian people. That aid would soon begin reaching those in need. Meanwhile, Israel should take steps to improve the humanitarian situation, in keeping with its responsibilities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and obligations arising from previous agreements. Mr. Annan urged international donors to help avert a humanitarian crisis by responding swiftly to the latest consolidated appeal. The Secretary-General pledged that the United Nations would remain fully engaged in efforts to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), and 1515 (2003).

8. **Paul Badji**, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, said that the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory was most distressing. The especially difficult times called for bolder measures. It was not the moment to step back, but the moment to galvanize efforts to search for ways to stabilize the volatile situation and resume political talks to pave the way for a peaceful end of the conflict.

9. The violence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory permeated all aspects of Palestinian life, he said. Time and again, the news carried tragic reports of families and young children killed as they went about their daily lives. Since the start of 2006, Israeli security forces had killed more than 100 Palestinians. Israeli army incursions, air strikes targeting Palestinian towns and moving vehicles and the disproportionate use of force had become almost routine. The Israeli practice of extrajudicial assassinations of Palestinians had been on the rise. Also, the number of Qassam rocket launchings by Palestinians at Israeli targets had increased. He said that the Committee’s position on the matter was very clear: it had repeatedly condemned the policy and practice of extrajudicial executions as inadmissible under international humanitarian law. At the same time, the Committee had strongly denounced all terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians, which could not be justified and undermined any prospect of reconciliation among the parties.

10. Amid the deepening frustration, confrontations among the Palestinian factions in recent weeks had become more frequent, diverting attention from the objective of Palestinian statehood, he said. He realized the difficulty and complexity of the political transition in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, particularly when the socio-economic situation was under tremendous pressure, owing to the Israeli and international fiscal sanctions and the halt of major donor assistance. Hopefully, the Palestinian factions and organizations would overcome those challenges and focus on achieving unity for the sake of the common aspirations of their people. On the Committee’s behalf, he appealed to the Palestinian parties to embrace the Arab Peace Initiative and support the principles of non-violence and recognition of Israel’s right to exist and to accept previous agreements and obligations, including the Road Map, as endorsed by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

11. He emphasized that the root of the conflict, now in its fortieth year, was the continuing Israeli occupation of Palestinian Territory. Its grip on the territory and its people had been reinforced through a rigid system of checkpoints, curfews, closures and roadblocks. The ever-lengthening separation wall carved deep into the West Bank, dissecting Palestinian communities. Families were faced with land confiscations and loss of access to schools, clinics, places of worship and employment and friends and relatives. Farmers reached their farmland only with great difficulty and, if they were fortunate enough to harvest, could not bring their produce to market. Israeli settlements in the West Bank continued to expand and proliferate, in particular those around Jerusalem. The Israeli Defence Ministry had authorized the expansion of four West Bank settlements to the north and south of Jerusalem, as well as in the Jordan Valley, creating new physical facts on the ground. In the Gaza Strip, the widely welcomed Israeli disengagement last year had not improved the lives of Gazans. The movement of people and goods in and out of the Gaza Strip had been severely restricted and unpredictable.

12. Turning to the deadlocked political process, he said that Palestinian Authority President Abbas had repeatedly called upon Israel to return to the negotiating table. He also emphasized that Israel had a partner for peace on the Palestinian side. Three months had passed since the election of a new Government in Israel, without any meaningful steps from that Government towards resuming a political dialogue. Efforts by regional powers, particularly Egypt and Jordan, to put the peace process back on track were welcomed. He drew attention to the so-called “convergence” or “realignment” plan, which sought to unilaterally fix the borders of Israel by consolidating main blocks of West Bank settlements, taking in swathes of

Palestinian land. If the plan was implemented without negotiations with the Palestinian side, it would most certainly have harmful consequences for the region. Implementation of the plan would frustrate not only the Palestinian people's aspirations for a contiguous and independent State, but could foster insecurity among the States in the region and jeopardize relations between Israel and its neighbours. He urged Israel to concentrate on political negotiations with its Palestinian partners within the framework of the Road Map, which both sides had endorsed.

13. The international community had always supported Israelis and Palestinians in their search for reconciliation and peace, he noted. The Palestinian Rights Committee had always advocated a peaceful solution to the question of Palestine, and it had given its support to the Road Map introduced by the Quartet, with a view to fulfilling the two-State vision. In keeping with its mandate, the Committee continued to promote the full realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and to mobilize international assistance for and solidarity with the Palestinian people. He concluded by saying that a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the conflict would not just be a blessing for the Palestinians and Israelis. It would be a wider success that would, without a doubt, be felt across the region and the world. It was in the international community's interest to remain actively engaged in promoting the peace process and see the end of the conflict.

14. **Ralph Scheide**, Deputy Political Director and Head of the Middle East Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Austria, said his country believed in the urgent need to relaunch the process towards a negotiated settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, leading to an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State living in peace with Israel and its other neighbours. Both parties must avoid unilateral measures that prejudiced final status issues. Consequently, Austria would not recognize any change to pre-1967 borders, other than those arrived at by agreement between the parties.

15. He said that recent events, the internal power struggle between Hamas and Fatah and the new escalation across the border between Israel and the Gaza Strip, were a source of great concern. President Abbas' bold step of calling for a referendum over the "prisoners document" could give the broad Palestinian public a chance to unequivocally express its demand for a negotiated solution. Yet, a somehow ambiguous result of the referendum bore the risk that President, Government and Parliament would descend even deeper into a political struggle. Hopefully, the efforts to engage in a national dialogue would prevent further violent intra-Palestinian confrontations.

16. Calling on the Hamas-led Palestinian Government to accept the basic principles of the peace process – non-violence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of existing agreements – he also called on Israel to refrain from any unilateral steps that could jeopardize a negotiated two-State solution. The escalation of armed confrontation in recent days and weeks had showed the lack of a political perspective. The solution to the conflict could only be political, based on negotiations and the principles of the Road Map.

17. As current President of the European Union, Austria was more than ever involved in the search for progress towards a political solution and in efforts to alleviate the social and economic hardship of the Palestinian population, he said. The Temporary International Mechanism, which the European Commission was presently operationalizing, certainly involved some risks, but was still the best contribution that could be made at this point. A way needed to be found to avert a major social and political crisis in the Palestinian Territory, in order to keep alive the hope for a political solution.

18. **Abdullah Abdullah**, Head of the Political Committee of the Palestinian Legislative Council, said that the Palestinian people faced several challenges at this stage. First, they had to put on track the political platform. In the elections held earlier this year, those elected by a majority had had a different platform from the Palestinian Authority. The task now was to have the new Government and the new majority in the Legislative Council toe the line of the Palestinian Authority's political platform. Consensus was close to being reached among the political groups. That job needed to be concluded in preparation for confronting the present challenges imposed on the Palestinians by the occupier of their land.

19. The second challenge, he said, was the continued escalation of murders, assassinations and kidnapping of Palestinians. Those were a daily occurrence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and were in no way helpful in promoting peace. There was a new Government in Israel, and he hoped it would cooperate with the Palestinian Government. Neither should be guided by extremists, but rather by those who cared for "every drop of blood, be it Israeli or Palestinian, to prevent violence and work towards normalizing life among the neighbouring countries in that part of the world. This challenge had now grown more difficult, as the military operation two days earlier had resulted in the taking of an Israeli prisoner of war. The Palestinian Legislative Council was committed to the Geneva Conventions and ensuring that that prisoner's life was protected. It also expected that Israel would not further complicate the situation by launching a wide-range attack on Gaza, thereby subjecting 1.4 million Palestinians to collective punishment. There were other ways and means to defuse the situation, if there was a commitment to peace on both sides of the divide.

20. The third challenge was to revive the long-stagnant peace process, he said. There was no excuse whatsoever to remain hostage to the past, but to look to the future. It was only through peace that both sides would win. In the Palestinian Territory, the people were committed to making peace with the occupiers, but only when that occupation ended. Continuation of the building of the separation wall, the "discrimination wall", separating Palestinians from Palestinians, encircling Jerusalem and separating it from the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, was no contribution to peace, and neither was expanding settlements or sending disguised Israeli soldiers into the middle of Palestinian cities to kill or to kidnap.

21. There were obligations on both sides, he stressed. The Palestinians were ready and willing to take measures to fulfil their obligations, but that could only succeed if the Israeli Government worked towards peace by declaring its commitment to the Road Map and not doing anything that destroyed the chances for peace or jeopardized the two-State solution. Peace would be achieved when a Palestinian mother cried for the loss of an Israeli boy, and an Israeli mother cried for the loss of a Palestinian child.

22. Statements were also made by representatives of Governments and intergovernmental organizations. The representative of **China** expressed his country's deep concern and disappointment over the current situation. Facing complex and unstable circumstances, the leaders would hopefully show political courage and wisdom, dispel all disturbances and reopen peace talks without delay. That was in conformity with the common wishes of both sides, as well as the international community. He said he was currently worried about the situation in the Palestinian Territory and hoped the political parties there would bridge their differences, consolidate the common understanding and restore the situation to stability through negotiations and dialogue. Their aim should be to safeguard the fundamental and long-term interests of the Palestinian people, while taking the unity and the overall situation of the Palestinian people into full consideration. The international community, including the United Nations, should actively encourage the two sides to build mutual trust, implement the Road Map and build an independent Palestinian State. The legitimate rights of the Palestinian people

had to be restored, in order to bring peace and stability to the Middle East. The Palestinian Rights Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights had spared no effort in promoting understanding and the attention of the international community to the question of Palestine over the years. China appreciated their work and would continue to support their efforts. He would, as always, continue to play a constructive role in bringing about lasting peace in the region.

