



DIVISION FOR PALESTINIAN RIGHTS

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I. Action taken by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

On 2 May 1985, the Acting Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in a letter addressed to the Secretary-General, drew his attention to incidents which had taken place recently in the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza. The full text of the letter is as follows: (A/40/281-S/17146)

"In my capacity as Acting Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I wish to bring to your attention a number of recent reports concerning serious incidents that have taken place in the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza. These reports indicate a continuing pattern of repression by the Israeli authorities, which appears to be aimed at stifling all forms of opposition by the Palestinian people to the continuing illegal occupation of their land.

"According to the weekly Al-Fajr of 5 April 1985, demonstrations and strikes by Palestinians in celebration of Land Day on 30 March were met with hundreds of arrests, the forcible reopening of shops, heavy censorship of Arabic language newspapers, the closing of schools, and the shooting of demonstrators at several locations in the West Bank and Gaza.

"Further protest demonstrations in the following weeks have reportedly been met with various acts of repression, including gunfire, by the Israeli authorities, leading to an ever-growing list of casualties, particularly of youths and students.

"Al-Fajr reported on 5 April that hundreds of Israeli border police had stormed the al-Ibrahimiyyeh College in East Jerusalem and violently quelled a demonstration by Palestinians in support of striking political prisoners in Asqalan prison. It was reported that the police had arrested 132 students and others, and that many had been injured in the raid, seven of whom had to be hospitalized."

"According to the weekly Al-Fajr of 5 April, a Nablus youth was critically injured and tens of Palestinian youths arrested on 3 April as the Israeli army broke up a demonstration in the Qasabeh district of Nablus. The demonstrators, who were raising Palestinian flags and chanting national songs, were reportedly met with tear-gas and live bullets.

"The same source reported that Israeli border police had shot and wounded four Bethlehem University students on 1 April, following alleged incidents of rock-throwing. The police then barred access to the campus and arrested a number of students, and threatened to close the university for two months.

"Subsequently, Ma'ariv reported on 21 April that units of the Israeli army and of the military government had raided and searched Bethlehem University in connection with a proposed exhibit to mark "Palestine Students Day". Although no illegal materials were found, the campus was then declared a "closed military area".

"Ha'aretz reported on 21 April that a 15-year-old boy had been shot and killed and an 18-year-old youth injured when a border police patrol opened fire on demonstrators at the al-Borj refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, who were protesting the demolition of the house of a man accused of attacking an Israeli police officer.

"In another development, the weekly Al-Fajr reported on 19 April that 12 residents of the Dheisheh refugee camp, including the prominent journalist Hamdi Farraj, were remanded for trial in connection with demonstrations held last January at the camp and were held at the Tulkarm detention centre, which is under the direct control of the Israeli army.

"As on previous occasions, I wish to reiterate the most serious concern of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People at these developments. There is no doubt that, as long as the Palestinian people are prevented from exercising their rights to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty, and their territory remains illegally occupied, tension and violence will continue to prevail in the area, increasingly endangering international peace and security. The Committee remains convinced that a peaceful political solution under the auspices of the United Nations is possible and continues to call on all concerned to co-operate in the search for such a solution.

"In conclusion, I wish to request that this letter be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under item 33 of the preliminary list, and of the Security Council."

On 23 May 1985, the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in a letter addressed to the Secretary-General, informed him of the Committee's profound concern at the current tragic developments in and around the Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut. The full text of the letter is as follows (A/40/339-S/17219) :

"In my capacity as Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People I wish to inform you of the Committee's profound concern at the current tragic developments in and around the Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut. The world is once again watching with horror as the camps at Sabra, Shatila and Burj el-Barajneh are the object of armed attacks. The Gaza hospital in Shatila and a home for the aged in Sabra were destroyed by artillery shells a few days ago, with considerable casualties. Reports today indicated that many injured Palestinians have died for lack of medical care. The fighting is continuing, with great loss of life and destruction, thus adding to the cruel suffering of the Palestinians as well as of the Lebanese people.

"The Committee has repeatedly pointed out that conflict and violence in the region will continue as long as the Palestinian people are prevented from exercising their inalienable rights in their own independent State. We wish to assert once again that the United Nations, and particularly the Security Council have a clear responsibility to ensure the physical safety of the Palestinians and to bring about the exercise of their inalienable rights.

