



DIVISION FOR
PALESTINIAN RIGHTS

UNITED NATIONS EUROPEAN REGIONAL NGO SYMPOSIUM
ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

Vienna International Centre
Austria, 30 June to 1 July 1986

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INTRODUCTION

In pursuance of General Assembly resolution 40/96 B of 12 December 1985, the third United Nations European Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine was held at the Vienna International Centre, Austria, from 30 June to 1 July 1986. The theme of the symposium was "The inalienable rights of the Palestinian people". Thirty-four NGOs participated in the symposium as well as 15 observers.

The meeting was opened by the Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and head of the Committee delegation, Mr. George Agius. In his statement, the Rapporteur stressed the importance of the Declaration adopted at the Second International NGO Meeting on the Question of Palestine, held at Geneva from 9 to 12 September 1985, in its support for the convening of an International Peace Conference on the Middle East.

In his statement on behalf of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Mr. Zehdi L. Terzi, Permanent Observer of the PLO to the United Nations, underlined the importance of the current meeting focused on Europe and the support that the grass roots organizations showed by bringing the message across through parliamentarians, trade unions and other groups. Their aim, he said, was to resolve the root cause of the problem in the Middle East, by enabling the Palestinian people to exercise its inalienable rights in Palestine and thus help find a just solution to the question of Palestine .

PANEL DISCUSSION

Mr. Erwin Lanc, former Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs of Austria, in his opening statement, explained that his country's interest in the Middle East is based on its geographical affinity and historical links with that region and on the conviction that Europe's security could not be separated from events in the Middle East. In 1979, he continued, former Chancellor Bruno Kreisky of Austria, speaking before the General Assembly, had expressed the following basic facts on which any settlement of the Middle East problem should be based:

(a) The State of Israel is a reality and has the right to be recognized as such and the right to exist within safe and secure borders;

(b) The existence of the Palestinian people is also a reality. Like every other people, the Palestinian people has national rights, including the right to its own State;

(c) The PLO represents the Palestinian people: those who want to talk with the Palestinians will thus have to speak with the PLO;

(d) Use of force is not a legitimate means for the acquisition of territory. Israel must therefore withdraw from the occupied territories.

Israel's security, according to Mr. Linc, could not be safeguarded by the occupation of Arab territories including East Jerusalem. No peaceful solution, which should be based on the principle of "peace for land", could be reached without talks between those directly concerned, the Palestinians and Israel, and without the consent of the regional Powers or the two super-Powers. Therefore, his country was in favour of the idea of an international peace conference on the Middle East under the auspices of the United Nations. Austria believed that several rounds of informal consultations between the interested parties had to precede the conference. A careful approach was indispensable and the preparatory talks should be as flexible as possible, especially as far as the participants were concerned. A greater degree of unity within the PLO and the Arab world would improve their positions for future negotiations.

Since 1982, he affirmed, there had not been any diplomatic move. Arab countries should come up with not only political declarations but with concrete proposals that would enable other countries to act (such as the European Economic Community).

He concluded by stressing that an active Arab peace policy was needed, for it would show the Arab world that the Palestinian people had a greater number of friends in Europe and they were all prepared to work towards an equitable and peaceful settlement of the conflict.

* * *

Michele Achilli, Chairman of the Institute for Development Studies in Milan, focused on the differences of opinion between certain European States and the United States on the relationship with Arab countries which are determined by the Palestinian issue. European countries, representing the southern flank of NATO, also had a different approach on terrorism and the logics of retaliation. Those countries had a vital interest in a just and lasting peace in the Mediterranean and had the following reasons to find a solution of this problem:

- (a) The creation of a privileged relationship with the whole Arab world;
- (b) The elimination of the instability of the region, which is one of the elements of the inter-Arab conflict;
- (c) The contribution to the growth and consolidation of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, which could increase their political weight.

If Europe wanted to survive as a political entity in the future, it should promote north-south relations rather than traditional relationship between the two super-Powers and itself.

According to him, the inter-Arab conflict was deeply rooted in the European colonialist strategy of dividing in order to dominate more easily. The Camp David accords, he continued, had further deepened the rift between the Arab countries.