23. The representative of **Egypt** said that his country was committed to a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Egypt had been the first Arab country to have made the strategic decision for peace with Israel, and it had been able, through negotiations, to regain all of its territories. Just and comprehensive peace could only be realized on the basis of international legitimacy and United Nations resolutions, which called on Israel to withdraw from all Arab territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, and the creation of an independent, viable Palestinian State, living side by side with Israel in peace and security. He said that genuine peace could not be realized through unilateral measures seeking to impose fait accompli. Nor could it be established if the legitimate rights of the Palestinians, as recognized by the United Nations, were ignored. Violence, land appropriation, the building of settlements and a separation wall, threats and blockades did not build peace. Israel's continued operations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip had resulted in a tremendous loss of life among civilians. But there was a glimmer of hope stemming from the meeting between the Israeli and Palestinian leaders, as well as from the decision to establish an international mechanism to meet the needs of the Palestinian people. Calling on both sides to resume the peace process as soon as possible, he said he looked forward to the day when the two States lived side by side in peace and security. Egypt was committed to supporting the Palestinian cause in every way, and it had spared no effort in creating the conditions conducive to dialogue. The international community had the responsibility to ensure that a just and lasting solution of the Palestinian problem was achieved. He was firmly convinced that all United Nations mechanisms and systems related to that issue should be continued. That was especially true at a time when attempts were being made to merge some of those bodies and terminate others, within the context of the ongoing United Nations reform. Egypt would stay engaged until a Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, was established.

24. The representative of **Iran** deplored the current appalling situation and the unspeakable plight of the Palestinian people. The realities on the ground suggested that Israel's systematic pattern of human rights violations and massive breaches of international law and international humanitarian law had continued unabated, resulting in the killing of nearly 4,000 Palestinians since September 2000. He said that recent military operations against Palestinian civilians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, had added to the misery and suffering the Palestinian people had long endured. In fact, Israel's deadly air strikes and the shelling of Gaza were part of a larger policy marked by State terrorism, expansionism, aggression and oppression. Recent reports indicated that the continuous and increased violation of the rights and aspirations of the Palestinian people by the Israeli regime had resulted in the deterioration of the situation to an unprecedented and unbearable level. Moreover, in defiance of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and the unambiguous calls of the international community, the Israeli regime not only continued the construction of the illegal wall, but had even accelerated plans for completing it, while the settlement construction and land confiscations in the West Bank and other parts of the Palestinian Territory were continuing unabated. He said that the impunity with which Israel had been allowed to carry out its crimes had emboldened it to continue. It was high time, therefore, for the international community to take effective measures to protect and enforce the basic rights of the Palestinian people and to help put an end to their suffering. The Security Council should live up to its immense duty by preventing Israel from committing atrocities and flouting resolutions, he stressed. Regrettably, the Council had thus far failed to take any serious and tangible action, or even attempt to implement its own modest and limited decisions on the Palestinian question, owing to the unconditional support extended to Israel by a Permanent Member of the Council. The democratic choice of the Palestinian people, as expressed in the elections, deserved the respect and support of the international community. The Israeli decision to halt the transfer of taxes was blackmailing the Palestinian people for exercising their democratic rights. The restrictions that certain countries applied regarding aid to the Palestinian Authority amounted to punishment of the Palestinians for exercising their basic rights in choosing their own representatives. Such inadmissible punitive measures against a nation, the principles of democracy and democratic choice were a breach by those who often preached them. In the context of Israel's defiance of the international community, a particular reference should be made of the infamous Israeli nuclear weapons programme, he said, which was a showcase of five decades of concealment and deception, in total disregard for the demand of the international community to immediately accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Nuclear weapons in the hands of a regime that had an unparalleled record of State terrorism and resorted to aggression and the threat of force against other countries was a real threat to regional and global peace and security and to the non-proliferation regime. The international community should urgently and decisively address that threat and pursue the initiative to rid the region of weapons of mass destruction.

25. The representative of the **Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC)** said the meeting was held at a time when the Palestinian cause was going through a most delicate and dangerous phase in the aftermath of the elections. He had hoped that the international community, especially the donors, would respect the outcome of the elections and not take actions undermining their support of the Palestinian people. He criticized Israeli claims that there was no Palestinian peace partner as mere attempts to evade its obligations. In the last few weeks, everyone had watched the massacres perpetuated by the occupation army in Gaza against innocent civilians. Yet, the international reaction had not risen to the seriousness of that crime against humanity. Israel was escalating its aggression against the Palestinian people, in violation of international law and agreements and norms, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention, almost daily. It was implementing a policy of collective punishment and committing extrajudicial killings. It also continued to demolish Palestinian homes, bulldoze farms, confiscate land and build illegal colonial settlements. It had also imposed a tight blockade, which limited the movement of Palestinians at hundreds of military checkpoints. Those continuing Israeli actions had had destructive impact on the Palestinian economy and infrastructure, placing it on the verge of collapse, he said. OIC called on the international community today to provide political and material support to the Palestinian people, as a continuation of the current situation would have catastrophic consequences affecting the whole region. He further called on the Permanent Members of the Security Council, and on the European Union, to promptly intervene to bring an end to illegal Israeli practices, and also on the international community not to recognize any unilateral Israeli measures. He said that the only way to stop the deterioration of the situation, which threatened regional stability and security, lay, among others, in the following steps: Israel must stop the crimes and aggression against Palestinian civilians; the political process must be resumed promptly on the basis of the Road Map and relevant United Nations resolutions; the construction of the apartheid wall must stop and be reversed; Israel must withdraw from all Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, back to the pre-1967 borders; a just solution must be found for the refugees; and the Palestinian people must be enabled to create an independent State.

26. **Michael Kingsley-Nyinah**, Director of the Executive Office of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), speaking on behalf of the Director-General, said that the Agency's mandate was to provide services and facilities addressing the humanitarian and human development needs of the Palestine refugees in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. It had striven, and continued to strive, to enhance the livelihood and living conditions of the Palestinian refugees through the delivery of a variety of programmes in education, vocational training, health, relief, social welfare, microfinance, microenterprise and even in mental health. He said that UNRWA sought to alleviate poverty among the refugees, as it sought to strengthen their ability to sustain themselves and enhance their capacity for self-reliance. Its

vision was for those refugees to become “agents of strength and human progress” within the wider Palestinian community. UNRWA’s mandate was humanitarian and non-political, even if the reality of its operational environment was one of armed conflict and political strife. The meeting could not have been held at a more opportune moment. In the region, peace was the most highly desired commodity, yet also the most elusive, he said. Everyone agreed that a great deal was achieved through humanitarian and development action by UNRWA and other United Nations and civil society actors. Humanitarian action helped to preserve the dignity of the Palestinian refugees and contributed to calm; its presence reassured Palestinians that the international community was mindful of their plight. At the same time, he said he was painfully aware that humanitarian action was fundamentally constrained and limited in the absence of political solutions. Indeed, humanitarian action was no substitute for a just and lasting solution to political and armed conflict. UNRWA and other humanitarian actors would continue to do their part, steadfastly addressing the humanitarian dimension. However, it had to look to other actors to bring to fruition the profound, yet unfulfilled, desire for peace, shared by the majority of Palestinians and Israelis.

27. The representative of **Indonesia** recalled that the Foreign Ministers of the Non-Aligned Movement had met in Malaysia the month before and had, among other things, stressed the continued relevance of the Arab Peace Initiative, adopted by the Arab Summit in Beirut in March 2002. They had called for the exertion of all necessary efforts to reinvigorate that Initiative. Indonesia was unwavering in its full support of the Palestinian struggle for self-determination and for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State. He congratulated the Palestinian Authority for the successful holding of open, honest, fair and democratic elections early this year. He was deeply regretful, however, over the policy of certain countries to cut off financial support to the Palestinian Authority and to impose its political isolation in the election’s aftermath. That had only aggravated and intensified the Palestinians’ hardship. He said that all democratic countries should respect the democratic choice of the Palestinian people and fully support the Palestinian Authority. At the same time, Palestinians should remain united, as disunity would only make it more difficult to “cast off the yoke of the occupying Power”. Also disturbing was Israel’s continued flagrant violation of international law. While he noted Israel’s withdrawal from within the Gaza Strip and the dismantlement of the settlements that had entailed, he was alarmed by the continuing Israeli military attacks against civilians, including children. That gravely threatened the prospects for a negotiated settlement based on the two-State solution. The international community should take immediate action to see to it that Israel ceased the atrocities and respected its obligations under international law, he said, stressing that violence and unilateralism could never solve the conflict. Both sides, therefore, should refrain from violence, which only aggravated the situation and sowed distrust. Hopefully, the international community and the Quartet would exert all efforts during the present critical period to revive the peace process and salvage the Road Map.

28. The representative of **Algeria** said it was clear that the policies being pursued by the new Israeli Government were far from encouraging. Algeria understood the importance of peaceful coexistence, but recent events had shown that no progress, or very little, had been made through dialogue. In fact, Security Council resolutions had not been sufficiently implemented, and there was no end to the illegal occupation in sight. The Road Map had not been put into practice, and no sovereign Palestinian State had been created. The building of the wall, which resembled an instrument of an apartheid regime, had further complicated that situation. She said that dialogue was meeting several obstacles created by Israel, which had refused to talk to the Palestinian Authority. Israel claimed there were no Palestinian interlocutors; the world had heard this claim from Israel in the past. The Palestinian Authority was fragile and incapable of managing its own financial resources, because of all of the constraints imposed on it by Israel, which had bred violence and despair among the Palestinians. There was a general feeling of frustration throughout the Arab world, as a result. A historic offer was still on the negotiating table, but, unfortunately, it had been rejected by Israel. She continued to believe, however, in the value of full-fledged dialogue and the peaceful settlement of the conflict.

