

Discussion of the Report of the Director-General on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories

11th June 1998

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Mr. AHMED Khurshid, Workers' delegate

Pakistan

- I feel it my great privilege, on behalf of the Workers' delegation of Pakistan, to associate myself with the remarks made by the earlier distinguished speakers from this forum, thus demonstrating their commitment and support for the cause of the Palestinian workers in occupied Arab territories, for the elimination of discrimination and for the right to self-determination.

We are thankful to the members of the Governing Body for placing this item on the agenda and to the Director-General for submitting the report to this session. As we all know from the report, the Israeli authorities allowed very little time for the mission - only two-and-a-half days and waited until as late as 8 May before allowing the mission to visit. Thus the report is shorter this year than it used to be. Despite a shorter report, it manages to reflect the various forms of discrimination.

We are living in the age of reason. Humanity is on the eve of the twenty-first century and peace, prosperity, dignity and freedom are the goals of all freedom-loving people. We in this world, where such ideals, including the ideals of the ILO which stands for international peace and social justice, feel that the working class in Palestine is still being subjected to discrimination. As pointed out in the report, in paragraph 17, there is discrimination in terms of admission to educational colleges and universities and in relation to the sale of agricultural products because land has been confiscated. Similarly in paragraph 23, the report also points out that

permits have been refused and used as a form of collective punishment for Palestinian workers. Similarly in the case of settlements, the report says "... that human resources and land were the only resources in the territories; the expansion of settlements entailed land confiscation and had a direct negative impact on the inhabitants' means of subsistence".

Similarly, paragraph 27 points out that there is a loss of continuous income for Palestinian workers and their economy continues to suffer. For example, the UNSCO report referred to in paragraph 45 indicates that almost 30 per cent of the Palestinian work force had suffered a loss of income during this period and that almost 90 per cent lived below the poverty line.

Similarly, in the case of the loss of employment, it has been pointed out that Palestinians suffer unemployment whereas migrant workers in the occupied territories are being employed. They come from as far away as Thailand and Romania, and the number of migrant workers has more than doubled during the year.

Similarly, the loss of income as referred to in an IMF report in 1996, no less, has fallen considerably even by up to 20 per cent. This speaks of the agony and suffering of the working class of Palestine.

Then there is another form of abusive employment in the form of the "manpower company" system whereby Palestinian workers are subcontracted, as pointed out in paragraph 56.

There are numerous kinds of suffering, both economic and social. Why it is so? Because these workers continue to live under occupation and they are being denied the basic right to freedom and self-determination. We fully support the conclusions of the Director-General's Report, and the technical assistance being given by the ILO should continue to be enlarged for the workers in the occupied territories to enable them to strengthen their organizations. We urge all freedom-loving nations, including the United States, which played a key role in bringing about agreement, to implement that agreement, and ensure the security of and respect for the Palestinian people and the restoration of their right to independence on their own land.

Mr. AL-SENANY Musaad Mohammed, Minister of Labour and Social Affairs

Saudi Arabia

- In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate! It is a great honour for me to speak here on behalf of the tripartite Arab delegations. I would like to express my appreciation to the Chairperson and members of the Governing Body of the ILO who, through their wise decision to reinstate the special sittings, have proven that they are fully aware of international developments and can respond accordingly.

Since 1980, the year in which the Conference adopted its historic decision to condemn the Israeli occupation policies and called for an end to this policy and the removal of existing settlements, the official Israeli policy has, in fact, been one of continuous defiance of international legitimacy. Settlements continue to spread. Lands are being exploited, as are natural resources. Agricultural land owned by Palestinians is constantly reduced, depriving Palestinians of their land and culture and history, as well as their right to work and live on their land and that of their ancestors.

The Director-General's report last year clearly indicated the results of the Israeli settlement policy, the destructive effect on the present and the future of the Palestinian people in all its social aspects. That report also detailed the effect of collective sanctions that are in fact in violation of the most basic human rights. The closures and sanctions are applied constantly. This has impoverished the Palestinian people and prevented them from exercising their basic right to life, work and education, as well as other basic rights. It has also led to a failure of all genuine efforts by the Palestinian national authority with international backing to create a Palestinian infrastructure which the Israeli military occupation has destroyed over the decades. It has deprived Palestinian citizens of their right to development, prosperity, and their right to benefit from their advancement and national production.

The ILO's mission this year has failed in a task that it has been successively undertaking for the past 20 years. We fully understand and appreciate the obstacles that prevented this. This is a further Israeli violation to add to its record of consistently defying the will of the international community. It also marks a failure by the Israeli authorities to hide the facts. I shall not detail the reaction of the Arab group to the present report, which will be submitted in writing to the President of the Conference and the Director-General so that they may take the appropriate action.