European uncertainty and lack of determination was a useful alibi for those in Washington who had decided on different options. It was also a weak point for those who would like to see a change in the direction of American politics in the Middle East but did not have the necessary support.

Resolving the Palestinian problem could be an essential factor in the revival of the political weight of Europe, which, apart from the Venice Declaration, had not taken significant political action towards the recognition of the PLO as the legal representative of the Palestinian people. On the contrary, the PLO leadership was weakened precisely because Yasser Arafat had not found real interlocutors for his peace policy.

European public opinion, he continued, was often ahead of the Governments in its support for the struggle of the Palestinian people. He was of the opinion that the only way to overcome the political impasse was by convening an international conference along the lines indicated by the Geneva Declaration on Palestine of September 1983. The NGOs should step up their information and education campaigns to stimulate public opinion towards new forms of solidarity with the struggle of the Palestinian people.

* * *

Mr. Vinogradov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, stated that it was appropriate on the part of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to appeal to European public opinion since those States play a major role in world politics and had a special relationship with the Middle East both in world history and in current politics.

He further stated that Western European countries, to a certain degree, were to blame for the state of war in the Middle East because their involvement had not been equal to their political weight. The majority of European States had voted for the Partition Plan and therefore for the creation of two States - an Arab State and a Jewish State. They should therefore bear the responsibility for carrying out the Plan to enable the Palestinian people to acquire their own statehood.

Unlike the United States, Europe was not seeking to establish a military presence in the Middle East. The militarization of the region by "foreigners from faraway places" did not serve the interests of the Europeans since it led to instability in regions directly adjacent to Europe.

Europe should strive to stop the reckless arms race, in particular in outer space. Israel, he added, had become a "military and strategic partner" of the United States and was also involved in the "star wars" programme. The European nations, Mr. Vinogradov continued, should be equally active in the humanitarian aspect concerning the Arab people of Palestine.

Consequently, from the historic, economic, political, military, legal and humanitarian points of view, it was the duty of the European States to make an important and possibly decisive contribution to reaching a Middle East settlement.

Mr. Vinogradov affirmed that the Palestinian people would not resign themselves to their plight and that Israel should not expect the Palestinian people to give up their fight or to solve the conflict through separate deals or even through military action.

The Soviet Union stood for an early, just and lasting settlement in the Middle East. Its position was based on the principle of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force, on the attainment of the legitimate rights of the Arab people of Palestine, independent existence and self-determination, and the secure existence of all States in the region, including Israel. And the way to achieve a Middle East settlement would be to convene an international conference, under the auspices of the United Nations, tailored on the pattern of the International Conference of the Question of Palestine and based on the Geneva Declaration of 1983, adopted at that conference.

As Mikhael Gorbachev said, our age needed a new way of thinking in international affairs geared towards the future. In his opinion, European States should encourage peace by exercising influence in their blocs and alliances and promote the proposed United Nations approach.

He concluded by saying that Europe could and should ensure peace, both at home and abroad, particularly in the Middle East.

* * *

In his closing statement Mr. George Agius, head of the Committee delegation, stressed the importance of the work carried out by the workshops designed to broaden the basis for the understanding and support for the Palestine question in Europe.