29. The representative of the **Olof Palme International Foundation** said the situation that the Foundation faced in the Occupied Palestinian Territory was bad. Professors were not being paid and the organization was unable to provide even meals for the orphans in residence. The institute had been a great success, but now, many students were unable to attend classes because they could not pay the fees. Unfortunately, the international community, once it had decided to stop sending money to the new Palestinian Government, had not provided a way for the Foundation or other non-governmental organizations to get their much-needed money. For a lot of people, the situation was impossible to understand. Democracy was based on consensus, but there could be no consensus over unilateral decisions.

30. The Representative of the International NGO Network on Palestine said that there was a crisis looming in Gaza. Everyone had seen pictures of Israeli tanks massed on the border, ready to reoccupy the Strip. The crisis was not only humanitarian, it was also political. It was about the end of hope for ending the occupation and finding a political settlement. The United Nations had to be engaged, and she hoped the Committee would take the lead in crafting a new diplomatic approach. A new call for an international peace conference was needed, based on the Arab Initiative. Such a conference should be global and not regional, because the crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory was now part of a much wider global situation. She said that the Road Map and the efforts by the Quartet had failed, as had the Israeli unilateral moves and a new kind of diplomacy by the United States. Thus, a new mechanism was needed, not only for the provision of humanitarian support, but for a new diplomacy based on a new international peace conference. She hoped the Committee, on behalf of the United Nations, would broaden the initiative towards the creation of a new kind of diplomacy.

31. The representative of **Cuba** said that Israel, instead of implementing the resolutions of the General Assembly and Security Council, was designing new policies that were far from contributing to a just and lasting peace in the region. Those policies perpetuated the status quo and nullified the efforts undertaken by the Palestinian people for decades. As long as the Government of Israel had the support of the United States Government, Israel would maintain its attitude of open defiance of the United Nations resolutions, as well as the norms of international law. She said that, immediately after the Palestinian elections of 25 January, Israel, the United States and Europe had exercised their “typical two-faced morality”, denying the validity of the elections and implementing a cruel financial blackmail against the Palestinian people. Today, they were deprived of nearly \$1 billion per year, which was seriously eroding their economic development, the payment of the salaries to public officers and the provision of direct food aid for the population. Freezing the funds was creating a humanitarian crisis of unpredictable proportions in the illegally occupied territory. Essential services, such as health, education and the provision of food, were seriously affected. The Israeli people had also been victim of their Government’s policies, she said. It should not be forgotten that important sectors of the Israeli population did not support the actions against the Palestinian people. Instead, they were developing efforts in favour of peace and the recognition of Palestinian rights. But Israel’s State terrorism, supported and financed by the United States, and Israel’s illegal occupation, were the real causes of the conflict. It would not be possible to attain a lasting peace in the Middle East until the illegal Israeli occupation came to an end and the Palestinian people could exercise their right to independence.

III. Plenary sessions

Plenary I
The situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory,
including East Jerusalem

32. Speakers in plenary I examined the physical obstacles to achieving Palestinian statehood; the characteristics of the Palestinian economic and humanitarian crisis; and the impact of the current situation on the Palestinian Authority.
33. **Ghassan Andoni**, Director of Public Relations for Birzeit University in the West Bank and Board Member of Rapprochement, Alternative Tourism Group and Applied Research Institute of Jerusalem, noted that Israel had only been willing to accept a level of separation that allowed for the creation of a Palestinian entity within the State of Israel. Such a separation, which excluded sovereignty over East Jerusalem and other areas that Israel considered vital to its national interests, fell short of addressing the legitimate Palestinian right for independence and sovereignty over areas occupied in the 1967 war. That was impossible to be accepted by any Palestinian leadership, be that Hamas or the Palestine Liberation Organization. Consequently, he said, Israel was proceeding with its unilateral steps to consolidate the occupation gains and de facto, acquire by force what was not possible to gain through negotiations. On the other side, Palestinians were left with one and only option – to continue with the struggle. In the absence of any diplomatic process, Israeli actions and Palestinian resistance determined an environment governed by violence and radicalism. Israel was as radical as some Palestinian resistance groups, if not more. It was a State that was still holding onto a military occupation, imposing ethnic discrimination, legalizing the takeover of others' properties by force and creating an apartheid system of the twenty-first century.
34. Examining physical obstacles to achieving Palestinian statehood, Mr. Andoni said that the first and most effective obstacle lay in the concept of political ambiguity, which characterized most, if not all, of the resolutions or international initiatives on the Palestinian issue. Ambiguity always favoured the strong party, here Israel, and had led the majority of Palestinians to wonder whether separation was meant for two States or meant to help only Israel in avoiding an odd demography of the region. Such ongoing ambiguity had helped Israel deal with the Palestinian issue as a domestic, and not a national, one. It had become possible, therefore, to avoid any reference to international law, in general, and the Fourth Geneva Convention, in particular. Another obstacle were settlements and the related network of "slicing and separating" the different parts of the Palestinian Territory from each other and those parts away from East Jerusalem. While everything - settlements, the wall and the bypass roads - had been established under the pretext of security, all added up to preventing the creation of a Palestinian State. The severe impact of such measures had destroyed the only possible peaceful solution, namely the two-State solution. The majority of Palestinians, who had previously supported such a compromise, were right now certain that any proposed separation under such conditions could only lead to turning the Palestinian Territory into isolated reservations. That fact stood behind the recent drastic political changes in the Palestinian Authority that took place in the latest legislative elections.
35. Turning to the Palestinian economic and humanitarian crisis, the speaker noted that the sanctions applied against the Palestinians led to the collapse of Palestinian civil society institutions, in particular, the ones that were more supportive of a political compromise. The private sector and education and health institutions were also collapsing under the "hammer of sanctions", as it was impossible to sustain higher education and provide tuition fees in a community that had barely enough to eat. No one was willing to continue investing in a community that could barely buy its living essentials. The resulting poverty and lack of hope were fertile ground for extremism. There was a big difference between freezing cooperation and not providing assistance to a Palestinian Government over political disagreements, on the one hand, and applying sanctions that prohibited the transfer of vital assistance, on the other. The latter was a clear act of enmity, which represented a very short-sighted policy. The international community, particularly the Quartet and the donor community, were directly responsible for creating an disproportionately large Palestinian public sector, which had expanded from 20,000 to more than 150,000 due to international agreements that followed Oslo. He criticized using the current misery of public sector employees for political blackmail as neither ethical nor acceptable.
36. The speaker concluded by saying that the only driving force for achieving such a compromise was the essential need for both communities to live in peace and freedom, and in the context of a pragmatic solution in line with international law and international humanitarian and national rights, which both sides could accept. Unilateralism was only a way to avoid a solution, and such moves should only be encouraged by the international community if they did not replace a negotiated settlement. Establishing settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory was a unilateral step not tied to any agreement and against the will of the international community. Removing a few of them was also a unilateral step to correct past wrongdoings.
37. **Shabtai Gold**, Outreach Director for Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, introduced his organization by saying that it was founded several years ago by a group of Palestinians and Israelis, who had seen first-hand the conditions in the Gaza Strip. Its main objective was to promote long-term positive change, including at the political level. The organization had a mobile clinic in the West Bank, and it also worked with the Palestinian Red Crescent Society. It had begun with 450 members and now had some 1,400. All of the medical staff were volunteers.
38. He drew attention to the fact that thousands of Palestinian prisoners were being held in Israel, many without a trial and many not even knowing why they had been jailed, as that information was considered confidential. One concern was that detainees, some of whom had been held for up to 96 hours, could be mistreated, but anything that denied a person's basic rights - be that a right to a lawyer or to meet with a non-governmental organization - was troubling. Torture had officially been banned in Israel in 1999, but that had not been implemented entirely, and there had been cases of torture and severe mistreatment of prisoners, both Israeli and Palestinian, especially during arrests.
39. Regarding the "health crisis" in Gaza and East Jerusalem, Mr. Gold stressed that his organization was not trying to replace the Palestinian Authority or the current health system. It was sending all kinds of medical supplies to where those were most needed. Dividing and splitting the Territory and imposing closures and curfews had a direct negative effect on health care. For example, at least 20 doctors had been unable to reach Nablus, and mobile clinics had been unable to move around and travel to the villages due to the lack of fuel. Often the Palestinian Authority did not have money for treatment, so it could not pay. Furthermore, people themselves now often had financial problems and could not afford medicines or transportation to reach the hospitals.
40. He noted that many parts of the Territory had been disconnected from the others. His organization had sent a letter alerting the Minister of Defence and the Government Coordinator of Activities in the Territories of the looming humanitarian crisis, based on his organization's own information, as well as information from the World Health Organization (WHO) and that of his Palestinian colleagues. He had asked the Israeli authorities what they planned to do in face of an easily predicted crisis. The Israeli High Court had said it was the obligation of a military High Commander to prepare for such an event in advance. Health was Israel's responsibility, as the occupying Power. Mr. Gold concluded by saying that

the embargo on the Palestinian Authority was now hurting the weakest, for which Israel must take responsibility.

