



**DIVISION FOR
PALESTINIAN RIGHTS**

ASIAN REGIONAL NGO SYMPOSIUM

ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

**Vigyan Bhawan Conference Centre,
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CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
I. Declaration adopted at the Asian Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine.....	1
II. Statement by His Excellency Mr. Massamba Sarré, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.....	5
III. Statement by His Excellency Mr. Khurshid Alam Khan, Minister of State for External Affairs of India.....	8
IV. Message from His Excellency Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization, Commander in Chief of the Forces of the Palestine Revolution, delivered by Mr. Zehdi L. Terzi, Permanent Observer, Observer Mission of the Palestine Liberation Organization to the United Nations.....	11
V. PAPERS PRESENTED AT THE SYMPOSIUM.....	14
A. The International Peace Conference on the Middle East.....	14
1. Roman Timofeevich Akhramovich, Professor at Moscow State University, Director of the Institute of the Countries of Asia and Africa.....	15
2. Hussam Al-Khatib, Advisor to the Speaker, Syrian Arab Republic.....	18
B. The role of the Palestine Liberation Organization.....	26
Shafiq Al-Hout, Member of the Palestinian National Council, Representative of the Palestine Liberation Organization in Lebanon.....	26
C. The question of Palestine and Asian public opinion.....	30
Irwin M. Herrman, Assistant Director, Footscray Institute of Technology, Melbourne, Australia.....	30
D. NGO collaboration on the question of Palestine and the role of the United Nations.....	36
1. Mohammad Farid Zarif, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations and Vice-Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.....	36

CONTENTS (continued)

	<u>Page</u>
2. Donald Betz, Assistant to the President and Professor of of Political Science at Northeastern State University at Tahlequah, Oklahoma, United States of America.....	41
VI. CLOSING STATEMENTS.....	43
A. Mr. Khaled El-Sheik, Ambassador, Palestine Liberation Organization.....	43
B. Ms. Savitri Kunadi, on behalf of the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.....	44
VII. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS AND OBSERVERS.....	46

I. DECLARATION ADOPTED AT THE ASIAN REGIONAL
NGO SYMPOSIUM ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

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 that 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 that 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 the USSR can create the basis for a just and lasting peace. We reject partial and piecemeal agreements as such agreements have proved to be counterproductive 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 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 NGO committees 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 visualize 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, 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.

II. STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY MR. MASSAMBA SARRE,
CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE OF THE
INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I have the honour to welcome you to this important Symposium which is the first of its kind in Asia. May I, at the same time, extend to the Government of India, our appreciation and gratitude for providing us with the venue for the Symposium and for their assistance and co-operation in the organization of this Symposium.

The Committee is convinced that NGOs have a signal role to play in the efforts made by the international community to find a just and lasting solution to this difficult question. It is our belief that by making the elements of the question better known and by ensuring a broader dissemination of the facts as well as by taking an unbiased look at them, it will be possible to make progress in our search for a solution.

The question has been before the United Nations for almost 40 years and although the Organization's search for a solution which would ensure justice to the Palestinian people as well as to all other people in the region has not been completely successful, at least there has emerged broad agreement on the principles which should serve as a basis for a just solution to the question of Palestine.

Unfortunately, a lack of political will has presented obstacles to the implementation of these principles, even though the United Nations in 1975 established our Committee - the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People - to draw up a programme for the exercise of its inalienable rights by the Palestinian people.

In 1976 the Committee drew up a programme of action which was immediately confirmed by the General Assembly, which has reaffirmed its validity and relevance at each of its subsequent sessions.

However, the implementation of this programme has so far come up against the intransigent opposition of the State of Israel, which persists in denying the Palestinians their national inalienable rights, encouraged in that, it must be said, by the situation in the Security Council, the organ charged with maintaining international peace and security which, owing to the veto of one of its permanent members, has still not approved the Committee's recommendations.

This has been most discouraging. Just as discouraging is the fact that many solutions provided outside the United Nations have not found acceptance either, although many of them contain positive elements which could form the basis of a just and durable solution. There are obstacles, therefore, in the path of any significant progress and the Committee has found it necessary to take every action that might contribute to overcoming the impasse.

A highlight of the Committee's attempts to bring this impasse to an end was the initiative it took in convening the International Conference on the

Question of Palestine in Geneva in 1983. That Conference, which was attended by 137 nations, concluded with a Declaration and a Programme of Action which our Committee is making every effort to implement.

A major proposal at that Conference was that an International Peace Conference on the Middle East should be convened under the auspices of the United Nations, with the participation, on an equal footing, of all the parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the Palestine Liberation Organization, the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. This proposal has since been adopted by the United Nations General Assembly.

Another feature of the Geneva Conference was the presence of 104 NGOs who participated actively in the Conference and demonstrated the importance of the NGO community in the search for a solution.

Our Symposium today had, in fact, its genesis in the Geneva Conference. Our Committee, which had had some contacts with NGOs prior to that date, realized the importance of harnessing the potential that lay amongst NGOs in working towards progress on this question.

Our Committee therefore has made it an important aspect of its work programme to co-operate more actively with NGOs interested in the question of Palestine and to encourage them to work together in this project. Consequently we have embarked on a programme which envisages three symposia for NGOs each year as well as an International NGO Meeting in Geneva annually.

Last year, we organized an NGO Symposium for the North American continent which was attended by over 50 NGOs. Later last year, we had the first International NGO Meeting in Geneva, which was attended by almost 100 NGOs. At that meeting, the NGOs themselves formed a Co-ordinating Committee of which I am sure you are aware and which has been active in co-operating with the United Nations and with other NGOs that were present at the International Meeting. An important suggestion made at the International Meeting was that there should be a signature campaign appealing for the convening of the International Peace Conference on the Middle East. The campaign was launched on 29 November 1984 and already several thousand signatures have been collected. We look forward to the support of all NGOs present here in making the signature campaign a success.

It is our hope that those NGOs that are present today will also find it possible to attend the International NGO Meeting in Geneva, scheduled to be held from 9 to 12 September 1985 in Geneva. This year, we are also organizing symposia, such as the one we have here today, in North America and in Africa. By organizing these symposia, we hope to provide you with an opportunity to acquaint yourselves both with our Committee on one hand and with the other NGOs in the Asian region who are working towards the same goal. These contacts, we hope, will enable you to form a network, a powerful network, which will enhance your activities on this question and make you a potent force in policy-making on this question.

Your participation and the interest which you have demonstrated in this question is especially welcome as it will complement and sustain the efforts made by Governments in the United Nations. Your determination will mobilize greater attention and participation throughout this continent in the implementation of policies which will assist in the solution of the problem. It is the hope of the Committee that you will utilize this opportunity to co--ordinate your efforts and that you will participate in the International Meeting in Geneva in September.

I need hardly add that the Committee is pleased with your co-operation and is prepared to assist you in every possible way. We hope that this Symposium is only the beginning of a long and close collaboration founded on common interest in the cause of the Palestinian people.

Before concluding, I wish to thank you on behalf of the Committee. The task which is entrusted to you is immense and inspiring. It constitutes an important step in the efforts undertaken to render justice to the Palestinian people and to restore peace to that region of the world.

On behalf of the Committee, may I say that I am convinced that your efforts will be crowned with success.

III. STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY MR. KHURSHID ALAM KHAN,
MINISTER OF STATE FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS OF INDIA

I am indeed happy to welcome you all to New Delhi on the occasion of this Symposium organized by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

As the land of the prophets, the cradle of Judaism and Christianity, and Islam - three great religions of the world, Palestine has historically been endowed with special significance. In recent times political geography has accentuated conflict and protracted it in and around Palestine.

India's own sympathy for the people of Palestine and support for the establishment of a Palestinian State, are rooted in our awareness of the historical, territorial and national integrity of the Palestinians. Even during the days of our struggle for national independence, our leaders indentified themselves with the Palestinian cause and raised their voices in support of the establishment of an independent Palestinian homeland. The continuing struggle of the brave Palestinians has evoked sympathy and understanding among the people of India to this day. As the late Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, recalled in her closing address to the seventh Non-Aligned summit held in New Delhi in March 1983, millions, including the Palestinians, were still denied their birthright. She said, and I quote, "We are of one mind in our support for the brave, homeless and much harassed Palestinian people. Israel feels free to commit any outrage, unabashed in its aggression, unrepentant about its transgressions of international law and behaviour. But can it forever obstruct the legitimate rights of Palestinians?"

This Seminar focuses on one of the most important aspects of the problem, i.e. "the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people". After 36 years of United Nations action, the question of Palestine remains as tangled as ever before, with the major protagonists in the field remaining as far apart as they were in the beginning of the United Nations involvement in this issue. Yet peace in West Asia and indeed world peace and security depend on a satisfactory solution to this problem.

Attempts by the international community to convene an International Conference on the Middle East were propelled by a sense of urgency, by an awareness raised to a level of revulsion over the continued violation of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to and in their ancient homeland. These efforts by the international community to find a comprehensive solution of the problem of the Middle East received fresh impetus at the International Conference on the Question of Palestine in 1983, which adopted the Geneva Declaration. This Declaration envisaged that a peace conference on the Middle East, to be convened under the auspices of the United Nations, with participation of all parties to the conflict, including PLO as well as the United States of America, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and other concerned States on an equal footing, should take as its basis the internationally recognized guidelines endorsed at the Conference.

India has fully supported this call. We had however suggested that some flexibility be retained in the selection of participants for the Conference. On the time framework for the convening of the Conference, it is our view that the situation in West Asia does not brook any delay and urgent preparatory measures should be undertaken so that the Conference can be convened at the earliest possible time.

Time is of the essence and delay does not facilitate a solution of the problem in the Middle East. The continued denial to the Palestinian people of their basic and inherent right to self-determination and nationhood is a sordid chapter in a seemingly endless tragedy. We also view with interest, as an interim measure, the proposal of the Secretary-General, contained in his report on the situation in the Middle East, of using the machinery of the Security Council in a pragmatic way to work with the parties concerned on various aspects of the Middle East problem and to distil from the various proposals and plans that have been put forward in recent years the common elements that could help to work out the basis of a negotiated structure. It is important that a process of negotiations be initiated, as the Secretary-General has said, "to clear the ground and to prepare for a full-fledged effort to negotiate the problem".

The Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, from its inception, has consistently advocated a comprehensive solution of the question of Palestine, the core of the Middle East problem and the root cause of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It was at the initiative of the non-aligned countries that the majority of the United Nations resolutions on the subject has been adopted. In the past years, the non-aligned countries have been particularly active in mobilizing international support against Israeli action in the occupied territories and its invasion of Lebanon. The non-aligned countries have also reaffirmed their firm opposition to the Israeli practices and policies in occupied Arab and Palestinian territories and called for the withdrawal of Israel from occupied Syrian Golan Heights. At the Seventh Conference of the non-aligned heads of State or Government, held in New Delhi in March 1983, this question was exhaustively examined. Fundamental principles for the solution of the problem were again reaffirmed.