"The Committee remains convinced that positive action by the Security Council on its recommendations, and on the proposed International Peace Conference on the Middle East, would advance prospects for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, and avoid the recurrence of tragedies such as the one now unfolding. It continues to call on all parties concerned to co-operate in the search for a peaceful solution.

"In this connection the Committee urges you to continue to do all in your power to put an end to the violence against the Palestinian refugee camps and to promote a just and durable solution of the Palestinian question, the core of the conflict in the Middle East.

"I should be most grateful if you would have the text of the present letter circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under item 33 of the preliminary list, and of the Security Council."

II. The Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council issue statements on the situation in Lebanon

The following statement was made on 22 May 1985 by the Spokesman for the Secretary-General (SG/SM/3699):

"The Secretary-General is deeply concerned at the escalation of fighting in Beirut, resulting in grievous casualties and material destruction on all sides. In particular, in recent days there has been heavy fighting and casualties in and around the Palestinian refugee camps in the city.

"The Secretary-General appeals to the Lebanese Government and to all concerned to make every possible effort to put an end to violence involving the civilian population, to heed the sufferings and provide for the care of all those who have already been so gravely afflicted and to recognize the vital necessity for a determined move towards conciliation."

The President of the Security Council issued the following statement on behalf of the Council on 24 May 1985 (S/17215):

"The members of the Security Council express their serious concern at the heightened violence in certain parts of Lebanon in the past few days.

"They take note of and fully support the statement issued on 22 May 1985 by the Secretary-General, which also refers to the situation in and around the Palestinian refugee camps, and his appeal to all concerned to make every possible effort to put an end to violence involving the civilian population.

"They reaffirm that the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Lebanon must be respected.

"In response to their humanitarian concern, they strongly appeal for restraint, in order to alleviate the sufferings of civilians in Lebanon."

III. United Nations Asian Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine adopts a Declaration

The following Declaration was adopted by the United Nations Asian Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine held at New Delhi, India, 1 - 3 May 1985:

1. We, the group of Non-governmental Organizations participating in the United Nations Asian Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine, wish to thank the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for convening this meeting. We are indeed honoured by the presence of the Chairman, Members and Observers of the distinguished United Nations body.
2. We also wish to thank the Chief of the Division for Palestinian Rights, the NGO liaison officer, the staff of the Division, the Department of Conference Services including the services of the interpreters for their valuable assistance in the preparation and execution of this Symposium. We believe this meeting marks a pivotal point in the constructive interaction between the United Nations and the Asian NGO community concerned with the Question of Palestine and we look forward to increasing levels of understanding, appreciation and co-operation.
3. Special thanks is extended to the Government of India for hosting this Symposium and for the generosity and co-operation extended to the participants. We were honoured by the presence and statement of His Excellency, Mr. Khurshid Alam Khan, Minister of State for External Affairs, at the official opening of the Symposium. We recognize and genuinely appreciate the long-standing and unfailing support that the Government of India has given to the just cause of the Palestinian people.

4. We also wish to sincerely voice our appreciation to the distinguished experts who spoke here and offered valuable historical, political as well as practical insights into the Question of Palestine and the potential central role to be played by NGOs. The practical suggestions assisted us in formulating future plans for effective collaboration in Asia and the Pacific and in linking our efforts to a broader, global network.

5. We resolutely reaffirm the international consensus that the Palestine Liberation Organization is the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. We affirm the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination without external interference, to return and to the creation of an Independent Palestinian State on its own national territory under the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization, in conformity with relevant United Nations resolutions.

6. We further strongly support the convening of the United Nations-sponsored International Conference on Peace in the Middle East as specified in United Nations Resolution 38/58 C. The Palestine Liberation Organization strongly supported this resolution but it was opposed by both Israel and the United States of America. As the positions of these two Governments constitute a serious obstacle to world peace, we urge more pressure be exerted on both States to join in the global consensus on the issue. We urge those undecided States, especially Members of the Security Council, to lend their support to this resolution. In this manner, we also uniformly support the declaration on this issue adopted by the International NGO meeting on the Question of Palestine held in August 1984 in Geneva.

7. We express our grave concern over the protracted Arab-Israeli conflict. We recognize the basic cause of that conflict is the denial by Israel and its supporters of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. In particular, we regret the record of successive administrations of the United States of America which have supported Israeli State terrorism.

8. The convening of the International Peace Conference on the Middle East, as endorsed by General Assembly resolution 38/58 C, offers the only realistic and practical way towards a solution to the problem of Palestine and the establishment of a Palestinian State.