The continued declarations by Israeli officials on the events in Palestine and the occupied Arab territories is proof that official Israeli policy is following a determined course to Judaize Jerusalem, to increase the area of settlement in occupied Palestine and create cities out of Israeli settlements, and to fragment Palestinian land and seize water resources, as well as to continue to close the Palestinian territories for security reasons. The purpose and objective of this policy is to undermine the rights of the Palestinian people, the right to live, the right to free religious practices, the right to education and the right to freedom of movement, as well as the right to be protected from torture and inhuman practices and treatment. Palestinian workers are being deprived of decent work and paid menial wages. All this is aimed at demolishing the Palestinian economy and to prevent the Palestinian Authority from setting up the necessary infrastructures.

The organization of this special sitting is necessary and useful. However, a better procedure would be to establish a Conference committee to examine the situation. History teaches us that the forces of evil, however much they defy international legitimacy, cannot overcome the will and determination of a people which will triumph. Our Palestinian people who have suffered from being displaced, oppressed, and deprived of their human rights shall be victorious with the Lord's help. It shall establish its Palestinian nation on its Holy Land with Jerusalem as its capital, the third of the Islamic holy places. I would like to stress from this rostrum and in this Conference, which is the social conscience of the world, that the forces of peace in the world are behind us and behind the Palestinian people and victory will come, and we are firmly convinced that no international peace can be installed, no permanent peace is possible unless social justice prevails for all the people of the world and for all humanity without any exception or discrimination.

Allow me here to pay tribute to the Arab people of occupied Syrian Golan and in Southern Lebanon. We would like to reaffirm to them that their resistance to the occupation is a symbol of the struggle for legitimate rights and that they shall be victorious soon.

M. ALFARARGI Saad, Representative

League of Arab States

- Allow me first of all to thank the Director-General for continuing to submit a report on the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories. Our attention this year has been drawn to the fact that the report deals with the matter in a slightly different form than was envisaged in the resolutions of 1974 and 1980.

We know that the Israeli authorities delayed the arrival of the ILO Mission to the territories, but this does not excuse the weak areas in the report or the disregard for the basis on which other reports were drafted. On the contrary, the report should have concluded from the behaviour of the Israeli authorities that they were seeking to hide the truth from the members of the ILO Mission and undermine its effectiveness.

The report does rightly refer in paragraphs 48 and 49 to the difficulties faced by the Palestinian workers, in particular to the discriminatory work permit system which is prohibited by the discrimination (Employment and Occupation) convention, 1958 (No. 111). It also refers to the inequality of wages and the non-payment of wages. However, the report does not refer to the violation of international humanitarian law in the occupied territories and especially the provisions of the fourth Geneva Convention which applies to the occupation. The report makes no mention of the very difficult social and economic conditions in the Golan and West Bank, which are a direct result of the expansion of settlements, land seizures, seizure of water resources, sealing off of territories and closures of border crossing points.

Nor did the report mention the situation of occupied East Jerusalem, which is especially grave. The Israeli authorities are attempting to change the geographic and democratic nature of the city, particularly with regard to the provision of services to the Jewish inhabitants and not to the Arab inhabitants, in an attempt by the Israeli authorities to deny the Arab identity of the city. The 1997 report mentioned this. Is the Mission entitled to disregard the negative impact of Israeli settlements in Palestine and the Golan, although the international community continues to condemn this in the General Assembly and in the Commission on Human Rights? The mission should create a subheading in the report dealing with employment and the problems created by Israeli settlements in the occupied territories and other territories.

We would remind you that these settlements are illegal, both under international law and the terms of the International Labour Conference in 1980.

We would also like to refer to the blatant contradiction in paragraphs 45 and 47 concerning unemployment, underemployment and poverty in the occupied territories. The report takes into account the comments of the Arab group to the conference.

Finally, we say clearly that the conclusions of the Mission in paragraph 80 fall far below our expectations, unlike previous reports which helped to reinforce the role of ILO in the protection of workers in the occupied territories and to improve their working conditions.

M. AOUN Samir, Adviser to the Minister

Lebanon

- Allow me, as the representative of a country that has suffered for many years from Israeli occupation and Israeli crimes, to stress the importance of this special sitting, which allows the world to know about Israeli crimes committed every day against our workers and our children in Palestine, the Golan and in south Lebanon. The Preamble of the Constitution of the ILO says that universal peace requires social justice. How can social justice be achieved under occupation, under repression, under lip-service, and faced with blocked peace processes and evasive practices that even found it difficult to give visas to members of a fact-finding mission from an international organization?

It is not strange for a country that was created through aggression and massacres, and which flaunted international resolutions for over half a century, it is not strange for such a country to permit itself not to issue visas easily to the envoys of an international organization on a fact-finding mission.

On behalf of the Government of Lebanon, I would like to stress the following points. The report of the Director-General did not touch upon the destructive effects of Zionist settlements. It did not sufficiently deal with Zionist practices, including the destruction of houses and flagrant violations of workers' rights. It did not speak of the situation of Arab Jerusalem, and I leave you with the details that the Minister of the Syrian Arab Republic discussed.