The Committee of Eight on Palestine set up by the New Delhi summit to "work with the various forces influential in the Middle East for the achievement of a just, durable and comprehensive peace in the region", has just held a meeting at ministerial level on 20 April 1985 in New Delhi and reiterated its full support for the Palestinian people and their struggle for liberation, self-determination and the establishment of an independent sovereign State in their homeland, Palestine, under the leadership of PLO, their sole and legitimate representative.

The Committee, which was given a comprehensive briefing by His Excellency Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the PLO, on the current situation prevailing in the Middle East, has reviewed the evolving situation in the area.

As a member of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, India has fully supported the Committee in its efforts

to secure the rights of the Palestinian people and to promote their cause. Though the basic recommendations of the Committee have remained unimplemented so far, its activities over the years have served to increase the support of the international community to the cause of Palestine.

I would like to take this opportunity of underlining India's solidarity and support for the heroic struggle of the Palestinian people under the Palestine Liberation Organization. India has consistently supported the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people at the United Nations, at non-aligned conferences and in other international fora. As Prime Minister Shri Rajiv Gandhi, in his inaugural address to the Extraordinary Ministerial Meeting of the Co-ordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Countries on Namibia, on 19 April 1985, stated, "No meeting of non-aligned nations can remain silent to the sufferings of the Palestinian people and their righteous cause for regaining their homeland". India's support for the Palestinian cause is rooted in traditional history and has been matched by concrete action. India has given material support to the PLO in various ways. India also support the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in looking after Palestinian refugees.

Despite some recent negative developments, there is reason for optimism. Non-aligned solidarity with Palestine's nationalism and aspirations has remained steadfast. The right of the Palestinian people and the role of the Palestine Liberation Organization have come increasing to be widely recognized. More and more countries have joined the overwhelming majority of the international community in censuring Israel regarding its settlements policy, violation of basic human rights and attempts to make Jerusalem its capital. Many of them have also underlined the necessity of association the Palestine Liberation Organization in any negotiation for a solution of the problem. Mobilization of international public awareness of the true nature of the Palestine problem and of Israel's barbarous policies has much to do with this gradual evolution of positions, and credit should go to the untiring efforts of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People towards increasing the support of the international community for the cause of Palestine.

No people as determined and steadfast in achieving their legitimate rights as the brave Palestinians can be subdued indefinitely. Under the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization, their sole and authentic representative, Palestinians have repeatedly demonstrated their bravery and heroism in resisting Israel's settlers in terms of human lives and resources. Their struggle may be protracted and bloody, but we have no doubt whatsoever of their final victory. If, through these seminars, and the mobilization of international public opinion, we can contribute to making their struggle a little shorter and reducing their sacrifices ever so little, we will have done something worthwhile.

IV. MESSAGE FROM HIS EXCELLENCY MR. YASSER ARAFAT, CHAIRMAN OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION, COMMANDER IN CHIEF OF THE FORCES OF THE PALESTINIAN REVOLUTION, DELIVERED BY MR. ZEHD L. TERZI, PERMANENT OBSERVER, OBSERVER MISSION OF THE PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

It gives me great pleasure, on this day of the convening of your Symposium on the rights of the Palestinian people, to express to you, in the name of our Palestinian Arab people, in the name of my brothers, members of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and in my own personal name, our heartiest greetings.

We express to you our high esteem and profound gratitude for your efforts to promote the legitimate struggle of our people and for your infallible support to the national inalienable rights of our people, including their right to return to their homes, to self-determination and to the establishment of their independent sovereign Palestinian State and to their attainment.

Excellency, dear brothers, you are fully aware that our Palestinian cause is presently witnessing a dangerous phase as a result of the intensification of the Israeli aggressive policies which receive the support of successive American Administrations.

The Government of the Zionist Israeli enemy is intensifying its repression, oppression and terror against our Palestinian people inside and outside our occupied homeland and persistently exercises racist practices by dispossessing them of their basic human rights, paralysing civilian life, destroying the Palestinian economy, expropriating land and water sources, establishing armed colonial settlements in the occupied territories, encouraging and supporting and financing the terrorist Zionist gangs whose aim is to perpetrate criminal actions against our people.

All these acts are being perpetrated with the sole aim of expulsion and forced deportation of our people from their lands and homes, for the implementation of the Israeli plan of Judaization of the occupied Palestinian areas and achieve their ultimate annexation to the Zionist enemy entity.

The Zionist parties compete in the expression of their hostility and racial extremism against our Palestinian people by granting protection and by preserving rules and regulations based on the Zionist racist ideology.

Additionally there is the declared policy of Israel of non-withdrawal from the occupied territories, the non-return of Jerusalem to Palestinian sovereignty and the non-establishment of the Palestinian State and the rejection of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

On the other hand, the American Administration is intensifying its hostile policies and stands against our Palestinian people, and continues to increase its support to the Israeli enemy entity and to its aggressive expansionist policies, by establishing with the said enemy a strategic military alliance aimed against our Palestinian people and the peoples of our Arab nation.

The American Administration also establishes with the Israeli entity a free-trade zone to support its deteriorated economy which is basically devoted to war, to expansionism and to the establishment of colonial settlements. This, in addition to the financial and military aid provided to Israel in the form of non-refundable grants and the moral, political and diplomatic support granted by the United States Administration on all international levels to the extent that it impedes the condemnation of the crimes and aggressive measures against the Palestinian people under occupation and hinders the implementation of the international laws of the international community. The American Administration is the only member of the Security Council that opposes a peace process under the auspices of the United Nations.

The American Administration similarly denies our people their inalienable rights as affirmed by the resolutions of the entire international community and it permanently attempts to bypass the Palestine Liberation Organization, the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and attempts to distort its image by all possible means.

In the face of these enormous challenges imposed on our Palestinian people, they nevertheless continue their struggle and resistance to these oppressive and aggressive Israeli policies and to the hostile United States policies.

The ordeals and hardships will never dissuade nor impair our people's resolve in their struggle, which meets with the support of the peoples of the world and of their democratic peace and justice-loving forces.

The Palestine Liberation Organization has availed itself of every opportunity in the search for peace. This emanates from our firm belief in the need to achieve justice, peace, stability and development in our explosive area, in the interest of international peace and security.

This feeling of responsibility has prevailed among our people and their representatives in the consecutive Palestine National Councils which have repeatedly reaffirmed the determination of our Palestinian people to achieve a just comprehensive peace based on the attainment and exercise of the national inalienable rights of our people, including their right to return to their homes and property, to self-determination and to the establishment of their independent sovereign Palestinian State on Palestinian soil.

Based on the resolutions of our consecutive Palestine National Council sessions and in particular the sixteenth and seventeenth sessions, and also based on the principles of the Fez summit, which reflect the peaceful will of our Arab Nation, and in accordance with the international resolutions, the Palestine Liberation Organization continues its efforts to achieve a joint Arab political plan which aims to contribute to the attainment of a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Middle East conflict.

Honourable brothers, in the name of our people who are suffering the immense ordeals of wars, oppression and occupation and who strive to achieve

peace, in the name of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and in my own personal name, I wish to express to you our profound gratitude for the valuable efforts deployed by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, under the able Chairmanship of our brother Ambassador Massamba Sarré, by holding symposia and international conferences which have greatly contributed to clarifying and unveiling the justice of the Palestinian cause and in informing the peoples of the world of the legitimacy of the Palestinian struggle for liberation as well as in acquiring the respect and esteem of the peoples of the world for the struggle of our people.

Of particular significance is this NGO Symposium, which reflects our conviction that the role of the grass roots - the NGOs - is extremely important, particularly in an issue like the question of Palestine: the fate of almost 5 million Palestinian human beings - an entire nation - and the search for peace and stability in Western Asia and the world. To the representatives of the NGOs, I wish to extend a hearty welcome and to say that we look for your militant support and action now. The convening of the International Peace Conference on the Middle East under the auspices of the United Nations and on the basis of its Charter and relevant resolutions should receive immediate attention.

Allow me in conclusion to reiterate our profound gratitude to His Excellency Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, Chairman of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, to the Government and people of India. India, we wish to recall with pride and great appreciation, hosted only a few days ago a meeting in support of the valiant heroes, the people of Namibia and their sole and authentic representative, SWAPO. Today India is hosting a symposium on the right of the Palestinian people. The message is clear and we are grateful.

I extend to you my sincerest wishes for the full success of the works of this Symposium.

Revolution until Victory!

V. PAPERS PRESENTED AT THE SYMPOSIUM

A. The International Peace Conference
on the Middle East

1. Roman Timofeevich Akhramovich,
Professor at Moscow State University,
Director of the Institute of the Countries of Asia and Africa

Allow me first of all to express satisfaction over the possibility of addressing such an authoritative meeting of representatives of the public movements and organizations from many countries and continents who have arrived to the capital of India to voice again their interest in and attitude to the prospects regarding a real settlement of the Palestine problem.

In the memory of the present-day generation the Middle East has been and remains one of the "hottest points" of the planet. A fierce battle between the national liberation movement of the Arab peoples and imperialism, direct confrontation between the course steered toward aggression, territorial seizures and a desire to defend their rational rights and to bring about peace on a just basis have been going on in that region for more than one decade.

The main cause of the protracted Middle East crisis lies in the criminal policy pursued by Israel, international zionism, and imperialist States, aimed against the Arab countries and the Arab people of Palestine, in the aggressive occupation of the Arab territories, in direct opposition to the solution of the Palestinian problem on a just and democratic basis. Moreover, imperialism, United States imperialism in the first place, pursuing its global and regional colonialist goals, more than ever before counts on the split in the Arab national patriotic forces, provoking clashes in Lebanon, intensifying the plots against the Syrian Arab Republic, making direct attempts to undermine the unity of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Intending to immerse in blood the Palestine resistance movement and thus to take off the agenda the item about satisfying the legitimate rights of the Arab people of Palestine, Israeli ruling circles, with Washington's blessing, have begun and continue the aggression against sovereign Lebanon and carry out exterminating punitive actions against the Arabs, including the Palestinians.

The aggression in Lebanon has exposed in full measure the hypocritical policy of the United States, demonstrating its hostility in regard to the Arabs. Washington extends to the Zionist aggressors its economic, military and political support and active assistance. The so-called "strategic co-operation" of the United States and Israel pursues an open goal of military penetration of United States imperialism into the Middle East. The shameless, unceremonious and cruel actions of the Israeli Zionist rulers would be impossible, if they were not backed by the United States of America.