Annex I

DECLARATION ADOPTED BY THE EUROPEAN REGIONAL
NGO SYMPOSIUM ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

1. We, the first United Nations European Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine, express our thanks to the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the Division for Palestinian Rights for their great efforts, without which this meeting would not have been possible. We are honoured by the presence of the members and observers of the Committee. We are also honoured by the presence of the distinguished speakers and panelists who eminently set the tone and the theme of the Symposium at our opening session.
2. We recognize the historic links between Europe and the Middle East and that the security of Europe cannot be separated from the security of the Middle East. We recognize, too, that the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and self-government in its own independent State is not only a central requirement for peace and security, in particular for just and durable peace between Israel and its Arab neighbours, but is also in full accord with one of the most fundamental principles of the Charter of the United Nations.
3. We fully uphold the Geneva Declaration on Palestine adopted on 7 September 1983 by the International Conference on the Question of Palestine a/ and we fully uphold General Assembly resolution 38/58 C of 13 December 1983, which calls for the convening of an International Peace Conference on the Middle East, to include representatives of all concerned peoples and States. We are aware that world peace, as well as the human and civil rights of the Palestinian people, have been set back by the non-implementation of the Declaration and General Assembly resolution 38/58 C, and we are convinced that non-implementation is the result of obstruction by the Governments of the United States and Israel.
4. We confirm absolutely the international consensus that the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) is the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in its just struggle for its inalienable rights. Noting the support of the Palestinian people for the PLO, we reject the idea that anyone other than the Palestinian people can decide who should represent them, all the more so as the first implementation of any people's right to self-determination is the choice of its own representation.
5. Accordingly, we call on all European Governments that do not recognize the PLO to do so. Equally, we call upon all European Governments to support the convening of an International Peace Conference and to work for the realization of such a Conference as a top priority.
6. We view with grave concern the law proposed by the Israeli Government that would make any meeting between an Israeli citizen and a member of the PLO punishable by three years' imprisonment. We call upon the Israeli Government to drop immediately that proposed law and we call upon all European Governments to exert their influence on the Israeli Government to do so.

7. The purpose of our meeting was to develop practical means for European NGOs to work to encourage their Governments in those policies. Our primary work was conducted in workshops and we affirm their conclusions as amended below.

8. The Symposium agrees with the report of the workshop on Civil and Human Rights (see annex II), which addressed the common objective of advancing public knowledge of Israeli violations of Palestinian rights and emphasized that the case must be sharply and expertly presented in order to attract attention.

9. The violation of human rights in the occupied territories clearly evokes the violations of human rights in South Africa, which have been unanimously condemned by international public opinion.

10. Attention should be focused on specific areas and cases rather than on generalizations.

11. A resource pool of information should be created in the European region, with one organization acting as the central clearing house for information.

12. The Symposium agrees with the report of the workshop on Information and Media that 1987 will mark the anniversaries of important events in the history of conflict in the Middle East. They are: (a) 40 years since the adoption of the General Assembly resolution on the partition of Palestine; b/ (b) 20 years since the Israeli aggression that resulted in the occupation, which continues, of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights; and (c) 5 years since the Israeli aggression against Lebanon. The workshop emphasized the need for action to be co-ordinated in publicizing those issues.

13. In advancing understanding of the Palestinian situation, special attention should be given to addressing parliamentarians, government officials, trade unions and also tourists visiting the Middle East. Additional attention should be directed to schools and universities, churches and the media.

14. The Symposium agrees with the report of the workshop on Development, Solidarity and Relief that development projects, relief programmes and humanitarian services are in themselves means for building popular support and affirming solidarity with the Palestinian people in helping it to survive on its own land.

15. Public opinion must be drawn to the need for projects to create employment and to build an economic and social infrastructure in the occupied territories. Solidarity must be demonstrated by educating public opinion on the issue of Israeli oppression. Youth exchange programmes, international seminars and sponsorship of children should be developed.

16. Certain specific dangers must be avoided such as acting in charity instead of in solidarity, intervening individually instead of collectively, and jeopardizing the efforts of the Palestinian people to maintain its own community.

17. The Symposium agrees with the report of the workshop on International Peace Movements in especially underlining the importance of associating the European peace movements with achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East. There is a common concern over nuclear risk and the situation of tension in the Mediterranean area, from which co-operation can be developed between European peace movements and NGOs concerned with the question of Palestine.

18. Opportunities to do so are especially presented by the forthcoming International Conference of the Year of Peace to be held at Copenhagen in October 1986 and the European nuclear disarmament convention, to be held in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in the summer of 1987.

19. Finally, we, the NGOs at the European Regional Symposium, have established a European Co-ordinating Committee (see annex V). We request United Nations assistance and financial support for the continuation of co-ordinated European NGO activities. We call upon the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to include this Declaration of the European NGO Meeting on the Question of Palestine, held at Vienna from 30 June to 1 July 1986, in its report to the General Assembly at its forty-first Session.