41. **Bahia Amra**, representative of the Health, Development, Information and Policy Institute, based in Jerusalem, delivered a statement on behalf of **Marwa Abu Dagga**, Board Member of the Palestinian Working Women's Society for Development, Gaza, who had been unable to leave the Gaza Strip. It noted that the situation in the Gaza Strip had recently seen a number of changes, including the Israeli withdrawal and the emergence of new political trends. Every mother was happy to hear her child's first words, its first sentence, but it was unimaginable when that first sentence was one of fear, generated by the Israeli occupation. A Palestinian child realized very early the nature of the conflict with Israel, either by reading about its roots or living a life affected daily by the details of that conflict on all levels. The Israeli Air Force spread fear among civilians as a means of paralysing the Palestinians. Late hours until dawn, the planes sounded above and lasted until the smallest children walked to school in the mornings. Israel might have withdrawn from the Gaza Strip, but its Air Force was still there.

42. The killings and assassinations were even worse than the sound of the airplanes, yet their impacts were about equal. The policy of harming Palestinians in those ways was an effort to frighten them into rejecting the resistance and isolating the fighters. But that always failed, because a policy of collective punishment only sparked resistance; nothing could harm humanity more than the scene of a child crying close to its fallen mother. The Israelis were subjecting the Palestinian people daily to all forms of violence and killed for the sake of killing, she concluded. By imposing restrictions and confiscating sources of livelihoods, Israel was turning the Palestinian Territory into a big prison.

43. **Knut Dethlefsen**, Resident Representative of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory since 2005, introduced his organization as a German political foundation, affiliated with the Social Democratic Party of Germany, but financially and organizationally independent. Mr. Dethlefsen said it was a very tense and difficult time, so it was important to reassess the processes behind what he called the "non-existent peace process". As much had been heard about the obstacles to Palestinian statehood, the speaker preferred to focus on the question of democracy and State-building in Palestine, as well as on political transformation and institution-building. With the situation in Gaza very tense right now, these were very important. He urged participants not to get caught up in the daily occurrences only, but to look at the long term, in an effort to find a way out.

44. Doing so could change the dynamics on the ground. Political transformation in the Palestinian Territory was very difficult, because Palestine was not a sovereign State. Nevertheless, the Palestinian Authority sometimes seemed like a State, particularly from the perspective of the international community and the media. There was a President and a Government, which were State organs, but their authority was rather limited, due to both external and internal constraints. The Palestinians were basically divided into five cantons, and authority was restricted by the deterioration of the rule of law and the limited power of the security services.

45. Political transformation and institution-building was very important for achieving the goal of a viable and democratic Palestinian State, which was the basis of the two-State solution. It was not enough to liberate a State. A State could only exist if it had institutions capable of supporting it. A democratic State of Palestine would need the support of the European Union, as well as non-State actors. Clearly, Palestinian society was at a crossroads, deciding which direction to go while building that State. The Palestinian elite and civil society should ask themselves what they were doing internally to realize the vision of statehood. Many Palestinian leaders could do very little to change the greater political environment, but they could influence internal events. The question was one of priority - was that liberation and resistance, or internal State-building?

46. In this, institutions should be built that were capable of delivering the most important needs of the Palestinian people, such as security, rule of law and economic development and bridging the huge inequality gap in Palestinian society. While the occupation and all other obstacles were great impediments to the establishment of a State, State-building involved questions that should be part of the national dialogue of any emerging Government. Democracy, for instance, was not only about elections, but about building a civil society, a democratic culture, media and institutions, which could carry that democracy forward. Elections, in fact, could be polarizing, as was presently the case in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. To further complicate things, the national movement there grappled with these questions while facing probably the most hostile external environment.

47. Building a democracy while under occupation had not really been done before in history, the speaker said, but in that effort, the Palestinians had the support of organizations such as his. Despite everything said here today about European "non-action", its programmes had continued and, in fact, had expanded in the past few months. Building a Palestinian State was an important question for Europe, and its efforts should focus not only on the Palestinian Authority structures, but also on civil society organizations. It was very important to work with Fatah, but also to engage Hamas and not isolate it; to find a way to have a dialogue. Hamas was a reality and needed to be integrated into a democratic system of democratic institutions.

48. **June Ray**, Head of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (with offices in Gaza and Ramallah), said that the meeting reinforced the vital relationship and interaction between peace, human rights and development. Her Office, first established in Gaza in 1996, had worked closely with Palestinian civil society to facilitate interaction with human rights mechanisms and to strengthen the Palestinian voice in international human rights forums. Increasingly over recent months, civilians had paid the price of the continuing violent cycle. Additional restrictions on freedom of movement had further curtailed their basic human rights. The Palestinian Authority's fiscal crisis, becoming more and more acute, had affected most of the already vulnerable sectors of Palestinian society, like children, the elderly and the chronically ill.

49. Detailing the escalation of killings in conflict-related incidents in recent weeks and months, she said that between March and May, some 90 Palestinians had been killed in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, or three times that number last year in that period. This month, there had been a further escalation in the human toll, with a steep rise in the number of civilians killed, with the intensification of Israel's policy. In a two-week period earlier this month, 32 Palestinians had been killed in the Gaza Strip, including 10 children, of whom six were under the age of 5. In the last three months, there had been a ten-fold increase in artillery shells fired, compared to the first quarter of the year, and 71 Israeli Air Force strikes.

50. Civilians, particularly the most vulnerable, should not pay the price for the neglect of human rights and humanitarian obligations, which remained incumbent on all sides.

51. Freedom of movement had been further curtailed at some 515 checkpoints, roadblocks and earth mounds, compared to some 400 at the end of last year. That, along with closures and curfews, had increasingly confined Palestinian movement to the immediate vicinity, with all that that entailed in terms of access to medical facilities, work, family life and the right to human dignity. The intensified restrictions had also affected the ability of United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations to deliver essential humanitarian assistance, as well as carry out their normal human

rights work.

52. Implementation of the agreement on movement and access remained problematic. Since the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, Palestinians had enjoyed movement within the Strip, but they had been unable to export produce. And, despite the landmark Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice, which had found that construction of the separation wall was contrary to humanitarian law, that construction had continued, accompanied by settlement expansion. As several speakers had pointed out, the wall violated freedom of movement, divided families, affected livelihoods and separated farmers from their crops or destroyed their olive trees.

53. The impact of the current fiscal crisis, according to the International Monetary Fund, had caused Palestinian Authority revenues to plummet in April to just one-sixth of its monthly requirement. The World Bank had said in March that by the end of 2006, average personal income would have decreased by 30 per cent and poverty levels would have risen from 44 to 67 per cent. In light of recent developments, the Bank was currently reassessing those figures as too optimistic. The temporary international mechanism was a most welcome step, but it did not nearly address the rights of the Palestinian people in a sustainable way. The impact of the current fiscal crisis on the right to health was tangible on a daily basis. Last week, the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health had issued a new release renewing appeals to the international community to build on its temporary mechanism for assistance to the Palestinian people.

Plenary II

The peace process and challenges ahead

54. In plenary II, the sub-themes put the focus on the parties' commitment to a platform of peace; enhancing prospects for peace through accepting the goals of the Road Map and the principles of the Arab Peace Initiative; the need to achieve a negotiated settlement of the conflict; and the importance of upholding international law, including United Nations resolutions.

55. The morning session considered the theme, "the peace process and challenges ahead". Participants were expected to address the following topics: enhancing prospects for peace by accepting the goals of the Road Map and the principles of the Arab Peace Initiative; the need to achieve a negotiated settlement of the conflict; and the importance of upholding international law, including United Nations resolutions.

56. **Abdullah Abdullah**, Head of the Political Committee of the Palestinian Legislative Council, Ramallah, said that the Gaza Strip was facing catastrophic times. That was not just a problem for the Palestinian people, but for anyone with a conscience. A strong voice was needed to call on Israel to restrain its attacks, including the ones that had not yet occurred. The Gaza Strip was crowded, and sometimes a single bullet hit more than one person, not to mention the gun ships and rockets, or the tanks massed at the international airport in Gaza, ready to move.

57. All of that, however, would never prevent the Palestinians from seeking peace, Mr. Abdullah stressed. The older generation of politicians, both in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, realized that there could be no military solution; only peace would lead both peoples to live side by side, first as neighbours and then as friends. The Israelis claimed that there was no Palestinian partner for peace. But two brave Israeli journalists had written a book called "Boomerang", which had described how Israeli security organs were filing faulty reports, claiming that Palestinians were seeking to destroy Israel and how they were no longer partners for peace. That book might have come too late, but it was still possible to solve the problem. The two sides, however, could not do that by themselves. They needed third-party intervention and strong voices. The international community must not leave it to Israel to make peace or war.

58. On the previous day, a speaker had reported that in the month of June alone, 32 Palestinians had been killed in conflict-related deaths, more than 100 had been wounded, and still others had been detained, Mr. Abdullah recalled. Israeli forces went about that business in daylight, sometimes disguised as Palestinians. If Palestinians did that in Israel, the reaction would be enormous. He wondered where those people who had a moral responsibility to uphold international law and morality were during the murder of Palestinians. He wondered where in the world a woman could be detained for six months without a trial, and even without formal charges. The number of those detainees now exceeded 3,000, and the total number of Palestinians in prison totalled more than 10,000.