Trying to force the Palestinians to decline their legitimate rights, Israeli rulers step up terror in the occupied territories, continue the policy of the "creeping annexation", expulsion of the Palestinians from their homelands and creating militarized Zionist settlements. The invaders carry out broad offensives against the Arab culture; they destroy and plunder the Arab historical and cultural heritage. The Middle East remains an arena of criminal actions of the forces guided by the doctrines of undisguised aggression and racism.

As is known, aggression and racism make up the essence of the component part of the Fascist ideology and practice. Fascism is a criminal outgrowth of imperialism which unleashed the Second World War and which brought about innumerable sufferings to mankind. We see now that one of the organic component parts of the present-day imperialist policy is the Zionist doctrine which bears in itself the idea of aggression and racism and which bases its plans exactly on these ideas. Thus, international Zionism, and accordingly the Zionist State of Israel, are a manifestation of one of the models of fascism. It is not in vain that the present-day activity of international Zionism, openly and purposefully connived at by the imperialist politicians in the West on an official State level, is accompanied by such a noticeable intensification of various old and new Fascist movements in the countries of the West (in the Federal Republic of Germany, the United States and others). We observe a certain consolidation of the forces of extreme reaction.

It should be said point-blank that the Zionist rulers of Israel think little about the future of their country binding its population to the shameful and lethal policy of racism and aggression. Such a policy holds no future. This is confirmed by the experience of history and, first of all, the experience of the development of the world today.

The Zionist organizations in the countries of the West behave irresponsibly, trying to carry out a noisy anti-Palestine propaganda, based on gross slander, on the criminal ideas of racism and genocide. These actions of the Zionists inevitably aggravate the atmosphere of hatred and enmity, which can manifest itself not in the way the modern Zionist Nazis want it. The Jewish circles in all countries -- especially those, for example, in the United States of America, who support the criminal doctrines of Zionists -- will have to think seriously. The Arab peoples, taking into account their basic interests, are interested in rallying in the common struggle against the common enemy. The liberation movement of the Palestinian people will be effective as a factor of resistance to the imperialist, Zionist aggression in the Middle East.

The just aims of the Palestinian people have ensured its struggle broad international recognition and the support and solidarity of all progressive, democratic and liberation forces of today.

Your respectable audience is well aware of the fact that the Soviet Union has invariably come out on the side of the just cause of the Palestinians. The Soviet public is firmly convinced that the attainment of a just and durable peace in the Middle East is impossible without the implementation of the inalienable rights of the Arab people of Palestine, including its right to self-determination and creation of an independent State.

Today, addressing you from this rostrum, I would like to draw your attention once more to the proposals on the Middle East settlement which the Soviet Union made public on 29 July 1984. These proposals contain a comprehensive, all-round detailed plan for a comprehensive settlement of the Middle East conflict. My country is coming out for a genuinely collective way

of solving the issue with the participation of all sides concerned. No separate settlement is able to resolve a complex knot of Middle East contradictions. It seems that everyone agrees with that conclusion now, except the United States of America and Israel.

The Soviet proposals have formulated the principles for a Middle East settlement, which, as is known, received broad international support at the United Nations and other international organizations, in the League of Arab States, in the Movement of Non-Alignment and others.

The section on ways for achieving a settlement contains clear-cut and definite formulas of the main goals of the proposed international conference on the Middle East. According to the Soviet Union, that conference must end in signing a treaty of number of treaties, embracing the following components for a settlement, organically connected between themselves: withdrawal of Israeli troops from all Arab territories occupied since 1967; implementation of the legitimate rights of the Arab people of Palestine, including its right to the creation of its own statehood; establishment of a state of peace and ensuring the security and independent development of all States parties to the conflict. At the same time, there should be elaborated and adopted international guarantees for the observance of the terms of such a settlement. All understandings reached at the conference must constitute a single whole, approved by all the participants.

The Soviet Union believes that all Arab countries, having common borders with Israel, that is the Syrian Arab Republic, Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon, as well as Israel itself, must have the right to participate in the conference. PLO, as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, must necessarily be an equal participant in the conference. This is a principled issue, because a Middle East settlement is unthinkable without the solution of the Palestinian problem and it cannot be resolved without PLO participation.

USSR and the United States, playing a major role in Middle Eastern affairs and being the co-chairmen of the previous conference on the Middle East, should also be participants in the conference. Participants in the conference should also include, given general consent, certain of the States of the Middle East and the adjacent regions.

The Soviet Union has addressed to all the participants in the conflict an appeal to act on all disputable issues proceeding from a sober-minded account of the legitimate rights and interests of each other, and all other States should contribute to the search for such a settlement. The principal significance of the Soviet proposals lies first of all in the fact that they take into account the basic interests of all countries and peoples involved in the Middle East conflict and they proceed from a desire to ensure a just peace and genuine sincerity to the peoples of that region.

The Soviet public believes that the struggle of the Arab peoples against aggression, for independence and social progress, is closely linked with the struggle for the preservation of international peace. In their turn, the

successes of the international movement for peace, against the militaristic actions of imperialism, have an invaluable significance for a Middle East settlement.

In our country there are no people indifferent to the events in the Middle East, where imperialism and zionism manifest their savage face. It should be said point-blank that a big mistake is made by all those who are prone not to attach special significance to that circumstances. We are convinced, that no one can underestimate the fact that feelings of indignation over the crimes perpetrated by the Zionists are spreading among broad strata of the international public. The current conference has been an illustration of just that.

We in the Soviet Union are champions of the broadest unification of forces, coming out against the criminal activities of zionism and imperialism, for the establishment of a just peace in the Middle East in support of the rights of the Palestinians. It is in this light that we consider the high mission of this authoritative meeting. Our conference will demonstrate that the leaders of Israel and the United States Administration supporting them cannot ignore infinitely the will of the overwhelming majority of the world community.

May the broadest international support for the just cause of the Palestinians grow stronger!

2. Hussam Al-Khatib, Advisor to the
Speaker, Syrian Arab Republic

The need for such a conference

Despite the noble efforts that are being made by the United Nations, the constantly widening gap between the theoretical advancement of the question of Palestine in the United Nations and the sharp deterioration of the situation in the Middle East is bewildering. As from the 1970s onwards the United Nations General Assembly in particular has been deeply preoccupied in the discussion of the different aspects of the problem of Palestine: the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, the human rights of the Palestinians under occupation, the legal status of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the Middle East conflict, Israeli practices and infringement of international law, Israel's co-operation with the South African régime, Israel's aggression and military adventures, the plight of the Palestinians in the camps, the necessary social and sanitary conditions for them, relief and placement, etc.

In fact, the convening of the Geneva Conference on the Question of Palestine has come as a coronation of all these efforts of the United Nations. Its wide attendance, its clear and categorical Declaration, its detailed recommendations, its full endorsement by the United Nations General Assembly (resolution 38/58 C of 13 December 1983), all these appearances gave the impression that the theoretical aspects of the question of Palestine have been fully examined and what remains is action in the field. The well organized and painstaking efforts of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People has helped, probably more than any other single factor, in the attainment of this peak in the General Assembly.

Unfortunately, the picture on the ground is quite different. It is almost the other phase of the moon. Israeli policies of aggression, expansion, oppression, violation of human rights, colonization, deportation, closure of academic institutions, alteration of the demographic and geographical nature of the occupied territories, collective punishment of villages and camps, etc. still continue as strong and ruthless as ever. (Does one need here detailed reference? Do not the successive resolutions of the United Nations on these subjects form a huge material that is very difficult to reference in detail? And is not this fact the best substantiation of what the recent paper has started with?) The Palestinians do not seem more protected after those series of resolutions. Their plight continues to acquire more and more tragic dimensions. Even geographically, those who were always the victims of only the air bombing have become in 1982 in Lebanon the target of direct tank and ground artillery, let aside massacre, demolition of homes and famine. Furthermore, PLO, which has always been proud of its democratic integrity and its flexibility in dealing with ideological and political differences, has found itself, for the first time in its rather long history, victim of disunity and perplexity. After all, what remains to be said to the Palestinians under occupation or his brother in diaspora? True, the Palestinians are not desperate at all in spite of all the suffering, but still

they need someone to tell them when and how their tragedy will come to an end; they know the beginning but no one can tell them any word about the end. And around the Palestinians there are also the Arabs, at least those of the Golan Heights and southern Lebanon. The same Israeli tactics are applied there, more destruction and more bloodshed, more violations of human rights, more victims, more tension, more threat to the area's peace and stability. In brief, every day the tragedy is taking catastrophic dimensions.

At the same time there is real hard work in the United Nations for coping with the grave situations, but there are also obstacles which seem beyond control. The Security Council, which has the supposed power of action and which is looked upon as the source of hope for finding a way out of this cul de sac seems to be the victim of its very own construction. The right of veto is concurrently being used by one super-Power in order to protect the aggressor from any sanctions in spite of the presence of a wide consensus over condemning its practices. By insisting that balance is needed and not justice the United States veto obstructs all opportunities for United Nations action in the Middle East. By blocking the ways of international action it leaves room only for two options: either the Camp David style of institutionalizing the aggression and injustice or simply mere chaos.

Thus the idea of an international conference comes as a rescue from the present cul de sac. It is bitterly needed at least in order to keep international work going and to keep the door open for the exploration of the long-contemplated just and durable peace. Whether the Conference will be a substitute for the lack of action on the part of the Security Council or an extension of the existing phenomenon, nobody can tell. But still the matter is worth trying.

To conclude this section, it can be said that the International Peace Conference is needed for the following main reasons:

- (a) It comes naturally as a second step after the Geneva Conference on the Question of Palestine and it is supposed to translate the Geneva Declaration and recommendations into action;
- (b) It comes as a fresh experience in the exploration of new horizons of international work for finding a just solution for the question of Palestine and for establishing durable peace in the Middle East;
- (c) It comes as a forum for the participation of all parties concerned on the highest level possible, on an equal footing and within arrangements free from the pre-imposed institutional bonds of the existing international bodies;
- (d) It comes as a new opportunity for more international concentration on the developments of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the continued deepening of the suffering of the inhabitants of the Palestinian and Arab occupied territories;

(e) It also comes as a new mechanism for the intensification of the world public opinion campaign for peace in the Middle East and against policies of aggression and violation of international law as well as human rights;

(f) Finally, the International Peace Conference on the Middle East is needed not only because of the continued aggravation of the situation in the Middle East but also because of the absence of any other concrete options for international work.