Notes

a/ Report of the International Conference on the Question of Palestine, Geneva, 29 August-7 September 1983 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.83.I.21), chap. I, sect. A.

b/ General Assembly resolution 181 (II).

Annex II

SYNOPSIS OF WORKSHOP RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION BY NGOS

Development, solidarity and relief

1. Development by the secretariat of the International Co-ordinating Committee (ICC) of a reference document on organizations serving in this field.
2. Meetings of such NGOs on the basis of regions or fields of service.
3. Pressure on national Governments to increase financial support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and to assist in the evaluation of its services to assure that they are geared towards solidarity rather than charity work.
4. Publicizing of the human interest dimension of active programmes of social service and obstacles to their implementation (e.g. closure of a hospital in Jerusalem, Israeli Government disapproval of certain development projects).
5. Affirmation of the value, both at the grass roots and political levels, of small project work which educates the public about the rights and needs of the Palestinian people.
6. Stimulation of contributions to those private organizations which employ local people and build an economic and social infrastructure in the occupied territories.
7. Preference to community building and social awareness projects.
8. Solidarity work designed as a contribution to the peace education process.
9. Identification of priorities for human services by Palestinians themselves. Articulation of such priorities by the PLO to concerned Governments and by NGOs in countries where contact with Palestinians is restricted.
10. Priority to programmes in the occupied territories which engage professionals such as doctors and engineers.
11. Facilitation of initiatives to promote products of grass roots Palestinian organizations such as SAMED, the PLO economic institution.
12. Condemnation of the current atrocities against Palestinian camps in Lebanon and of the oppressive prison situation in the occupied territories and in Israel.

International peace movement

1. Organization, within the international peace movements, as well as peace organizations, of a campaign of information concerning the rights of the Palestinian people.

2. To this end, identify common interests with such European movements and develop practical programmes.

3. Common interests would include, for example, the dangers of the arms race in the Middle East, especially nuclear escalation in the area, and the situation of the Mediterranean region as a sphere of continuing warfare. Stress would be laid on the fact that a just solution to the question of Palestine is an essential element in the peace process.

4. Specific programmes would need to take into account the diversity among peace movements in Europe based upon geography, international links and special interests (religion, trade unions, youth, women, etc.). Outlined proposals for action are:

(a) Inclusion of peace organizations in ICC;

(b) PLO initiatives to increase direct contact with peace movements to impress upon them the reality of the situation of the Palestinian people;

(c) Incorporation of the question of Palestine into the planning of the International Conference of the Year of Peace to be held at Copenhagen in October 1986, and of the European nuclear disarmament convention, to be held in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in the summer of 1987.

All these initiatives need to recognize the necessity of having written materials in a variety of European languages.

Information and media

Consensus was reached on several points.

1. Target areas to be pinpointed should include:

(a) Churches;

(b) Trade unions;

(c) Mass media;

(d) Members of Parliament and Government officials;

(e) Schools and universities.

2. A more human and cultural approach is required in the dissemination of information concerning Palestinians as a people.

3. Provision needs to be made for contact with various sectors of the local population in the occupied territories and Israel. Alternative tourism could provide a vehicle for this.

4. There is a need for co-ordination of NGO activities so as to avoid duplication as well as to produce new information aids at the European level for use especially in educational settings.

Civil and human rights

Several suggestions emerged as ways to draw attention to violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people and to develop popular support to advance their cause.

1. Draw parallels between the situations in Israel and South Africa where public opinion is more focused. Examples given included: (a) settlements/Bantustans; (b) workers' daily exodus; (c) discrimination as regards identity cards, license plates, etc.; (d) lack of freedom of movement.
2. Take care that materials concerning this question are drawn from sympathetic Israeli as well as Palestinian sources so as to avoid the impression of being biased.
3. Focus publicity material for periods of time on specific segments of the Palestinian population (children, women, students, etc.) rather than the wider range of human rights. Use sharp slogans to attract attention to the situation.
4. The newly-formed NGO European Co-ordinating Committee (see annex V) should be requested to build a pool of resources (written, pictorial, video) for use within the European region. A European-based NGO might serve as a clearing house and maintain a network with other regions.