59. Mr. Abdullah stressed that third-party interventions should be based on international law and United Nations resolutions, as well as on the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the construction of the separation wall. After receiving a ruling by the Court that the wall's construction was illegal, Israel continued unabated to infringe on the rights of Palestinians, not by separating Palestinians from Israelis, but by separating Palestinians from Palestinians. Israel was gradually deteriorating into an apartheid regime, building roads used only by Israelis, while others were built for use by the Palestinians – and it was easy to recognize which was for which. Mr. Abdullah concluded by saying that the culture of peace did not come from "the barrel of the gun", but flowed from a mutual recognition that all people were human beings, first and foremost, and able to live with each other in peace and harmony.

60. **Colette Avital**, Deputy Speaker of the Knesset, Labour Party, Tel Aviv, said that many friends and colleagues had tried to dissuade her from coming to the Meeting, which they felt might be just another exercise in Israel-bashing. But, since she was inclined to take advantage of any meeting where she might meet her Palestinian colleagues, to search ways to "get us out of this mess", she had decided to attend. Admittedly, the previous morning had not been easy for her, and she had regretted some of the statements she had heard. One country had denied Israel's existence altogether and had called for a conference of the "deniers of the holocaust". Having seen first-hand the events in Israel, having seen Israelis killed by acts of terrorism, Ms. Avital felt it was too much to hear that Israelis were the only killers. She had been part of the peace camp in Israel for a long time and had fought against the occupation, not only because it was unethical to "occupy" another people, but because that occupation had inflicted a great deal of moral and public harm to even her own country. It cost her, at certain times, her career. To make progress, however, it was very important to speak about both sides and to consider the events that had pushed people to despair.

61. She recalled that Israelis had left the Gaza Strip 10 months earlier with a great deal of pain and a high political price, including the breakdown of the Israeli political system. They had left because they felt it was the right thing to do. Settlements had been dismantled, but in 10 months, hardly a day had passed when Israeli cities had not been attacked by rockets. In this, like in every situation, there were two sides to the story. Considering the news today, the prevalent fear in Israel was that it might again face renewed escalation, and yes, Israel was part of that escalation. There would be a rocket attack, and then Israel would retaliate, sometimes with excessive power, and then the other side would attack again. That was escalation. It should be clearly understood that Israeli disengagement had carried a "heavy" price, had left people miserable on both sides of the fence and had

paved the way for Hamas to win the elections this year.

62. Nevertheless, Ms. Avital stressed, progress had been made, in principle and in attitudes, like the fact that 70 per cent of Israelis in the past three years or so had said that the only solution was the two-State solution. That was indeed progress, because some years ago, hardly five per cent of Israelis had believed that. At the same time, however, developments on the ground had made that goal more difficult to achieve. The results of the last Palestinian elections, having been democratic, should be respected, but many Israelis and many Palestinians had seen the result as a setback. No one knew if and when there would be a change in attitude among Hamas, so it was felt that the elections had taken the situation back some 20 years to a time when the Palestinians and Israelis had refused to negotiate. Oslo had been a major breakthrough because it had enunciated the basic principles, but it was felt now that everyone was “back to square one”.

63. Ms. Avital thought the Prisoners Document was important because of the position held by prisoners in Palestinian society. In principle, it had enunciated a few welcome points. First, a division of responsibility had been set out between Hamas and Fatah, with the latter responsible for foreign affairs and negotiations and the former for domestic affairs. That was a way for Hamas to circumvent the thorny issue of having to negotiate with Israel. The results of those negotiations could be submitted for public referendum. If and when such an agreement was reached, bringing it to the public would be a very good step. Most of the people who had voted for Hamas had probably done so because of internal problems like corruption. Submitting an agreement concerning Israel to a public referendum might finally pave the way for a return to the peace process. Ms. Avital concluded by declaring that she believed that Israel had a partner for peace in the Palestinians. Above all, it was important for both sides to understand each other's narrative, each other's claim to the land. Only when both sides acknowledged each other's pain would they be able to engage in negotiations.

64. **Harald Haas**, Senior Researcher at the Institute for Strategic Research in the Austrian National Defence Academy, pointed to the unique way of the creation of the Palestinian State, namely, under occupation, without control of its borders or airspace, with its citizens subjected to the control of an occupying country. No doubt, the best solution would be a mutually negotiated final status agreement guaranteeing Israel its security needs and creating a sovereign, independent and economically viable Palestinian State, internationally guaranteed. He further pointed out that international law should have made it quite easy to find and impose a final agreement. International law favoured the Palestinian cause, while condemning Israeli actions and policies, and provided clear guidelines for a final settlement. Unfortunately, the United Nations Security Council failed to impose its Chapter VII resolutions upon Israel. The sponsors of the Oslo Process, as begun in September 1993, had had their own national interests at heart, and none of them really favoured a sovereign Palestinian State. That process had been doomed from the start because it ignored the fundamentally contradicting expectations of both parties, as well as the need to negotiate and agree on the most crucial contentious issues before signing. It had also failed to establish a global control regime to supervise the process. Most crucial of all, it had failed to fulfil the basic needs of the Palestinian masses, namely, socio-economic well-being and freedom from oppression.

65. Mr. Haas said that the reason approaches to a lasting peaceful solution of the Middle East conflict had so far failed was most likely because the roots of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict had never been dealt with seriously, and approaches to the solution touched only the surface of the conflict. The ongoing war between the two peoples was an inevitable result of many factors including the psychological burdens both peoples had been carrying with them for more than half a century and their effects on the interactions between them. Feelings of guilt, shame and humiliation were handed down from one generation to the next because the terrible events that both peoples had suffered had not been fully addressed. Trauma existed latently over generations and flared up if triggered even by seemingly small events, leading to violent conflict. The basis for mutual peace negotiations should be mutual understanding, but that could only be achieved if both sides came to terms and coped with their respective history and trauma. Coping with the psychological wounds of as many people as possible on both sides might lead to coping with the psychological wounds of the two nations, leading to a sustainable peace among them. In other words, a basic psychological understanding of the conflict would create the possibility of finding a political framework that suited the respective peoples and their history. Without undergoing a process of internal as well as cross-border reconciliation, no sustainable and lasting peace would be possible; formal agreements and treaties alone could not solve the problem. Palestinians as well as Israelis would have to accept their fate as well as their history. Both had to acknowledge the other's suffering, as well as their own responsibilities and both would have to understand each other. Israel would have to formally apologize to the Palestinian people for what it had been doing to them up to now.

66. Traditional methods of conflict management applied by the United States and the European Union with respect to conflict resolution in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict had so far failed, he went on, with neither the United States nor the European Union proving to be an impartial mediator. The European Union, when it came to Israeli occupation and aggression, rather mildly called for further Israeli steps, including the freezing of settlement activities and dismantling of settlement outposts, and Israeli abstention from measures that were not in accordance with international law, including extrajudicial killings and collective punishment. Hamas' landslide election victory in January 2006 had shocked the Union, prompting it to get tougher on the Palestinians. The Union should follow a twofold path: to negotiate with President Abbas; and to channel aid through non-governmental organizations. The United Nations should undertake the following: let Hamas prove its capabilities with regard to establishing a clean and effective administration; seek to establish peace and security within Palestine; convince Hamas to maintain the unofficial ceasefire towards Israel; and force Israel to refrain from any violence against Palestinians. In general, the European Union, besides the United Nations, seemed to be the most capable mediator in the conflict because its interest in the region aimed at creating peace and stability on a sustainable and strategic level, he noted.

67. He discussed which framework should be used as a basis for future negotiations, the Road Map or the Arab Peace Initiative. The former path appeared to be not only insufficient for paving the way towards a comprehensive Middle East peace, but even contradicted the requirements for such a way forward. The Road Map, for example, sought a return to the situation that had led to the outbreak of the intifadah, and although it called for a fair solution to the refugee problem, it avoided any mention of international law guaranteeing the right of return as a base for the Road Map, thus weakening the Palestinian position. Moreover, it contained no objective criteria for compliance or non-compliance. The Arab Peace Initiative, on the other hand, had been created by local actors and was not a Western product. It was balanced and flexible with regard to the return of refugees to what was now Israel - the one Palestinian right that would never be implemented. In addition, the Initiative offered the historic chance for a comprehensive peaceful settlement of the conflict.

68. **Andreas Van Agt**, Professor and former Prime Minister of the Netherlands, started his presentation by noting that this meeting, as mentioned already a few times, was held on the eve of the second anniversary of the landmark ruling of the International Court of Justice, in response to a request of the General Assembly for an advisory opinion, which stated that, among other things, Israel's construction of the separation wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, was contrary to international law and that Israel was under an obligation to cease forthwith

the building of the wall and to dismantle its structure immediately in the Occupied Territory. The Court had also obligated Israel to make reparation for all damages and obligated States not to recognize the illegal situation resulting from the wall's construction and not to render aid or assistance in maintenance of that situation. The ruling had further obligated all States parties to the 1949 Geneva Convention to ensure compliance by Israel with international humanitarian law. The Court further stated that Israel's policy of establishing settlements in the Occupied Territory was in breach of international law, a flagrant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. In that context, the Court recalled Security Council resolution 465 (1980), which had called on States not to provide Israel with any assistance to be used in connection with settlements in the Occupied Territories. That resolution was not the only United Nations verdict or request ignored or dismissed by United Nations Member States. As of 1967, both the General Assembly and the Security Council had issued numerous resolutions calling on Israel, demanding or urging or requesting it to end the occupation, but time and again, to no avail.