Objectives and substance

The Geneva Declaration states that the Conference is aimed at achieving a comprehensive, just and durable solution for the Arab-Israeli conflict, one of its basic elements being the establishment of an independent Palestinian State in Palestine. 1/

General Assembly resolution 38/58 C goes into detail in stating the provisions for the Conference. In these provisions the aims too are included. In the light of the present discussion it seems necessary to have these provisions, or guidelines as they are called in the resolution, stated here. In fact, they summarize the major conclusions of the United Nations and other international bodies, such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union, regarding the conception of a peaceful settlement of the Middle East conflict. Paragraph 3 of resolution 38/58 C states that the General Assembly:

"3. Welcomes and endorses the call for convening an international peace conference on the Middle East in conformity with the following guidelines:

"(a) The attainment by the Palestinian people of its legitimate inalienable rights, including the right to return, the right to self-determination and the right to establish its own independent State in Palestine;

"(b) The right of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the representative of the Palestinian people, to participate on an equal footing with other parties in all efforts, deliberations and conferences on the Middle East;

"(c) The need to put an end to Israel's occupation of the Arab territories, in accordance with the principle of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force, and, consequently, the need to secure Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem;

"(d) The need to oppose and reject such Israeli policies and practices in the occupied territories, including Jerusalem, and any de facto situation created by Israel as are contrary to international law and relevant United Nations resolutions, particularly the establishment of settlements, as these policies and practices constitute major obstacles to the achievement of peace in the Middle East;

"(e) The need to reaffirm as null and void all legislative and administrative measures and actions taken by Israel, the occupying Power, which have altered or purported to alter the character and status of the Holy City of Jerusalem, including the expropriation of land and property situated thereon, and in particular the so-called 'Basic Law' on Jerusalem and the proclamation of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel;

"(f) The right of all States in the region to existence within secure and internationally recognized boundaries, with justice and security for all the people, the sine qua non of which is the recognition and attainment of the legitimate, inalienable rights of the Palestinian people as stated in subparagraph (a) above;"

The positions of the different States that have accepted the idea of the Conference do not move outside these guidelines despite the fact that some States lay more stress on certain guidelines and others seem to be selective or cautious according to their different positions. This is natural since the Conference is meant to provide an open opportunity for ideas and suggestions within the general context of the guidelines which have been repeatedly confirmed by the overwhelming majority at the General Assembly.

So the major task of the Conference is to achieve justice and peace in the Middle East according to the relevant United Nations resolutions.

Participation in the Conference

On the point of participation there is an atmosphere of international consensus. Paragraph 4 of resolution 38/58 C says:

"4. Invites all parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the Palestine Liberation Organization, as well as the United States of America, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and other concerned States, to participate in the International Peace Conference on the Middle East on an equal footing and with equal rights."

The Geneva Declaration of 1983 is identical with this, and it takes the opportunity to stress the fact that the Conference is to be held under the auspices of the United Nations. 2/ This assertion is of great importance since the international peace conference is meant to be an extension of United Nations efforts in this respect. The United Nations remains the safest and most reliable framework for peace-making.

The above-mentioned paragraph 4 is quite clear on the matter of participation. The participation of the two super-Powers is indispensable. The "other concerned States" have been defined through a letter from the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Among the very few States which object to the idea of an international peace conference are Israel and the United States. Their objection is not limited to the idea of the conference. They also refuse the participation of PLO which is considered by the United Nations and the world community as the representative of the people of Palestine.

It should always be stated - as it is rightly done in the United Nations literature on the question - that PLO's full participation on an equal footing and with equal rights is a condition sine qua non for the success of any effort towards peace in the Middle East. Other participation problems should be settled also by the United Nations.

The major predicament

Any consideration of the chances of success or failure for the international peace conference should take into consideration the categorically biased position of the United States not only against PLO but also against the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. From the very beginning it should be remembered that the chances of convincing the United States to withdraw its objection to the participation of PLO are rather rare. In this respect, it should not be forgotten that it was the negative position of the United States in the Geneva Peace Conference of December 1973 that made it possible for Israel to decide not to go to Geneva if the Palestinians were present. Moreover, the growing Israeli intransigence finds its roots in the absolute and unreserved backing of Israel by the United States on every conceivable level. This super-Power, which supposedly bears a great burden of responsibility in the international life of our era, has allowed itself both to be answerable for all those offences committed by its ally, Israel, and to stand in the way of justice by using the veto or other means in order to defend Israel, thus obstructing the will of international consensus. All this could have been relatively understood had the United States cared to use its influence on Israel for at least controlling or modifying the latter's inhuman attitude towards the Palestinians and the other Arabs under occupation. But, contrarily, what happens is that, even when a sort of difference between the positions of the two allies eventually emerges, the American position tends to bend towards the Israeli position. Take, for example, the retreating American attitude towards the settlement policy in the occupied territories or the principle for the necessity for Israel to pull out from the occupied territories with slight border modifications. In both cases phrases like "illegal and obstacle to peace" and "1967 borders" have now given way to languid phrasing which suggest that Israeli clinging to acquisition of land and to settlement policy may at the end convince the Arabs to exchange land (whose land?) for peace (peace for whom?).

Public statements, however, are not always the repositories of truth. Then let us turn to deeds and actual policies. American aid to Israel has reached almost imaginary figures. It increases every year. It is coupled with a rise in the standard of technical military assistance. Israel now rates first among other countries both in the amount of aid received from the United States and the size of per capita aid. The actual figure of total United States official aid to Israel in 1984 amounts to \$3 billion and a half, which means that each Israeli citizen has received in 1984 something like \$1,000; whereas the figure in Egypt, for example, hardly amounts to \$40.

United States arms supplies have played a major role in creating Israel's modern war machine. Israel's war machine costs are clearly far beyond the State's economic means. Israel's overall mobilization resources include 450,000 men. They are armed with the most modern sophisticated American

weaponry. The United States Government declares always that it wants to keep Israel stronger than the whole bloc of the Arab States.

One can go endless to enumerate the huge United States military aid to Israel from the war industry to technological and communication assistance, to the question of the nuclear weapons, to the field assistance during the military clashes, etc. But this is not the major topic of the present paper. Moreover, relations between States are in principle a matter of their own concern. But here we face a case wherein the aid of a super-Power is used by its ally to commit more offences against the other peoples and to obstruct and defy international work for peace. Worse still is the fact that on the few occasions when the United States tried to make a connection between the flow of its aid to Israel and the latter's conduct in the area it failed to keep up its policies, and in several cases tended to take the direction of appeasing the aggressor. It is well known, for example, that the first official accord between the United States and Israel was signed on 30 November 1981, i.e. just after the intensified Israeli air raids on both Beirut and the Palestinian refugee camps around the Lebanese capital. Ironically, the accord was called the "Memorandum of Mutual Understanding in the Field of Strategic Co-operation". Less than one year after the Israeli occupation of Lebanon in 1982, and despite some official United States objections (not to its principle) an annex to the memorandum was signed in 1983. To all appearances, and in spite of all Israeli practices against international law and human rights, Washington seems to be determined to lay greater and greater emphasis on the special nature of United States-Israeli relations militarily, politically and economically and also to seek the most effective forms of such a partnership.

Any realistic preparation for the International Peace Conference on the Middle East must cope with this situation. An examination of the bearing of this partnership on the cause of peace in the Middle East leads one to believe that the problem of the United Nations disability to put into effect its resolutions does not only lay in the structure of the Organization but in the political position of one super-Power. Will the peace conference be able to find a way out? All means of work should be explored and tried, including international, political and media pressure. This is a vital issue, and if efforts achieve no success in this respect there lies the danger of running out of time and confining the conference to public opinion and media activity instead of concrete action.

International action, not "sit and talk" style

Another aspect of United States policy which any international work for peace is destined to cope with is this super-Power's activity in the Middle East, and probably outside that area, towards acting as a mediator for peace agreements which take little notice of United Nations efforts and moral authority. Here the interests of both the United States and Israel combine to make the Middle East a zone of influence. The oppressed is told to just sit with the oppressor and talk without any conditions. In the first place this means that the land acquired by the use of force belongs to the occupying Power which can exchange it for other privileges. The Camp David accords and Israeli-Egyptian treaty that followed in 1979 are an example of what is hidden for the Palestinians and the Arab area. The Palestinians were denied even the self-rule that was stated in the accords. The Arabs were divided and

weakened. The Americans were stationed in Sinai and the Israelis condensed their military action against the Palestinians, the Syrians and the Lebanese.

It might be useful here to listen to an official Syrian argument in this regard. The Syrian letter of acceptance of the principle of the International Peace Conference states the following:

"The events that have occurred in the Middle East region have demonstrated that partial and piecemeal solutions cannot lead to the establishment of a comprehensive, just and durable peace in the region. The situation has become even more complex and explosive and Israel is committing one aggression after another without hindrance and in defiance of the United Nations Charter and international law.

"It is now clear that the policy of force and fait accompli which Israel has been pursuing, with the unlimited support of the United States of America, is the main obstacle to the conclusion of a just and comprehensive peace in the region." 3/

Day after day it becomes clear that to bring the oppressed to accept the conditions of the aggressor is not peace-making. But, whatever one's opinion may be regarding Camp David policy style, it is clear that if the United States made the same efforts within the framework of the United Nations the results would be more balanced and even more applicable and durable. Furthermore, there is no wisdom in keeping a super-Power like the Soviet Union outside any peaceful effort or in telling the countries of Europe, which have kept always traditional relations with the Middle East and whose security is tightly connected with that of the area, that they have nothing to do with peace-making efforts in that particular area.

Finally, nothing brings balance, justice and durability like international action. Peace needs balance and probably guarantees. These guarantees cannot be the responsibility of any single Power; it is an international responsibility within the framework of the United Nations. Only in this case guarantees can be "guaranteed" not to become signposts for exerting power influence. All parties concerned should concentrate their efforts to lead the international peace conference to success. All efforts outside the framework of the United Nations bear the danger of expediency and may even jeopardize international action for peace.

Main recommendations

The International Conference is needed at least for the following main reasons:

(a) It comes naturally as a second step after the Geneva Conference on the Question of Palestine and it is supposed to work for translating the Geneva Declaration and recommendations into action.

(b) It comes as a fresh experience for the exploration of new horizons of international work for finding a just solution for the question of Palestine and subsequently for establishing durable peace in the Middle East.

(c) It comes as a forum for the participation of all parties concerned on the highest level possible, on an equal footing and within arrangements free from the pre-imposed institutional bonds of the existing international bodies (no veto at least).

(d) It comes as a new opportunity for giving more international concentration on the development of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the continued deepening of the suffering of the inhabitants of the Palestinian and Arab occupied territories.