9. We further reaffirm our belief that only a full and comprehensive solution involving the Palestine Liberation Organization and all concerned countries of the region and with the participation of the United States of America and USSR can create the basis for a just and lasting peace. We reject partial and piecemeal agreements as such agreements have proved to be counter productive and not conducive to a comprehensive peaceful solution and have totally ignored the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

10. This Symposium further asserts the close connection between the struggle of the Palestinian people and every struggle in each part of the world of peoples fighting for their independence, defending their freedom and building their life on the basis of their sovereignty. The cause of the Palestinian people is interconnected with the struggle of all peoples for world peace and against colonialism.

11. This Symposium of the NGOs of Asia and the Pacific positively points to the growing support in the United Nations for Palestinians and the Palestine Liberation Organization. It stresses the very significant role played by the Movement of the Non-Aligned Countries representing over two thirds of the world's Governments in awakening global public opinion to the urgent need to resolve this issue and in exposing the parts played by the governments of the United States of America and Israel.

12. We further endorse the global signature campaign to increase popular support for the proposed international peace conference on the Middle East and will endeavour to co-ordinate our efforts with the Interim Co-ordinating Committee for NGOs throughout Asia and the Pacific culminating in The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on 29 November 1985.

13. We concur that influencing world public opinion is a key factor in the just resolution of the Question of Palestine. As NGOs we have access to local populations, "the grass roots", in many societies and are determined to work to increase their understanding of the Question of Palestine and to effectively mobilize their potential political, social and spiritual power.

14. Beyond these principles, we firmly believe that non-governmental organizations are a unique asset in securing the rights of the Palestinian people, for we can present the issue in its vital human dimension to individuals and other non-governmental organizations.

15. We are aware of the forces opposed to our efforts. But the inherent justice of our cause and the sound construction of a genuine regional and global NGO network will be mutually reinforcing and demonstrably advance our endeavours.

16. We have reviewed and considered the initial activities of the Interim Co-ordinating Committee for NGOs (ICC) established at the International Meeting on the Question of Palestine convened in Geneva in August 1984 and regard it as a suitable transitional mechanism for the initial co-ordination of the worldwide NGO effort on the Question of Palestine. We look favourably upon its transformation from an "interim" to an "international" Co-ordinating Committee after the scheduled consideration of its future structure and composition at the International Meeting on the Question of Palestine to be convened from 9-12 September 1985 in Geneva.

17. We strongly urge the United Nations through the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to assist the ICC in every possible way in its worthwhile efforts to build a viable, global network of NGOs active on the Question of Palestine. This assistance should include

further serious efforts to secure an NGO liaison in Geneva in addition to the current New York-based liaison activities and to aid in the establishment of a properly resourced ICC Secretariat. The central co-ordination of all common NGO activities on this issue is a necessary condition for influencing domestic and global public opinion.

18. We Asian NGOs present here for this Symposium see ourselves as a nucleus of a broader, regional effort. We must reach out, identify and involve many other NGOs committed to a just resolution of the Question of Palestine. To accomplish these worthy goals, we are requesting United Nations assistance, including financial help, to establish an Asian Regional Interim Co-ordinating Committee of NGOs to serve as an initial focus for our regional efforts. We visualise such a Co-ordinating Committee establishing close links with the work of ICC and its successor.

19. The Asian and Pacific Region is an area of increasing geopolitical importance. As a result, forces opposed to the Palestinian cause are attempting to neutralize the traditional commitment of the peoples of this region to the Palestinian cause. Such attempts, notably by the State of Israel and its alter ego, The World Zionist Organization, and as well as by imperialism, must be resisted as they constitute impediments to achieving a just, comprehensive and enduring resolution of the Question of Palestine. We distinguish between Judaism as a religion and political Zionism as manifested by Israel, an unjust, undemocratic, racist, and dangerous ideology. In combating such opposition, Asia and Pacific NGOs could be expected to play a key role as moulders of public opinion in the region.

20. To ensure proper representation of this region at the forthcoming International Meeting on the Question of Palestine, we strongly urge the United Nations through the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to fund the participation of a representative number of NGO delegates from the region. To be effective, such aid should include transportation to Geneva and accommodation during the conference.

21. In co-operation with the stated objectives of the ICC, we Asian NGOs call for the compilation of a regional data base of information on NGOs in Asia and the Pacific active on the issue as a potent addition to global networking efforts. NGOs in Melbourne, Australia, have offered to commence the effort and to assist in the production of regional materials.