69. He opined that there was no contesting the fact that United Nations' authority, and hence its efficacy, was badly bruised when a Member State could persistently disregard its messages. Co-responsibility for that disgraceful state of affairs lay with Israel's protector vested with veto power, as well as with European countries who failed to take a firm stand on behalf of international law by not clearly dissociating themselves from their transatlantic ally. Europeans failed by shrinking from applying real political pressure on the adversary of the United Nations resolutions in question. If the European Union had "the spine to act", it would suspend implementation of the Association Agreement with Israel, which yielded Israel huge economic benefits.

70. He pointed out that the record with respect to implementation of the International Court of Justice ruling was appalling: the wall had not been dismantled and was steadily expanding, causing more damage to the Palestinians living in the area; settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem had not been removed, but were hurriedly being enlarged; and the occupation continued unabated. That was the "shocking picture of boundless disrespect for international law". Palestinians had been told, time and again, that they should not resort to violence, but all those countries that had dismissed the Court ruling had no moral ground on which to lecture Palestinians to renounce violence, for they themselves had disregarded a ruling of the highest Court.

71. Some had argued that the ruling had been advisory and was, therefore, not binding, he noted. The International Court of Justice had concluded that the obligations violated by the wall's construction were essentially imperative rules of international law, the existence of which could not be denied by any State. Those fundamental rules applied to Israel and other States, independently of the Court's opinion. That was why the General Assembly had voted overwhelmingly to demand that Israel and all other Member States comply with the legal obligations contained in that advisory opinion. The time had come now for the Assembly to put the matter before the Security Council, requesting it to compel Israel to abide by its resolution. As European Union members had voted in favour of the Assembly's resolution, breaking ranks with the United States, they might be counted on to follow that up.

72. He recalled that a striking parallel to the case was that of Namibia, on the legal consequences of the continued presence of South Africa in that country. The International Court of Justice had found that South Africa was obligated to end its occupation in Namibia and that United Nations Member States should refrain from lending support or assistance to South Africa's presence in Namibia. In Namibia's case, the Security Council adopted resolutions calling on States to discourage their nationals and companies from dealing with South Africa. It was up to the Council now to follow the precedent it set in the Namibia case and take similar action as Israel continued to construct its illegal wall and continued enlarging its settlements.

73. Turning to the latest news, namely the "disaster" developing in the Gaza Strip, he said that the abduction of a member of an occupying army was indisputably legal and legitimate, according to international humanitarian law. Punishing the entire Gaza population was a grave violation of the Geneva Conventions, incontestably. The international community was under a legal, as well as a moral, obligation to rise to its feet now and take a firm stand to save international law from any more damage. The Security Council should speak out loudly and clearly. Incapacitating that body by using a veto right now would be no less than "morally despicable" and would deal another, very devastating blow to the United Nations' authority.

Plenary III

International efforts in support of Israeli-Palestinian peace

74. Speakers in plenary III examined the following sub-themes: the role of the Quartet and regional partners in efforts at resuming the political process; the permanent responsibility and engagement of the United Nations; the need for continued donor assistance to the Palestinian people; and the contribution of civil society to building bridges of trust between Israelis and Palestinians.

75. **Mathew Hodes**, Director of the Conflict Resolution Programme at the Carter Center in Atlanta, Georgia, United States, noted that conflicts, their size, shape and number, had been the subject of study over time. It was estimated that some 60 conflicts had taken place around the world since the end of the cold war, but none of them had resonated in the same way globally as the one between the Israelis and Palestinians, and not one had created the need for a United Nations committee or division, such as the ones established in New York.

76. Turning to the Quartet, Mr. Hodes suggested that it was not really a quartet, at its centre was the United States which held the most power within that alliance. The Quartet's emphasis, furthermore, was on process, rather than product. The two things that Oslo and the Road Map had in common were that neither had defined a destination, since a peace process without a concluding "paragraph" did not have a destination. In the context of Israeli-Palestinian peace, the domestic politics of the United States played a considerable role in the decisions of the Administration. Mr. Hodes shared former President Jimmy Carter's view that the United States remained the sole actor in the region capable of bringing the parties together. Mr. Harald Haas, Senior Researcher at the Institute for Strategic Research in Vienna, who spoke earlier in the day, had said that the United States could not be a mediator because it was too close to the Israelis, but that was precisely why the United States could be the mediator. It was the one actor who could cause the Israelis to deliver in the long run. That role did not belong to the European Union countries, the Russians or even the United Nations. And, history had suggested that the United States had walked an interesting tightrope, maintaining the interests of Israelis while weighing those of Israel's neighbours. So, while Israel's relationship to the United States had always been close, new nuances should be considered before one suggested that the United States could not and should not play a role, even though the situation was in a new phase of recalibrations.

77. He pointed out that each of the main regional partners, like Egypt and Jordan, had its own set of self-interests, which guided their involvement, but these were consistent with the international goals of stability and peace in the region. Two themes should be kept in mind: both Egyptians and

Jordanians recognized that they were under a certain amount of stress by the Islamist movements within their own societies, but that that was not sufficient to cause either of those regimes to collapse. However, it did cause those Governments to respond to that pressure. At the same time, regional activities could not be pursued as long as violence persisted among the Israelis and Palestinians. In the case of the Egyptians, the overriding concern was the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood. There was also the view that Hamas was not an independent force. Some Egyptians believed that Hamas was nothing more than a “branch office” of the Muslim Brotherhood. Because of the Egyptians’ historical and traditional role, they held a special relationship with the issue, thus, the credibility of the Egyptian Government remained high among the various Palestinian factions, just as it remained high among the Israelis. Egypt had an important role in maintaining stability in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which the Egyptian Government wanted, as it did not need instability on its own border.

78. He continued by saying that Jordan occupied a different space, because of the common border on the Jordan River Valley and because of its demographic pressures could not be ignored and could be amplified if the Israelis “squeezed” the Palestinians from the West Bank into Jordan. The Jordanian Government was also wary of Islamist movements, including that of Hamas, in its midst. Jordan was further caught between the Israeli-Palestinian issue on the one hand, and the situation in Iraq, on the other. The terrorist attacks in Amman had been an indication of how instability could impact Jordanian society. Jordan’s balancing role was shaped by its interest in maintaining good relations with the Israeli Government. In fact, Jordan was already discussing joint efforts with Israel in the sphere of economic development, such as building a joint airport. He concluded by saying that self-interest should be looked at carefully in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and focusing on moral suasion as a means of pushing the parties together, making it possible for them to talk whenever the opportunity presented itself, should not be underestimated.

79. **Yahya A. Mahmassani**, Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States to the United Nations, started by suggesting that, in addressing the role of regional partners in efforts to resume the political process, it was essential to dwell on the root cause of the problem. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was basically a conflict over Israeli occupation of Palestinian land, and the numerous attempts to resolve that conflict had not borne fruits so far, because of the Israeli policy to annex and occupy Palestinian territory. It was clear by now that there was no military solution to the conflict. The occupation must be brought to an end by adhering to the basics of the peace process, namely the Road Map, the Arab Peace Initiative, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), the principle of “land for peace” and, most recently, resolution 1397 (2002) with its vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders. He stressed that the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory, since 1967, was a source of the current and continuing problems, which had remained unresolved for decades and included the Palestinian refugees, the illegal settlements, the illegal construction of the separation wall, the status of Jerusalem and the continued confiscation and destruction of the land in which the future Palestinian State was to be established, as well as the targeting of the civilian population.

80. Reviewing attempts to launch a peace process and the major agreements that had emerged as a result, Mr. Mahmassani noted that throughout those attempts, there was little support in Israel for implementing or abiding by the agreements and declarations. For example, in May 2000, five months before the Al Aqsa intifada, a survey by the Centre for Peace Research at the University of Tel Aviv had found that 39 per cent of all Israelis supported the Oslo Accords, and by May 2004, only 26 per cent of Israelis supported the accords. Meanwhile, successive Israeli Governments continued to follow a military option to resolve the conflict, an option that had proved its futility and brought further casualties, misery and destruction.

81. He emphasized that the Arab countries had committed themselves to peace under several initiatives, including in 1991 at the Madrid Peace Conference, the 1996 Arab Summit Conference, the 2001 Egyptian-Jordan Peace Initiative, and the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002. Unfortunately, the Road Map had yet to “hit the road” and to be implemented, with Israeli politics and the pursuit of military options instrumental in delaying its implementation. Settlements had been expanded, a separation wall was being built on Palestinian land in violation of the International Court of Justice’s Advisory Opinion, and a policy of resolving the conflict by force continued unabated.

82. For more than five years, no serious peace talks had taken place between Israelis and Palestinians. To achieve peace, stability and security for both sides, the international community and the Quartet had to exert efforts to “revive and salvage” the peace process. That would require a complete cessation of Israel’s settlement policy; a complete cessation of the construction of the wall; ensuring that East Jerusalem was the future capital of Palestine; the withdrawal of Israel from the territory occupied in 1967 and an end to the occupation; implementation of the two-State vision, with the establishment of an independent State of Palestine on the basis of the pre-1967 borders; a just and fair solution to the plight of Palestinian refugees; and the reversal of Israel’s ongoing unilateral measures. Noting recent announcements that Israel would resume negotiations with the Palestinian side to implement the Road Map and achieve peace, leading to an independent State of Palestine, living side by side with Israel, Mr. Mahmassani concluded by saying that he looked forward to seeing such statements put into action. A resolution of the conflict was long overdue and it was time for both Israelis and Palestinians to pursue the peace process and achieve a negotiated settlement, leading to a just solution and a permanent peace.