(e) It also comes as a new mechanism for the intensification of the world public opinion campaign for peace in the Middle East and against policies of aggression and violation of international law as well as human rights.

The major task of the Conference is to achieve justice and peace in the Middle East, to restore the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and to work out a just solution for the question of Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict in all aspects.

More careful effort should be exerted for defining the parties concerned and for ensuring their positive participation in the International Peace Conference. The participation of PLO is a condition sine qua non. Special efforts should be exerted in order to remove the United States objection to PLO participation and to secure a positive and whole-hearted participation on her part.

All parties concerned are called upon to create an atmosphere of positiveness, to exert all efforts possible in order to secure the success of the Conference and to refrain from any activities that may have a negative bearing on the work of the Conference, namely partial settlements and bilateral arrangements outside the framework of the United Nations. It should always be stressed that the peace conference is held under the auspices of the United Nations and within the context of its Charter and the relevant resolutions.

B. The role of the Palestine Liberation Organization

Shafiq Al-Hout, Member of the Palestinian National Council, Representative of the Palestine Liberation Organization in Lebanon

With the dismemberment of Palestine in 1948, the Palestinian people lost all control over their affairs, their institutions and political life in general. Even in terms of their national identity and status they ceased to be referred to as Palestinians. Some become Israelis, others Jordanian, still others Palestinians under Egyptian administration and probably then were referred to simply as Palestine Refugees under the care of either the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) or the host States of the region.

For about 16 years, the Palestinians struggled to overcome the problems of dispersion, annexation and oppression by Israel and loss of political and national identity. The existential reality of the Palestinians between 1948 and 1964 and the commitment of the Palestinians to take the initiative in leading the struggle for liberating their homeland and return to their historical soil made it inevitable for them to come forward, at an appropriate historical moment, namely in May 1964, to organize the first Palestinian national congress after 1948. That Congress, which met in Jerusalem, resolved to establish the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to mobilize Palestinian, Arab and international support for the just cause of the Palestinian people. Thus was born the organization which, with tremendous difficulties, sacrifices and confrontations with various hostile forces, eventually became the recognized representative of the Palestinian people.

Then, as now, PLO included different political groups, factions and tendencies. All of these groups - such as Fatah, the Popular Front, Democratic Front, etc. - eventually came to be represented in the Palestinian National Council and exercised their influence on PLO policy from within the Council. While at the moment there is important strife within PLO related to divergence in policy issues and the tactics of national liberation, it is important to mention that it is possible, as it has been before, to reconcile these difference within the process of dialogue which Palestinians are carrying on. It is also important to mention that no faction within the Palestinian community has ever challenged the legitimacy of PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, a legitimacy that it has obtained from the Palestinian people themselves. PLO acquired that legitimacy because it articulates Palestinian aspirations, pursues the struggle for Palestinian self-determination by all legitimate means including military, political, diplomatic, social, economic, cultural - relying on the basic constitutional document namely the Palestine National Covenant as well as the resolutions of the Palestinian National Council sessions.

Since the emergence of PLO, the Palestinians have been able to retrieve their national identity as Palestinian Arabs, regardless of their present political or social status and, accordingly have focused their attention and loyalty on PLO. Because of this, it has been possible to claim that PLO embodies the Palestinian will and is therefore considered today the surrogate of the Palestinian State and Government.

In those capacities, PLO organized and supported national institutions of the Palestinian people irrespective of place. It has embodied political groups

that are national, it organized social welfare institutions to care for the needs of the Palestinian people, it organized national economic enterprises such as SAMED [the economic institution of PLO], it has organized the Palestine Red Crescent Society to provide free medical care for the poor Palestinians and Lebanese (when in Lebanon); it sponsored Palestinian cultural institutions such as the research centre, arts centres, etc., and, actively promoted Palestinian cultural productions in books, plays, folklore, societies, etc. It has sponsored and supported national education endeavours - from primary to higher education and, with the support of friendly Asian, Socialist and other States, secured fellowships and scholarships for thousands of Palestinians to study abroad. Perhaps one of the more important achievements of PLO is the assistance it has rendered to our people under Israeli occupation, bringing the attention of the world community to the oppression and aggression that Israelis commit against them. We are proud of the steadfastness of our people under occupation and we are proud of the national resistance which they are waging against the Israeli occupation forces. All of these measures complement the militant activities which PLO, through its military forces, have been carrying out against the Israeli occupation.

As a Government, PLO organized the various departments to take care of all the needs of the Palestinian people; it has received voluntary contributions from Palestinians, it has received assistance from friendly States, it has levied a tax on Palestinians, it has run their affairs where possible. And as the principal governing authority of the Palestinians, it has received the recognition of the Arab States at the Rabat Summit Conference in 1974 and was recognized by the United Nations as the legitimate representative of the Palestinians in 1974, and became a full member of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and maintained a similar status in the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Because of its credibility and because of its political and diplomatic initiatives it has been able to formulate significant proposals for the settlement of the conflict in Palestine. Its call for the establishment of a non-confessional State in which Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews would have equal rights in Palestine was the first major initiative which PLO took to settle the conflict in Palestine. With the 1974 proposals PLO considered the possibility of de facto coexistence of two States in Palestine, as a provisional solution. Accordingly, PLO accepted the United Nations resolutions calling for the implementation of Palestinian self-determination leading to the establishment of a Palestinian State in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

With this clear vision of the future destiny of PLO, it has been able to support mechanisms that would lead to the resolution of the question of Palestine. It has supported efforts through the United Nations to convene an international conference on Palestine that would include all relevant parties including PLO and the members of the Security Council and has mobilized international opinion to support such a mechanism.

Through its active policy of dialogue with all progressive forces around the world including those forces in Israel that support the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the establishment of a Palestinian State, PLO has given every indication of its absolute commitment to peace with

justice. I think it is clear today that the policies of PLO are consistent with the international consensus on the nature of peace in the Middle East. This consensus is opposed by Israel and the United States, but with time it is fairly certain that the international consensus will eventually prevail. When that happens it will be recognized that PLO's role has been most crucial in generating it by its correct formulation of the issues, by its mobilizing of the Palestinian people, and by obtaining Arab and international support.

I know that I have been very brief in this exposé about the role of PLO; because I intended to be so. Firstly, because I am sure that the great majority of the participants in this symposium are very well informed about the details. And I am certain that there is a lot of published information at the disposal of those seeking more facts and figures about the role of PLO.

Secondly, because - and out of experience - I feel that what is gravely needed in such gatherings is the collective effort of all of us to respond to the very essential question, and that is how to contribute more effectively and fruitfully to implement the agreed-upon rights of the Palestinian people referred to in United Nations language as the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. How can we help to have these rights exercised on the ground, and to translate them into facts and realities?

With regard to this question, I would like to present a humble contribution. And, at the outset I would like to reiterate our peoples' appreciation of the good efforts of the United Nations, and particularly those of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. Being aware of the obstructive measures exerted by the United States against United Nations resolutions, one is obliged to explore and seek new means to neutralize the United States obstructive role. Personally, I believe that we have more and more to address ourselves to the masses through their non-governmental representatives who always reflect a much more advanced position than Governments. Through NGOs and other different public organizations - trade unions, cultural centres, etc. - I am sure we can exert the needed pressure against the United States to neutralize it, or at least to minimize its prejudices against international consensus. And, at this point, I would like to state firmly that we in PLO are fully aware of the power and global strength of the United States. Consequently we are not very happy to wage a confrontation against it. In fact, it is the United States Government which is waging this war against our people, and it is the Government of the United States that has chosen to make an enemy of itself against the Palestinian people and their just cause, consequently challenging world public and governmental consensus. In this respect I would like to pick my brain and those of my colleagues' here about the appropriate language that we should use in our deliberation and literature with the purpose of achieving what we are striving for, i.e. the implementation and the exercise of our inalienable rights. I have noted, through my experience, that this question constitutes a controversial issue. Thus, we in PLO would like to hear more and learn more from your own perspectives and experiences. The Asians, in their fight against colonization and all forms of discriminative ideologies, have gained a tremendous history of wisdom from their traumatic experiences. And I am sure that we are going to benefit a lot from their contributions to this symposium.

One last word before concluding this statement. I want to assure all the participants here, so that they are not alarmed by what they hear about divisions and differences within the Palestinian arena. Without any attempt to underestimate the last sad developments, I would like to stress again that all groups and factions that constitute the PLO's different institutions are determined to keep PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Not a single group called for a substitute to PLO. The opposition represented in what is called the "National Salvation Front" made it clear that it is not a substitute for PLO, and will never endeavour to be so. The differences are not strategic. They are organizational basically in addition to disagreement about certain tactics adopted by the leadership to achieve everybody's strategy.

All of us in PLO, including the opposition, agree upon the need for an international conference that could achieve a comprehensive solution for the Middle East crisis, the core of which is the question of Palestine. It is only through such a conference that we can guarantee the rights of the Palestinians, see that they are implemented and hope to see that peace is prevailing in the area once and for all.

C. The question of Palestine and Asian public opinion

Irwin M. Herrman, Assistant Director,
Footscray Institute of Technology, Melbourne, Australia

It is indeed a privilege and a pleasure to be with you today to participate in this Asian Regional Symposium on the question of Palestine.

Australian interests in the Middle East are varied and long-standing.

Ever since the Australian state of New South Wales despatched troops to the Sudan 100 years ago, the strategic position of the Middle East on the overland route to India and the Suez Canal life-line to Mother England have been high in the consciousness of Australian leaders.

So much so that until the end of the Second World War the Middle East was seen by Australians as a region second in importance only to Europe.

This helps to explain Australian participation in Middle East hostilities in two world wars. 3/

It also helps to explain the events of 1956, even though Asia had supplanted the Middle East in priority of Australian strategic importance. In 1956 Australia's Prime Minister Robert Menzies pursued his ignoble role during the Suez crisis as if little or nothing had occurred in the intervening 71 years since Australian troops were despatched to confront the Mahdi. 4/

There was as we know an important Palestinian dimension to the Suez crisis; but to all intents and purposes Australian public and Government perceptions of the Palestine question were no different from those in most Western-oriented countries in the mid-1950s, less than a decade after the establishment of the State of Israel.

Such opinion in Australia was overwhelmingly pro-Israeli. Typical was that of Labour leader, Dr. Herbert Evatt, who as Minister for External Relations had played a considerable role at the United Nations General Assembly leading up to the approval of the 1947 partition resolution for Palestine. 5/

Sensitivity to the Palestinian cause extended no further than to the "Arab refugees" who it was believed had left Palestine of their own volition and who were allegedly now being manipulated by hostile neighbouring Arab States.