22. We are determined to cultivate an expanding regional NGO constituency linked to a worldwide NGO network that will emerge as a significant complementary force in the campaign for the just resolution of the Question of Palestine. We firmly believe that we can most effectively express our solidarity with the Palestinian people in this way. We call upon the United Nations, through the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to offer every assistance, including financial support, to achieve these ends.

23. We look with great interest to the forthcoming United Nations sponsored World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women in Nairobi, Kenya, as a prime opportunity to call attention to the Question of Palestine with special focus on the plight of Palestinian women under occupation. We call upon the Committee to assist us in further strengthening the network of women working for a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East.

24. We urge the election of the Asian Regional Interim Co-ordinating Committee to be composed of representatives of organizations present at this Symposium.

25. We applaud the convening of this Regional Symposium and strongly request the United Nations, through the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to plan a follow-up Symposium in Asia and the Pacific as soon as possible but hopefully within the coming year.

IV. Non-governmental organizations activity and information

1. Solidarity with Palestinian and Lebanese Prisoners:

An evening of solidarity was sponsored by over a dozen Palestinian, Lebanese, Jewish and U.S. human rights organizations on May 11 in New York City. Speakers for the National Lawyers Guild, The November 29 Committee for Palestine and Amnesty International addressed the situation of both Lebanese and Palestinian prisoners. The evening featured the performance of Al Watan, a Palestinian dabke dance group, a slide show, poetry and the testimony of an ex-prisoner. This educational and cultural event was part of an international campaign to expose the plight of Lebanese and Palestinian prisoners.

In related actions the Permanent Secretariat of the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization circulated a press release alerting the public to the violations of the Fourth Geneva Convention by Israel in its transfer of 1,200 Lebanese and Palestinian detainees from Ansar detention Camp in Southern Lebanon to Israeli prisons. It requested maximum efforts by the public to save the lives of these detainees. Such action alerts are one of the many services which AAPSO renders to the entire NGO community.

The International Centre for Information on Palestinian and Lebanese Prisoners, Deportees and Missing Persons in its Information Bulletin No. 18 presented a synthesis of information from international and regional press

and UN Peacekeeping Mission eye witness reports concerning the Israeli launching of Operation "Iron Fist". Special attention is paid to the question of what happened to those taken away and imprisoned by the Israeli authorities.

Amenesty International announced that it was pressing the Israeli government for assurances that some 2,000 people arrested in Lebanon would not be held indefinitely, in violation of internationally accepted human rights standards. It also asked for assurances that an impartial observer or international humanitarian organization would be present at the movement and release of prisoners.

2. The Middle East Research and Information Project is distributing the documentary feature film "Gaza Ghetto" which is a portrait of a Palestinian family which has lived since 1948 in the Jabalia refugee camp. It is meant to reveal the human face of an international crisis and make an argument for a creative solution to the ongoing tragedy of homeless Palestinians.

3. On 27 March in New York City the American Israeli Civil Liberties Coalition sponsored a lecture by Professor Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi of Haifa University on the question "Is Israeli Democracy Incompatible with Basic Civil Liberties?" Reports were also given by officers of the organization recently returned from a trip to Israel.

4. A coalition of several organizations including the International Jewish Peace Union, Mobilization for Survival, New Jewish Agenda and the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee sponsored an open discussion "Breaking the Silence" on 23 May at the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue. Reverend William Sloan Coffin was moderator. Speakers included Dov Yermiah, Executive Director of the Committee Against Racism and for Co-existence in Israel and Munir Fasheh, former dean of Bir Zeit University of the West Bank.

This activity is representative of a growing trend of Arab, Jewish, Peace and Womens' groups co-sponsoring activities designed to cover a variety of view-points in the dialogue on building peace in the Middle East.

5. The Parliamentary Association for Euro-Arab Co-operation sent a delegation to Lebanon 27 March-1 April at the invitation of the Lebanese parliament. The group was led by its Vice-President Michael Lanigan (Senator, Ireland) and included two Belgian members of Parliament and the Deputy Secretary General of the organization. Its conclusions were presented in a press note.

6. The International Association of Democratic Lawyers has issued the report of its Mission of Inquiry entitled "Territories Occupied By Israel (West Bank)". This mission was undertaken by their International Standing Committee of Lawyers on Palestine and Peace in the Middle East.