83. **Peter Hansen**, former Commissioner-General of UNRWA, addressed the role of the United Nations in the context of Middle East peace. He called the region a “true roller coaster that has been mainly driving down” in the ten years he lived in Gaza. During his time there, the desire had been to wind down UNRWA, as there would be no more Palestinian refugees for it to take care of. The situation today was quite different. UNRWA was pushing 60, which was the retirement age at the United Nations, but unfortunately he did not see any retirement for that Agency in the near future. Paradoxically, many who had maligned the Agency and had wanted to see it shut down now failed to see tasks for which it was not needed.

84. Mr. Hansen noted a misperception about the United Nations as a unitary actor that made it easy for anyone, who wanted to denigrate the Organization or its role, to do so. The United Nations was many things to different people, but it was definitely not a unitary actor. On one level, there were the main organs, or the General Assembly and the Security Council, which were occupied with adopting resolutions. Those over time served as the collective voice of the Organization, giving it a rather high level of legitimacy. The International Court of Justice was separate, but also at that level. At another level were several United Nations agencies in the region. The most dominant among them in the Middle East was UNRWA, but there was also the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other specialized agencies. There were also special rapporteurs, who could speak with special authority and legitimacy, and, of course, there was the Secretary-General with the Secretariat and his special envoys. So, the United Nations was a multi-headed, complicated structure, often without well-defined, or separate, functions: there was the normative structure creating norms and obligations and defining right from wrong, there was a second function of applying those norms, the third one of mediating or adjudicating when there was disagreement, and finally, the function of enforcing the rules. But the Organization did not have a one-size-fits-all structure.

85. Addressing a distinct advantage the United Nations had over other actors, Mr. Hansen lamented that currently within the Organization there was a great deal of obsession with streamlining and coherence - everything was supposed to fit into a nice hierarchical pattern, but none of it really did. Political and humanitarian efforts, for example, did not fit seamlessly into a structure. Regarding the humanitarian aspect of the Middle East struggle, there could be no objective assessment. Rather, that was a matter of political expediency. As a result, double standards often emerged, as well as a particular tension, on the one hand, between the norm-creating function and, on the other hand, the mediating or negotiating function, which involved compromising those principles and norms. It was not possible to do both well at the same time.

86. The United Nations had a lot of resources at the normative level, but very few in other areas. Therefore, pushing oneself onto the negotiating table raised questions about the utility of the Quartet and about which member of the Quartet contributed any added value to the negotiations. Alternatively, the question was raised about how much participation in the Quartet had subtracted from the role of the United Nations in terms of legitimacy and normative contributions. The answer might raise questions from the standpoint of multilateralism. None of the setting of boundaries between the different functions was easy, and there were various trade-offs to consider, but unless those questions were asked of the United Nations and the process, the utility of that very important instrument was not being fully used. Great care should also be taken not to undermine the Organization's credibility. Indeed, there were those who would say that being part of the Quartet was thinking outside the box, but maybe that was thinking inside the box, which was "a coffin for the legitimacy and utility of the United Nations", Mr. Hansen stressed in conclusion.

87. **Neve Gordon**, Professor at Ben Gurion University in Beersheba, Israel, said he had been asked to talk about peace initiatives in the context of the academic community, but there really were no new peace initiatives. The main issue within the Israeli academic community was the academic boycott. The boycott was firmly linked to the question of peace, insofar as it was considered an effective tool to pressure the Israeli Government to abide by United Nations resolutions, the texts that should inform any peace initiative. There was, in fact, a boycott of the Palestinian Authority, and since the 1980s, universities in the Occupied Territory had been sanctioned by the Government and repeatedly closed. Professors could not go to conferences, and students could not reach the universities.

88. Turning to Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, Mr. Gordon saw it only as a reorganization of power. Almost one year after the withdrawal, Gazans were further limited in terms of resources, mobility and decision-making. Although Israeli soldiers, until today, had not been deployed in Gazan cities, villages and refugee camps, Israel had been employing remote technologies to control the population, such as surveillance aircraft, robots and F-16 fighter jets. He noted in this respect the complicity of Israeli universities in that continuing occupation. University research departments had developed the technologies used in the Occupied Territory to control the population, for example, night vision capacity. Professors of the social sciences and humanities constantly provided secret services with advice and moral rationales, even to the point of justifying extrajudicial executions by Israel. On the other hand, Israeli universities as institutions had not supported their Palestinian colleagues. Palestinian academic institutions had been closed for months and Palestinian students had been denied their right to education, and all the while their Israeli counterparts had remained silent.

89. Academic boycotts had been used in the past, most notably in South Africa, to bring about political and social change. Many Israeli academics were outspoken against the occupation and the rights-abusive policies of their Government, and some of them were even at the forefront of the struggle against occupation. But democracy had to come from below and not from above; cutting off the King's head alone would not do the job. One could not write off the internal struggle to end occupation, and it was crucial to empower the forces inside Israel that were fighting for democracy. Personally, he could not call on the international community to impose a boycott against himself and his country without losing legitimacy in his own society. He was, therefore, against an academic boycott, but he sought to emphasize the internal struggle. The question was how academics could contribute to a peaceful solution of the conflict based on the principles of peace and justice.

90. **Riad Malki**, Director-General of Panorama, the Palestinian Centre for the Dissemination of Democracy and Community Development in Jerusalem, found his point of reference, building bridges with civil society, at the time when the Israelis were literally destroying bridges in Gaza, somewhat awkward. In January 2005, following the election of President Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinians were hopeful because his political platform had advocated peace with the Israelis. During that period, the European Union proposed to focus on peacebuilding between the two sides and called for proposals. Panorama had responded to that call, intending to take advantage of the positive atmosphere created by the election, and set up a Palestinian and Israeli peace forum. The proposal, presented to the European Union at the start of this year, had received a positive response and Mr. Malki was happy to be able to initiate it. Then came the results of the 25 January elections, with the victory of Hamas. President Abbas, when approached on the Panorama's proposal, said it did not matter who had won the elections, it still should be initiated. In March, some 50 to 60 Palestinian non-governmental organizations attended the planning meeting, and last week, the first meeting with Israeli counterparts took place on the Jordan side of the Dead Sea. The same number of Israeli NGOs attended the meeting. A joint declaration emerged, but just as it was about to be issued, an Israeli soldier was abducted, and at that point, the Israeli participants said a call should be added to the declaration for the release of the soldier. The Palestinian NGO representatives, when consulted, agreed to include that point, but only if the document included the need to release the Palestinian prisoners, including women and children. When that request was put to the Israeli side, the Israelis declined to include that. So in the end, there was no declaration, no press release from their joint effort.

91. That was the reality, Mr. Malki emphasized. There were a lot of people committed to the pursuit of peace on both sides, but the reality was stronger than that, and sometimes it was impossible to separate from that reality. The situation, as reflected in each side's eyes, presented a distorted image that was a mix of reality, fiction, ignorance and negation of each other's existence and rights, amplified by asymmetry and a complete lack of trust between the two sides. The point of departure was more complicated than anyone had thought, when 60 to 70 per cent of the people on both sides continued to support peace through a negotiated settlement, yet an equal percentage on both sides supported armed resistance, armed struggle and military attacks. That was the irony, Mr. Malki concluded: on the one hand, the people wanted peace and supported that and on the other hand, they were, on both sides, very much influenced by events on the ground.

IV. Closing session

92. **Victor Camilleri**, Rapporteur of the Committee, introduced the final document of the United Nations International Meeting in Support of the Israeli-Palestinian Peace (see annex I).

93. **Riyad Mansour**, Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, said that the invasion of Gaza, which began at midnight last night, had cast a pall over the meeting. That aggression required a universal condemnation and a demand that Israel, the occupying Power, stop that

aggression immediately and withdraw its troops to outside Gaza. The Palestinian leadership, including President Abbas and the Cabinet, from the very beginning called on those who were holding the Israeli soldier to treat him in accordance with the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention and demanded his immediate release unharmed. They indicated that they were doing everything possible to accomplish those objectives, and therefore the Israeli aggression had no basis whatsoever. Furthermore, the capture of a soldier was not a reason to unleash that massive aggression, which, if continued, would lead to the further killing of large numbers of Palestinian civilians. That, in turn, would prompt retaliation from the Palestinian to the Israeli side, leading to further loss of life among Israelis. Unleashing that aggression under the pretext of saving lives would result in the killing of large numbers of persons on both sides.

94. Despite that dark cloud, a great accomplishment had occurred the day before, namely an agreement on the Prisoners' Document. President Abbas played a key role in this achievement, as well as in accomplishing the unilateral ceasefire and in convincing political groups to participate in the local elections, drawing groups formerly not involved in the political process into the Government. He pointed out that the Israeli Prime Minister was not faithful to the feeling prevailing among the Israelis at the moment. If 70 per cent of the people inside Israel favoured peace and the same percentage were "for killing", and a similar split existed on the Palestinian side, it was the responsibility of genuine leaders to actualize positive aspects of the thinking of the people.

95. Closing the Meeting, **Paul Badji**, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, called on Israel to stop its invasion into Gaza. Speakers during the meeting sessions had discussed the current status of the situation and efforts by the international community to bring it back on track and move it forward, stressing that a negotiated settlement was the only way to resolve the conflict. They had also assessed the challenges standing in the way of the political process and the level of commitment of the parties to a platform of peace, as well as the ways and means to enhance its prospects, based on the goals of the Road Map and the principles of the Arab Peace Initiative.