Over later years economic factors have played a key role in shaping changes in Australian perceptions of the Palestine question. More than 80 per cent of all Australians now favour the establishment of a Palestinian homeland; 6/ and, the Australian Government is now committed to self-determination for the Palestinians and to the establishment of a Palestinian State if the Palestinians so choose. 7/

Increasing demand for Middle East oil and expansion of Australian trade with the area promoted those changes.

The significance of Australia's dependence on the Middle East for 30 per cent of its oil was not fully appreciated until the 1973 oil crisis when in the space of four months, the price of a barrel of "Arabian light" oil rocketed from \$US3.07 to \$11.65. 8/

There were two aspects to the burgeoning oil factor. First, the need to ensure supplies when both the demand from and cost to Australians were increasing rapidly. By 1990 Australia might be importing 60 per cent of its petroleum requirements, mostly from the Middle East Gulf area at a cost of nearly \$A5 billion annually. 9/

Second, the need to meet these costs likewise focused on the Middle East. By 1980 the Middle East had become Australia's fourth largest export market and the one with the greatest prospect for expansion, as oil revenues world-wide began to flow back to the area.

A year earlier the "Harries Report" on Australia and the third world highlighted the oil/trade duality of Australian policy objectives towards the Gulf States.

The "Harries Report" identified the strategic importance of the Middle East to OECD countries, including Australia. The report cautioned that adequate defence of Western interests in the region required policies "sufficiently sensitive and flexible" to take into account issues over which regional peoples were most exercised and where their will was likely to prevail in the long term. The Arab-Israeli conflict was identified as one such issue. 10/

When the then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade and Resources, Mr. Anthony, visited Riyadh shortly after the "Harries Report" was submitted to the Australian Government, his Saudi hosts delicately raised the Palestine question with him amidst talk of trade relationships.

What in 1980 was but a brief exchange of views on the Palestine question and its pervasively dangerous effect on the Middle East became a year later on a return visit by Mr. Anthony an explicit Saudi request for Australian help notably in its voting patterns at the United Nations on the Palestine question.

Mr. Anthony indicated in reply that there was a growing awareness and even-handed policy being applied by Australia over Palestine. To which one astute journalist accompanying the Minister observed that as to the future of the Palestinians the time for genuine even-handedness by Australia had arrived. 11/

Government policy was moving out ahead of public opinion as the decade of the 1980s became one in which the Middle East assumed unparalleled importance to Australia.

Developing Australian-Middle East relationships posed an educational challenge arising from widespread ignorance of Australians about the Middle East, its people and their problems and aspirations. This was despite the participation of thousands of servicemen in world wars in the region and the fact that nearly one quarter of a million Australians hail from there.

In order to help remedy that defect a new organization, the Australasian Middle East Studies Association (AMESA), was established five years ago. The organization's purpose is to provide scholars, teachers and interested individuals from the business community, the media and government agencies with a platform for the exchange of ideas and the presentation of scholarly papers in the field of Middle East studies. 12/

As a non-governmental organization, AMESA proceeds on the basis that only unfettered access to information can allow soundly based judgements and action from academia, industry or from our leaders in Canberra in their shaping of Australian foreign and trade policy. 12/

The establishment of AMESA aroused hostility from Australian Zionists, who for decades had had it mostly all their own way in access to the media and government lobbies in Canberra. They certainly had little incentive to promote greater access to information on the Middle East, nor balance on the Arab-Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

When in 1972 Labour Prime Minister Gough Whitlam pursued even-handedness he incurred the wrath of the organized and Zionist-dominated leadership of the so-called "Jewish community" in Australia. 13/

I made a submission to an Australian parliamentary sub-committee on the Middle East in 1980. I pointed out that if Parliament wished to account for how attitudes to the State of Israel were formed notably amongst the organized "Jewish community", it should investigate the operations of the World Zionist Organization through its instrumentalities in Australia. For example, it could monitor the use of funds collected for charitable purposes and any application to political ends. 14/

I suggested that Canberra parliamentarians acquaint themselves with what the United States Senate Foreign Relations Committee chaired by Senator J. W. Fulbright itself had done two decades earlier about such world-wide activities of the World Zionist Organization operating behind the facade of monolithic "Jewish communities" in places such as the United States and Australia. 14/

In my submission to Parliament, which I was invited to present personally, I was but one of several witnesses arguing for accelerated change in Australia's attitude towards the Palestine question. I described the Palestine question as political, century-old, ubiquitous in its threat to world peace and ideologically determined. It arose from political Zionism whose proponents had succeeded in establishing a Zionist State in 1948 and subsequently infusing that State with laws, regulations and internal and foreign policy determinations geared to its central purpose - the in-gathering of Jews from around the world. 14/

The Zionist honeymoon with Canberra was, to quote an Australian Zionist leader, already showing signs of drawing to a close. 15/

In early 1981 the Fraser Government was waiting for the approach by the new Reagan Administration in Washington towards the Middle East. Canberra was stating with increasing frequency its support for a Palestinian homeland

alongside Israel as a development of its support for United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). 16/ It did not specify where such a homeland might be; and Australian voting patterns at the United Nations continued largely to reflect United States positions on the various Arab-Israeli-Palestinian resolutions dealt with by the General Assembly. 17/

The impact of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June the following year and especially the siege of Beirut further eroded the Zionist position in Australian public opinion as Foreign Minister Street, in the wake of Sabra and Shatila, affirmed that Israel must recognize the legitimate rights of the Palestinians including a Palestinian homeland. 18/

Within a year the newly elected Hawke Government gave further substance to the trend by leap-frogging the Reagan Plan in acknowledging the right of self-determination for the Palestinians, including their right if they so choose to independence and the possibility of their own independent State.

At the same time Canberra approved the setting up of an office of the League of Arab States in Australia and for Australian ambassadors to include the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in their range of contacts. It also called on Israel to freeze the settlement programme on the West Bank which it termed "illegal" and an impediment to peace. 19/

The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs protested this "deviation" from Australia's traditional pro-Israel stance while one Australian Zionist leader angrily but reliably interpreted the move as further indication that 1983 Australia was "now part of the world". 19/

Given sufficient time I could trace the twists and turns in the saga from Australia's decision under the Fraser Government in October 1981 to participate in the multinational force in the Sinai to the recent announcement by the Hawke Government confirming it would withdraw Australia's contingent in 1986. 20/

In the context of this paper an important feature is the consistent attitude over four years and two Administrations that Australia's continued participation in the Sinai force was contingent on progress towards resolving the Arab-Israeli-Palestinian conflict in all its aspects. 21/

I have traced today a discernible and positive trend in the development of Australian attitudes towards the question of Palestine. It is notable that this has occurred under a Government whose Prime Minister for most of his public life has been identified as pro-Israeli. 22/ But it is also a Government in which Foreign Minister Bill Hayden had the courage as Opposition Leader in 1980 while on a fact finding mission to the Middle East to seek out and confer with Chairman Arafat. He is a Foreign Minister who has demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the Zionist ideological underpinnings of the question of Palestine. 23/

I shall not gloss over the problems that still remain. Notable is Canberra's refusal to recognize PLO as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people even though it does consider it a most important participant in the Middle East peace process. And although a Palestine

information office headed by a PLO representative has been functioning in Australia for over two years now, one may detect evidence of Canberra's belief that PLO could be more decisive and unambiguous in spelling out its own position on the key elements thus allowing Australia, a member of the United Nations Security Council over the next two years, to encourage Washington to take a lead in the peace process. 24/

There still remains difficulty over securing visas for persons identified with PLO and invited from abroad on speaking tours of Australia. 25/

It should be mentioned, however, that Elias Freij, Mayor of Bethlehem, visited Australia last year at the invitation of Mr. Hayden. Mayor Freij seized the opportunity to put the Palestinian case to the Australian public. The City of Footscray gave him a civic reception which has led to the twinning of the two municipalities as a basis for future Footscray-Bethlehem co-operation. 26/

Over the past year, two developments involving Australia have had implications for the question of Palestine.

During the Federal election campaign last December which returned the Hawke Labour Government to power, the issue of nuclear confrontation between the super-Powers emerged as important to Australian domestic politics. Since that time the United States dispute with New Zealand over the visit of United States nuclear-armed ships has added to the concern of Australians, as well as New Zealanders. 27/ This indirectly brings into focus the Palestine question, at the centre of conflict between Israel and the Arab States, with the chronic threat of super-Power nuclear confrontation as when during the 1973 war between Israel and Egypt and the Syrian Arab Republic, President Nixon put United States forces on nuclear alert. 28/

The second development is even more specific to the subject of this Symposium, the question of Palestine and Asian public opinion.

I am referring to the decision by the Australian Zionist leadership to draw on Zionist resources world-wide to mount a campaign on behalf of Israel in the Asia and Pacific region, an area of emerging geo-political importance.

Drawing inspiration from President Reagan's recent observation that that region is "where the future is" an organization calling itself the Asian Pacific Jewish Association was established five years ago and headed by Australian Zionists. It organized an "Asian and Jewish Colloquium" last September in Singapore with participants from Japan, China, India, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, the Republic of Korea and Nepal. The Colloquium avowedly was part of a campaign to sensitize public opinion élites in the Asia-Pacific region on how the needs of their developing societies can benefit from better relationships with Israel. 29/

Sentiments expressed at a Conference of the Asian Pacific Jewish Association which preceded the Colloquium with Asian élites left no doubt that a Zionist education campaign directed at the remaining Jewish communities of the region aimed to prepared them for immigration to Israel. Otherwise, warned the Rector of Tel Aviv University drawing on demographic data, "none of your descendants will be Jews". 30/

As a Jew myself, I find such attitudes objectionable yet entirely predictable from a Zionist movement which seems bent on repeating what it has already accomplished amongst Jews in Arab countries where, as in Asia and the Pacific, they had lived for centuries. 31/

Just over 40 years ago, the most distinguished of Australian Jews, Sir Isaac Isaacs, who was the first Australian-born Governor-General, raised a clarion call about the inevitably dangerous consequences of zionism and its goal of establishing a Zionist State in Palestine. 32/

To me it seems incumbent on both Jew and non-Jew alike to do what they can to prevent those communities in the Asia-Pacific region from becoming the latest casualties of that dangerous and anti-democratic ideology, as Sir Isaacs described political zionism.

To encourage those persons from this part of the world who are working towards a lasting and just Middle East peace and to pay tribute to the graciousness of our Indian hosts, I can think of nothing more appropriate than to evoke the memory of one of India's revered, spiritual and political leaders, Mohandas K. Gandhi.