Annex III

TELEGRAM DATED 1 JULY 1986 FROM THE MODERATOR OF THE
EUROPEAN REGIONAL NGO SYMPOSIUM ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE
TO H.E. MR. SHIMON PERES, PRIME MINISTER OF ISRAEL

Delegates to the United Nations European Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine, held in Vienna on 30 June and 1 July 1986, unanimously agreed that they view with grave concern the proposed law which would make any meeting between an Israeli citizen and a member of the PLO punishable by three years' imprisonment. They call upon the Israeli Government to drop immediately that proposed law.

Annex IV

TELEGRAM DATED 1 JULY 1986 FROM THE MODERATOR OF THE
EUROPEAN REGIONAL NGO SYMPOSIUM ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE
TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS

We, delegates at the United Nations European Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine, held at the Vienna United Nations Headquarters on 30 June and 1 July 1986, anxious about the ongoing clashes in Burj el-Barajneh Palestine refugee camp while we are meeting here, call upon you, as Secretary-General, to convene an emergency meeting of the Security Council to implement the June 1986 statement of the President of the Security Council concerning the assault on the camps in order to secure an effective cease-fire, the lifting of the siege of the camps, and guarantee the free flow of relief and supplies to the inhabitants of the refugee camp by UNRWA.

Annex V

EUROPEAN INTERIM CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE

The 1986/1987 membership of the European Interim Co-ordinating is the following:

Vera Pegna (International League for the Rights and Liberation of Peoples)

Jean-Marie Gaubert (French NGOs Co-ordination)

Mikko Lohikoski (Finnish-Arab Friendship Society)

Willi Sommerfeld (Solidarity Committee of the German Democratic Republic)

Annex VI

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS AND OBSERVERS

Non-governmental organizations

Association belgo-palestinienne
Association Médicale Franco-Palestinienne
Christian Peace Conference
CIMADE (Service Oecumenique d'entr'aide)
Comitato di solidarita con il popolo palestinese
Committee for Medical and Social Relief for Palestinians
Committee of Youth Organizations of the USSR
Council for the Advancement of Arab-British Understanding
Finnish-Arab Friendship Society
Istituto cooperazione economica internazionale
International Institute of Humanitarian Law
International Jewish Peace Union
International League for the Rights and
Liberation of Peoples (Rome)
International League for the Rights and
Liberation of Peoples (Milan)
International Organization for the Elimination of
All Forms of Racial Discrimination (EAFORD)
International Progress Organization
International Youth and Student
Movement for the United Nations
Joint Organization of Palestine
Palestine Committee for NGOs
Palestine Front of Norway
Parliamentary Association for Euro-Arab Co-operation (Belgium)
Parliamentary Association for Euro-Arab Co-operation (France)
Pax Christi
Perspectives Judeo-Arabes
Polish Committee for Solidarity with the
Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America
Solidarity Committee of the German Democratic Republic
Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee
Soviet Women's Committee
Women's International Democratic Federation
World Council of Churches
World Federation of Trade Unions
World Peace Council
World Student Christian Federation
World Young Women's Christian Association

NGO observers

All India Indo-Arab Friendship Association
Association des avocats sénégalais
Association des juristes démocrates sénégalais
Austrian Medical Team
Committee for Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue
Co-ordinating Board of Jewish Organizations
East for Peace
Friends of the Arab Community Hospital, Jerusalem
General Union of Palestinian Women, Tunis
Jerusalem and Peace Service
Near East Cultural and Educational Foundation
Organisation des juristes
Palestine Human Rights Campaign
Terre des hommes France

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

H.E. Mr. George Agius, Permanent Representative of Malta to the United
Nations, Rapporteur of the Committee, leader of the delegation
Mr. Zehdi Labib Terzi, Palestine Liberation Organization

Panelists

H.E. Mr. Erwin Lanc
H.E. Mr. Vladimir Vinogradov
Michele Achilli

States Members of the United Nations represented by observers

Spain
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

United Nations bodies

United Nations Council for Namibia

Inter governmental organizations

League of Arab States

National liberation movements

Palestine Liberation Organization