96. A concern had been expressed that those prospects were undermined by Israeli plans to unilaterally determine its borders in the West Bank. Deliberations had also underlined the importance of upholding international law, including United Nations resolutions, and in particular the International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion, and of finding a solution to the conflict. Discussions delved into international efforts in support of Israeli-Palestinian peace. The role of the Quartet, the United Nations led by the Secretary-General, the European Union, the United States and the Russian Federation, merited particular attention. Discussions further reflected the fact that the regional stakeholders now played a crucial role with regional developments growing increasingly complex and interrelated. Donor assistance had been at the centre of many debates lately, and participants reflected on the special role to be played by the donor community.

97. Mr. Badji concluded by saying that with all the changes in the political landscape discussed here, some of its features stayed the same, one of them the permanent responsibility and engagement of the United Nations and another the contribution of civil society to building bridges of trust between Israelis and Palestinians.

Annex I

FINAL DOCUMENT

1. The United Nations International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace was held at the United Nations Office at Vienna, on 27 and 28 June 2006, under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian people. Participants in the Meeting included international experts, representatives of Governments, Palestine, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations entities, parliaments, civil society and the media.

2. The Meeting was convened by the Committee with a view to demonstrate the unswerving commitment of the world community to resolving this decades-old conflict, to help search for ways to stabilize the volatile situation in the area and resume political negotiations leading to a permanent two-State solution to the conflict, based on the 1967 borders, in accordance with the Road Map and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003). The participants reviewed the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, discussed the state of the political process and challenges ahead, as well as international efforts in support of Israeli-Palestinian peace. The Meeting was also held at a time of a major political transition for both Israelis and Palestinians and amidst a worsening political, economic and humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.

3. The participants agreed that there was an urgent need to resume a meaningful political dialogue between the parties and expressed concern at the intentions, repeatedly expressed by Israeli officials, to pursue unilateral measures. The participants called on Israel to refrain from any unilateral steps that prejudiced final status issues and jeopardized a negotiated two-State solution. In this regard, the participants noted the recent meeting between the Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and the Prime Minister of Israel Ehud Olmert and urged the two parties to resume negotiations as soon as possible, thereby reactivating the long-stalemated political process. In discussing efforts at advancing Israeli-Palestinian peace, the participants also noted the important facilitating role played by the Quartet and key regional parties, Egypt and Jordan.

4. The participants expressed particular concern at the recent upsurge in violence and its destructive effect on the hopes for peace. They condemned the intensified military strikes, incursions and extrajudicial assassinations by Israel, the occupying Power. They called on Israel to halt its invasion of Gaza, withdraw from the Strip, and stop escalating the current crisis. Alarmed at the large number of Palestinian civilians, including children, killed in the last few weeks and being of opinion that this escalation warranted an impartial international investigation, the participants supported a request to the Secretary-General to facilitate such an investigation. They also called for the cessation of rocket attacks on Israel carried out by Palestinian groups from the Gaza Strip. These actions put civilians in serious danger and inflame and destabilize the already fragile situation. The participants warned that the cycle of violence and counter-violence was getting out of control and had to be broken. A comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian ceasefire could be a first step in this direction.

5. The participants condemned the continuing construction of the wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in and around East

Jerusalem, in defiance of the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice. They noted the delay in establishing the Register of Damages with the goal of compensating those who had suffered any material damage as a result of the wall's construction, and urged the Secretary-General to intensify his efforts in this direction. The participants also denounced the continued expansion of illegal settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, in violation of international law and Israel's obligations under the Road Map. They expressed concern about the intensified settlement activities in and around East Jerusalem, including efforts to implement the so-called "E1 plan", and the situation in the Jordan Valley where new settlements had recently been established. In addition to being illegal and causing daily hardship for the Palestinian population, these physical obstacles in the Occupied Palestinian Territory prejudice the outcome of the permanent status negotiations and complicate efforts at establishing a contiguous and independent State of Palestine.

6. The participants welcomed the agreement on the National Conciliation Document ("Prisoners Document"), reached between Palestinian political groups on 26 June. They strongly supported efforts by the Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas that led to this agreement. They urged him to continue his work aimed at bringing together all political trends of the Palestinian society and convincing them to speak with one voice and to comply with existing understandings and obligations undertaken by the Palestinian Authority and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

7. The participants emphasized that the continuing occupation of the Palestinian territory, now in its fortieth year, remained the root cause of the conflict. They expressed the view that this long-standing conflict could have no final solution without the achievement of the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights defined by the General Assembly in 1974 as the right to self-determination without external interference, the right to national independence and sovereignty, and the right of Palestinians to return to their homes and property, from which they had been displaced and uprooted.

8. The participants stressed the critical importance of the international donor assistance. At the same time, they expressed apprehension over the recent decision by some donors to suspend direct aid to the Palestinian Authority. They noted efforts by the Quartet to resolve this situation, in particular its recent endorsement of an European Union's proposal for the establishment of a temporary international mechanism to deliver assistance to the Palestinian people. The participants were hopeful that these efforts would help alleviate the rapidly deteriorating economic and humanitarian conditions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. They urged the Government of Israel to fulfil its obligations under international law towards the Palestinian civilian population and lift its restrictions on the freedom of movement and other measures stifling the economic and social life in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and to resume the transfer of collected Palestinian tax revenues to the Palestinian Authority in keeping with signed agreements.

9. The participants reaffirmed the permanent responsibility of the United Nations with respect to the question of Palestine, until it was resolved in conformity with relevant United Nations resolutions and norms of international law, and until the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people were fully realized in all aspects.

Vienna, 28 June 2006

Annex II

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Speakers

Mr. Abdullah Abdullah
Head of the Political Committee of the Palestinian Legislative Council Ramallah

Mr. Ghassan Andoni
Director of Public Relations, Birzeit University, Board Member of Rapprochement — Centre for Dialogue and Understanding
Ramallah

Ms. Colette Avital
Deputy Speaker of Knesset, Labour
Tel Aviv

Mr. Knut Dethlefsen
Director, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
East Jerusalem

Mr. Shabtai Gold
Outreach Director, Physicians for Human Rights
Jerusalem

Mr. Neve Gordon
Professor, Ben-Gurion University
Beersheba

Mr. Harald Haas

Senior Researcher, Institute for Strategic Research, Austrian National Defence Academy
Vienna

Mr. Peter Hansen
Former Commissioner-General, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
New York

Mr. Matthew Hodes
Director, Conflict Resolution Program, The Carter Center
Atlanta, Georgia

Mr. Yahya A. Mahmassani
Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States to the United Nations
New York

Mr. Riad Malki
Vice-President, Palestinian Council for Justice and Peace
Ramallah

Ms. June Ray
Head, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Ramallah

Mr. Andreas A.M. van Agt
Professor and former Prime Minister of the Netherlands
Amsterdam

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

H.E. Mr. Paul Badji
Chairman of the Committee
Permanent Representative of Senegal to the United Nations

H.E. Ms. Norma Goicochea Estenoz
Permanent Representative of Cuba
to the United Nations Office at Vienna

H.E. Mr. Ravan A.G. Farhadiy
Vice-Chairman of the Committee
Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations

H.E. Mr. Victor Camilleri
Rapporteur of the Committee
Permanent Representative of Malta to the United Nations

H.E. Mr. Hamidon Ali
Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations

H.E. Mr. Riyad Mansour
Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations

Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations

Ms. Angela Kane Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs

Governments

Afghanistan, Algeria, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Chile, China, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Cyprus, Egypt, Finland, France, Guatemala, Greece, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Latvia, Lebanon, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Morocco, Namibia, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, Uruguay, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Viet Nam.

Entities having received a standing invitation to participate as observers in the sessions and the

Palestine

Intergovernmental organizations

African Union
League of Arab States
Organization of the Islamic Conference

United Nations organs, agencies and bodies

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO)
United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)
United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT)
United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)
World Health Organization (WHO)

Civil Society Organizations

Alternatives (Montreal, Jerusalem)
Assembly of Peace Cooperation (Madrid)
B'nai B'rith International (Washington, D.C.)
Coalition of Women for Just Peace/Machsom Watch (Tel Aviv)
Council for the Advancement of Arab-British Understanding (London)
European Jews for a Just Peace (Amsterdam)
Health Development Information and Policy Institute (Jerusalem)
International Coordinating Network for Palestine (Washington, D.C.)
International Forum for Justice and Peace (Hoevelaken, the Netherlands)
International Progress Organization (Vienna)
MADHOK Foundation (New Delhi)
“Not in My Name” (Cape Town)
Olof Palme International Foundation (Barcelona)
Panorama – The Palestinian Center for the Dissemination of Democracy and Community Development (Jerusalem)
Peace Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur)
Physicians for Human Rights (Jerusalem)
Rapprochement, Alternative Tourism Group and Applied Research Institute (West Bank)
Society for Austro-Arab Relations (Vienna)
Spanish Federation of Associations for the Defence and Promotion of Human Rights (Madrid)
ECCP European Coordination of Committees for Palestine (Brussels)
The Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (Jerusalem)
Women in Black (Vienna)
World Federation of Scientific Workers (Vienna)

Media

Al Hayat (newspaper)
El Gazeera Media Service
Horn of Africa News Agency
Okaz daily, Arab news
HONK International
Palestinian Press News Agency
Radio MBC
Radio Monte Carlo
Sekai Nippo (newspaper)