The Mahatma was amongst the early supporters of the Palestinians and even as he denounced Nazi persecution of Jews in Europe he rejected zionism for Palestine using language similar to that employed by Sir Isaac Isaacs. 33/

Finally, I thank the organizers of this Symposium for the opportunity to share my thoughts with you and look forward to participating in the remaining sessions.

D. NGO collaboration on the question of Palestine
and the role of the United Nations

1. Mohammad Farid Zarif, Permanent Representative of Aghanistan
to the United Nations and Vice-Chairman of the Committee on
the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

The subject I shall be discussing in my paper is "Non-governmental collaboration on the question of Palestine and the role of the United Nations".

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in discharging its responsibilities in accordance with its terms of reference approved by the General Assembly, has always been searching for additional ways and means of furthering the cause of the Palestinian People. Since its inception in 1975, the Committee has been fully conscious of the paramount importance of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in enhancing public awareness of the Palestinian tragedy and informing public opinion in favour of a speedy and just solution to the question of Palestine. It has actively participated in the meetings, conferences, symposia, colloquia, solidarity events, and other gatherings organized by various NGOs throughout the world in support of the Palestinian cause.

It was not, however, until the holding of the International Conference on the Question of Palestine at Geneva in September 1983 that a very determined effort was made to bring together as many concerned NGOs as possible under the same roof, not only for an expression of solidarity, but also for the purpose of co-ordinating their future activities among themselves and their co-operation with the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

In a meeting held on 5 December 1983, in conjunction with the International Conference on the Question of Palestine, over 100 NGOs adopted certain recommendations on the future collaboration of NGOs with the United Nations system. These recommendations, inter alia, called for the establishment of NGO committees around the United Nations to promote the plan of action adopted by the Conference, to institute dialogue among the people concerned and to inform the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People of NGO activities, publications and plans of action. The participating NGOs called on the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to establish close links with all interested NGOs, in particular with those represented at the International Conference, and to facilitate co-operation among NGOs and between NGOs and the United Nations. They urged the Committee to call consultative meetings with NGOs to be held at Headquarters in New York and the United Nations office at Geneva to examine possibilities of co-operating in implementing the Programme of Action adopted by the International Conference.

Cognizant of the significant role that NGOs can play, the International Conference devoted a considerable section of its Programme of Action to the subject of co-operation with NGOs. In Section D, Chapter II, of its Programme of Action, the International Conference confirmed that the dissemination of accurate and comprehensive information world-wide and the role of NGOs and institutions remained of vital importance in heightening awareness of and support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent sovereign State. To these ends the Conference called for the organization of meetings, symposia and

seminars by the relevant organizations of the United Nations system on topics within their terms of reference and relating to specific problems of the Palestinian people by establishing closer liaison with NGOs, the media and other groups interested in the question of Palestine.

Section 3 of the Programme is almost entirely devoted to the role of NGOs. Convinced of the important role of world-wide public opinion in resolving the question of Palestine, and in the implementation of the Declaration and Programme of Action, the International Conference urged and encouraged NGOs to increase awareness by the international community of the economic and social burdens borne by the Palestinian people as a result of the continued Israeli occupation and its negative effects on the economic development of the West-Asian Region as a whole. The Conference urged and encouraged NGOs and professional and popular associations, the media, institutions of higher education, parliamentarians, political parties, organizations for solidarity and intellectuals, particularly in Western Europe and North America, to intensify their efforts to support the rights of the Palestinian people in every possible way; to undertake exchanges and other programmes of joint action with their Palestinian counterparts; to investigate the conditions of women and children in the occupied territories; to disseminate relevant information to increase public awareness and understanding of the question of Palestine; to promote the study of the question of Palestine in all its aspects; to establish special investigative commissions to determine the violations by Israel of the Palestinians' legal rights and to disseminate their findings accordingly; to initiate with their Palestinian counterparts consultations, research and investigations on the juridical aspects of problems affecting the Palestinians' struggle, in particular the detention of political prisoners and the denial of prisoners-of-war (POW) status to detained members of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO); and to join their counterparts in other parts of the world in giving their support, where it has not been done, to an initiative which would express the desire of the international community to see the Palestinian people at last living in their independent homeland in peace, freedom and dignity.

The General Assembly at its thirty-eighth session adopted resolution 38/58 B on 13 December 1983 by a vote of 127 in favour to 3 (Canada, Israel and United States) against, with 17 abstentions. In paragraph 3 B of this resolution, the General Assembly requested "increased contacts with non-governmental organizations and the convening of symposia and meetings for non-governmental organizations in different regions in order to heighten awareness of the facts relating to the question of Palestine" during the biennium 1984-1985.

In response to General Assembly resolution 38/58 B, and in pursuit of the objective of further increasing its contacts with NGOs, the Division for Palestinian Rights, under the guidance of the Committee, organized a North American Non-Governmental Organization Symposium on the Question of Palestine. This symposium was held at United Nations Headquarters from 25 to 27 June 1984, as the first in a series of non-governmental symposia and international meetings. The North American Symposium, in which more than 60 organizations and some 20 panelists participated, adopted a declaration calling upon the peoples and Governments of the United States and Canada to take definitive steps to secure a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Arab-Israeli

conflict; the core of which is the question of Palestine. The participants voiced their support for the United Nations, especially its work to achieve a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine through the implementation of relevant resolutions which, in their view, reflected the existence of an international consensus on the elements of such a peace. They agreed that the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to national self-determination and statehood within historic Palestine encompassed the right to return to Palestine, the right to be represented by their chosen representatives, PLO, and the right to live securely in peace with all the neighbouring States. They were of the belief that all parties to the conflict should come together in an international peace conference on the Middle East.

While expressing gratitude to the United Nations for the creation of an NGO liaison staff function and for the provision of annual NGO meetings, the participants in the NGO symposium in North America urged the United Nations to include, in the mandate of the NGO liaison function of the Division for Palestinian Rights, work on the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women to be held at Nairobi in 1985, which should facilitate the inclusion and full participation of Palestinian women in the conference. They also urged the United Nations to assist the North American NGO community in establishing a clearing-house for information on the question of Palestine. The United Nations was also urged to continue the development of a bi-monthly North American calendar of NGO activities and facilitate its wide dissemination; to produce a comprehensive directory of all NGOs working on this issue including those that have not participated in any United Nations activities; to co-ordinate the development of a guide to resources; "how to" expertise and action-oriented networking, including the development of a telephone tree for the communication of urgent information. They agreed to create ways for better communication among themselves and for the dissemination of their collective resources with a view to the formation of North American public opinion as a joint NGO-United Nations venture.

Pursuant to resolution 38/58 B, an international NGO meeting on the question of Palestine was held at Geneva from 20 to 22 August 1984 in which more than 100 organizations and 26 panelists participated. The NGO meeting, which was organized by the Division for Palestinian Rights, expressed its particular gratitude to the United Nations for the creation of an NGO liaison staff function and for the provision of annual NGO meetings and symposia on the question of Palestine and called upon all the peoples and all the Governments to take definitive steps to secure a comprehensive, just and lasting peace for the Arab-Israeli conflicts. They decided to establish an Interim Co-ordinating Committee (ICC) for NGOs composed of 18 NGOs which constituted a positive development to further liaison between NGOs and the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, through the Division for Palestinian Rights. They requested the Committee to ensure that the 1985 International Non-Governmental Conference devoted a session to the discussion and defining of the future structures for co-operation of NGOs with the Committee and the Division. They also decided to launch a campaign to collect signatures from the peoples of the world in support of an international peace conference on the Middle East and, in this context, they called upon the Committee, through the Division, to assist NGOs in that most important endeavour by providing administrative facilities and

support in order to ensure the success of that petition. This campaign, which was launched on 29 November 1984, will culminate on 29 November 1985 and the results will then be presented to all parties involved.

The international NGO meeting called upon the Committee, through the Division, to campaign actively in order to bring new organizations, especially from those areas of the world that were not represented at the international meeting, into the work of solidarity in support of the Palestinian people and into the family of NGOs; to strengthen further the network of women working for a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East with particular focus on the situation of Palestinian women in preparation of the NGO forum in Nairobi in 1985; to facilitate co-operation and co-ordinating of NGOs on a regional basis; and to expand the Bulletin of the Division for Palestinian Rights to include a regular section on NGO activities and information.

In the closing statement which I delivered at the conclusion of the international NGO meeting in my capacity as Acting Chairman of the meeting, I welcomed the establishment of an NGO Interim Co-ordinating Committee on Palestine and reiterated the desire of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to develop its relations and co-operation with NGOs with a view to maintaining the momentum that the international NGO meeting had generated.

A United Nations symposium for NGOs on the question of Palestine was held at Geneva on 3 and 4 November 1984. This symposium, which was also organized by the Division for Palestinian Rights, adopted certain proposals for common action and future collaboration. These proposals, inter alia, called for a senior NGO liaison officer from the United Nations Division for Palestinian Rights to be based at Geneva with permanent close co-operation with the Secretariat of the NGO ICC. The office of the NGO liaison officer shall, according to these proposals, serve as a focal point for the collection and dissemination of material, information on action campaigns and quick alarm for all NGOs. The participants reiterated the appeal of the previous NGO meetings for the convening of an international peace conference on the Middle East, attended by all parties to the conflict under the auspices of the United Nations, as called for by the United Nations General Assembly resolution 38/58 C.

In paragraph 5 of its resolution 39/49 A adopted on 11 December 1984, the General Assembly requested the Committee to continue to extend its co-operation to NGOs in their contribution towards heightening international awareness of the facts relating to the question of Palestine.

The present symposium is the second of the five regional and international seminars, symposia and meetings which were scheduled to be held in 1985 alone. The first was the NGO Seminar held at Geneva on 4 and 5 March 1985. The forthcoming three events are the North American Symposium, to be held in New York from 10 to 12 July 1985, the African Symposium to be held at Dakar from 5 to 7 August 1985, and the International Meeting to be held at Geneva from 9 to 12 September 1985.

These gatherings together constitute a pool of experience and information pertaining to the question of Palestine from which not only have the participating NGOs benefited but from which also the committee has drawn valuable conclusions for the future expanded co-operation and co-ordination of its activities with NGOs.

Most of the proposals submitted by the previous NGO gatherings have already been implemented by the Division for Palestinian Rights. Work is continuing on the remaining ones.

The impact of the increasingly important phenomenon of "grass-root" organizations in the forming of public opinion, and of government policies for that matter, justifies the need for a substantial enhancement in the quality and expansion in the scope of co-operation among NGOs and between NGOs and the United Nations, first and foremost the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the Division for Palestinian Rights.

I have no doubt that the Asian regional NGO symposium will take due note of this fact and adopt such proposals as are conducive to more productive and fruitful collaboration in this issue of common interest.

2. Donald Betz, Assistant to the President and
Professor of Political Science at
Northeastern State University in
Tahlequah, Oklahoma, United States of America

Summary of main points

- I. Non-governmental organizations and the question of Palestine: a review of collaborative efforts with the United Nations
 - A. Preparing for the International Conference on the Question of Palestine (ICQP), March-July 1983
 - B. ICQP, August-September 1983, role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs)
 - C. North American Symposium on the Question of Palestine (NASQP), June 1984
 - D. International Meeting on the Question of Palestine (IMQP), August 1984
 - E. Formation of Interim Co-ordinating Committee (ICC) - first attempt to create a co-operative structure for global network of NGOs
 - F. Regional Symposia, 1985
 - G. IMQP 1985 - plans for transformation from "Interim" to "International" Co-ordinating Committee
 - H. Broadening, deepening the network

- II. Role of NGOs in the search for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East
 - A. To increase public, global awareness of the facts related to the Question of Palestine
 - 1. The question of Palestine is a human, as well as a land, issue
 - 2. The role of stereotypes in limiting global awareness of the Palestinian people
 - 3. The vital importance of challenging and changing publicly-held perspectives of the Palestinian people

- B. To seek support for ways and means to enable the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights in Palestine
 - 1. Public opinion as a key to policy change on the question of Palestine in North America, Western Europe and Israel
 - 2. The challenge of expanding contacts with other NGOs, including Israeli peace organizations
 - 3. Through central co-ordination by ICC, increased information flows among NGOs worldwide can enhance effectiveness

III. Toward NGO collaboration

- A. Global Signature Campaign - origins, objectives, status report
- B. NGO Directory
- C. Future Projects - completion of audio-visual directory, directory of NGO Meetings

IV. Co-ordinated NGO activity as an alternative source of ideas and action in the search for a just and lasting resolution of the question of Palestine that concentrates global attention on its human dimensions.

VI. CLOSING STATEMENTS

A. Mr. Khaled El-Sheik, Ambassador Palestine Liberation Organization

At the conclusion of the works of this Seminar, I wish to express gratitude and appreciation to all the distinguished participants, representatives of non-governmental organizations, experts and the organizers of this Symposium. On behalf of the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian people, I wish to affirm here, once again, our determination to continue our struggle, by all means, until we attain and exercise our inalienable rights. We shall continue our struggle in the Palestinian, Arab and international arena. Our struggle is for national liberation and independence, it is for self-determination without external interference, it is part of the struggle against colonialism and neo-colonialism, it is against imperialism and foreign domination, it is for the elimination of all forms of racism be it apartheid or zionism.

Your message to Chairman Yasser Arafat affirms your full understanding and unconditional support for the first cause of our people and our unity of ranks.

To our brothers, sisters and comrades-in-arms, the non-governmental organizations: we value your declaration very highly. We wish you success in your efforts to co-ordinate your activity and link it with the activities of the international NGOs, co-operating in your joint action in support of the international process for a peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict based on the norms of international law and the respect of the inalienable rights of peoples. A just solution to the Palestine question, the termination of the state of dispersion of our people and their return to their homes where they can exercise freely their right to self-determination and establish our sovereign independent Palestine - it is only through this solution that peace can prevail and be guaranteed. As you rightly concluded, the only process to attain the cherished peace is through the convening of the International Peace Conference as decided by the United Nations resolutions.

I wish to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for having organized this Symposium. I am confident that the just requests outlined in the Declaration will receive your attention and appropriate action. The NGOs are the driving force that influence public opinion and the policies of Governments.

Finally I wish to extend our profound gratitude to the Government and the friendly people of India and to reiterate the expression of thanks conveyed by Chairman Arafat in his message to the Symposium.

Thank you and we look forward to greater concrete achievements at your International Meeting on the Question of Palestine in September 1985.

B. Ms. Savitri Kunadi, on behalf of
the Chairman of the Committee on
the Exercise of the Inalienable
Rights of the Palestinian People

It is my privilege to preside over the concluding session of the first Asian Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine. I do so in the absence of the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, H.E. Mr. Massamba Sarré, who could not be present in our midst today. It is a singular honour for me, as the representative of India in the Committee, to have this unique honour at the first Asian Regional NGO Symposium hosted by my own country.

We have now come to the end of the first Asian NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine. I think we may describe it as an experiment in co-operation between the United Nations and NGOs on this important question and I am sure you all agree that it has been a most interesting and rewarding experience. Our meeting was indeed privileged to receive a message from H.E. Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization, at its opening session. We were privileged also to hear an inspiring address by H.E. Mr. Khurshid Alam Khan, Minister of State for External Affairs of the Government of India. We wish to express our thanks to Chairman Yasser Arafat for his message to Mr. Khurshid Alam Khan for sparing his valuable time for us.

The Declaration you have adopted reaffirms views which are held by an overwhelming majority of the international community, but are, unfortunately, still required to be shared by many more. A clearer understanding of the facts will promote progress towards acceptance of a just, comprehensive and durable solution to the problem. Your adoption of the Declaration by consensus represents a further commitment on your part to continue to work for justice for the Palestinian people.

I would like to take this opportunity to stress, once more, the importance that our Committee attaches to the convening of the International Peace Conference on the Middle East. We are glad to see that you too share this conviction. The Declaration adopted by you strongly supports the convening of the International Peace Conference on the Middle East under the auspices of the United Nations, as specified in United Nations General Assembly resolution 38/58 C. It stresses that the convening of the International Peace Conference on the Middle East offers the only realistic and practical way towards a solution of the problem of Palestine and the establishment of a Palestinian State. Your Declaration also reaffirms its support for a full and comprehensive solution to the problem and rejects all partial and piecemeal agreements. It 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. It acknowledges the very significant role played by the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries in finding a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the problem. In addition, the Declaration contains several recommendations and specific suggestions with a view to promoting the Palestinian cause and securing the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

The NGOs have a definite role to play in promoting a successful outcome of the global signature campaign to convene the International Peace Conference on the Middle East. I would appeal to you once more to participate actively in the signature campaign that has been launched and gather as many signatures as you possibly can. The more signatures we have, the greater the impact that the campaign will have. The responsibility of spreading the facts relating to the question of Palestine still remains and it is one you have shouldered. The dissemination of the facts and the achievement of more widespread understanding of the situation can be advanced through co-operation between the United Nations and the NGOs on one hand, and amongst NGOs themselves on the other. The foundation stone in this new structure of co-operation has now been laid. We look forward to a long and close relationship in tackling this challenging task before us. It has to be a continuing process - one in which our efforts cannot be relaxed until our objectives are fully attained. We have taken due note of the recommendations of the Declaration and the specific requests contained therein. The Committee will consider these requests in the course of its work. I am confident that your determination to continue to work for this cause, as manifested here over the last three days, augurs well for our continued co-operation.

I thank you all for your active participation in this Symposium, which has contributed to its success. Our special thanks are due to the panelists for their presentations and particularly to the moderators, who took on the additional responsibility of guiding the discussions. I also wish to thank all participants who have contributed towards the successful outcome of our work. I take this opportunity also to thank the members of the United Nations Secretariat for the efforts they have all made to make this event a success. Our special thanks are due to the Government of India for the close co-operation and generous assistance extended to us both prior to and during the symposium. India's commitment to the Palestinian cause is well known. We acknowledge the positive contribution of India as the Chairman of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and as a current member of the Security Council to the Palestinian cause.

I think we have made a good start. Your contribution here will play its part in the next event scheduled in this programme. I refer of course to the international meeting of NGOs to be held in Geneva in September this year. It is our hope that you will all find the time to attend that meeting, too. We believe that these symposia should be a recurrent feature, so that we are assured of close contacts in the future. We would always be interested in hearing reports of your activities and stand ready to co-operate and assist you whenever required. With these few words I wish you all good luck and success in your efforts.

I declare the first Asian Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine closed.

VII. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS AND OBSERVERS

Non-governmental organizations

All India Indo-African Friendship Association
All India Indo-Arab Friendship Association
All India Peace and Solidarity Organization
All India Women's Conference
An-Najah University
Arab Parliamentary Union
Asian Christian Peace Conference
Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development
Centre for West Asian and African Studies
Indian Council of World Affairs
Indian Federation of United Nations Associations
Indian Society of International Law
Indo-Arab Friendship Association
Indo-Arab Society
Institute of Middle East Studies
International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions
Jawaharlal Nehru University
National Federation of Indian Women
Palestine Committee for NGO
Peace and Solidarity Organization of Afghanistan
United Nations Association of the Arab Republic of Egypt
United Nations Association of Mongolia
United Schools International
World Assembly of Muslim Youth
World Association of World Federalists
World Federation of Teachers Unions
World Muslim Congress

Members and observers of the Committee on the Exercise of the
Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

H.E. Mr. Massamba Sarré (Senegal) - Chairman
H.E. Mr. Victor J. Gauci (Malta) - Rapporteur
Miss Savitri Kunadi (India) - Vice-Chairman of the Working Group
Mr. Zehdi L. Terzi (Palestine Liberation Organization) - Observer

Government of India

H.E. Mr. Khurshid Alam Khan, Minister of State for External Affairs
Dr. J. S. Teja (West), Ministry of External Affairs
Mr. V. K. Nambiar, Director, United Nations Division,
Ministry of External Affairs
Mr. Rajiv Misra, Under-Secretary, United Nations Division,
Ministry of External Affairs

Panelists

Prof. Roman Timofeevich Akhramovich (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics)
Mr. Shafiq Al-Hout (Palestinian)
Dr. Hussam Al-Khatib (Syrian Arab Republic)
Dr. Donald Betz (United States of America)
Dr. Irwin M. Herrman (Australia)
H.E. Mr. Mohammad Farid Zarif (Afghanistan)

States Members of the United Nations represented by observers

Democratic Yemen - Mr. M. N. Ali
Iran (Islamic Republic of) - Mr. Bahman Aghai Diba, Second Secretary
Syrian Arab Republic - H.E. Mr. Mohammad Khodor
Tunisia - Mr. Mohamed El-Bechir Buellouz, Minister Counsellor
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics - Mr. Valeri Fomin, Second Secretary
Zimbabwe - Mr. Nebist MUKONO, First Secretary

Intergovernmental organizations

League of Arab States, Tunisia
League of Arab States, New Delhi
Organization of the Islamic Conference

National liberation movements

African National Congress of South Africa
Palestine Liberation Organization - H.E. Mr. Khaled El-Sheik
Mr. Yousef Mohamed El-Esh
Mr. P. S. Sharma

Notes

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