The question before us is a question of occupation. Israel deprived our peoples of their rights, their national legitimate rights. It is normal therefore for it not to respect workers' rights and labour freedom. It is only normal that it should not respect any labour standards. Those who occupy other people's lands will not stop at the details.

Israel, the whole of Israel, usurps our land. It is not the Government of Israel that does so. The three social partners commit that crime together. The Histadrut and the employers and the Israeli army are all the same. They all looted the southern part of my country. It is not the Israeli army alone that did that, it did it with the cooperation of Israeli employers. Israeli workers in south Lebanon looted treasures and antiquities. Together they usurp our land and violate the rights of our workers.

The question of the occupied Arab territories is not a question of technical assistance and facilities at crossings. It is a question of legitimate national rights, including the rights of workers, and it is the violation of these national rights that has led to all the violations of workers' rights. That is why we reiterate our call to reject the occupation of others, because that leads to the violation of social rights, which in turn leads to social oppression. Therefore we consider that this is a fundamental right.

However many people they kill, however many massacres they commit, victory will return to our nation and its valiant struggle. Jerusalem will remain Arab, the Golan will remain Arab and south Lebanon will remain Arab and will be a valley in which the tears of Israelis will flow.

Sr. BERNAL CAMERO Joaquín, Representative

Permanent Congress of Trade Union Unity of Latin American Workers

- I would like to congratulate the President on his election and the Director-General for his report on the situation of the workers of the occupied Arab territories and also for the efforts made by the ILO to protect the rights of these workers.

It is obvious that in conditions of occupation such as those in the case we are now considering, the workers are subjected to foreign oppression. This should be the first problem to recognize and to solve so that the basis may be created for a normal development of labour relations.

The Permanent Congress of Trade Union Unity of Latin American Workers (CPUSTAL) once again wishes to express its solidarity with the cause of the Arab and Palestinian peoples and urges the parties to adopt the relevant provisions in order to guarantee the effective exercise of labour rights, in compliance with United Nations agreements and international labour standards.

M. BOUBAKER Mokhtar, Representative

Union of Workers of the Arab Maghreb

- In the name of the Union of Workers of the Arab Maghreb I would like to thank the Governing Body of the ILO which has organized this special sitting on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories. The situation has been recognized as having worsened, especially since two years ago, and the role of the Organization has become all the more important in bringing an end to the injustices suffered by Arab workers of the occupied territories.

I would like to thank the Director-General of the ILO for making such an effort to draw up this report, even if the report is somewhat short because of the way in which the Israeli Government assumed its responsibilities. We have been given a rather depressing picture of the situation of the workers of the occupied territories. The United Nations has called upon the Israeli Government to respect the rights of these workers. Their situation is totally untenable. It is characterized by poverty, by daily harassment, the dignity of human beings is deeply affected and trampled upon to such a degree that workers were even killed at a roadblock last week.

The workers are discriminated against. They must live through an untenable situation. When they try to go to work, they are often victims of insults. As a result we call for justice with regard to the Israeli policy, which deprives the workers of the occupied territories of justice, and which simply seeks to destroy the peace process. The Israeli policy seeks to shift the blame to the Palestinian authority for the regrettable situation in which the workers of the occupied Arab territories live. There is 30 per cent unemployment. The Palestinian trade union movement also has encountered considerable difficulties in mobilizing workers attempting to deal with the Israeli position.

The workers of Palestine are forced to pay dues to the Israeli national insurance system, without being able to benefit from any of the services and benefits provided by that system.

The situation described in the Director-General's report this year, as in all previous years, prompts us to call for the respect of the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination. We must also support a withdrawal from the Golan. Israel is one of the only countries which occupy the territory of another country by force. This is a situation which is totally incompatible with international law.

We would therefore call upon the ILO to step up its assistance which has been provided so far to the trade union movement. We would therefore request that a new mission be sent to the territories to ensure follow-up to this report, and we would hope that this session would be an annual event.

Sr. BULA CAMACHO Carlos, Minister of Labour and Social Security

Colombia

- On behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries of which Colombia is currently the President and on my own behalf as Minister of Labour, I would like to express our thanks to the Governing Body of the International Labour Organization for its decision to hold a special session for a review of the Director-General's report on the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories.

We believe that it is necessary to resume holding these sessions because of the deadlock in the peace process, because of the obstinance of the Israeli Government and its refusal to respect United Nations resolutions and to observe international commitments which stem from agreements concluded under the aegis of the international community.

We would like to thank the Director-General for the interest he has shown in the difficult social, economic and human situation in the occupied Arab territories. Every year, he has sent a mission to report on developments in this situation. He has taken pains to provide technical assistance to the representatives of Palestinian workers and employers, despite financial constraints and obstacles placed in the way by the Israeli authorities to hinder implementation of interregional programmes in that area.

The Director-General's report draws attention to the barriers raised by the Israeli authorities which prevented the ILO mission from properly fulfilling its task. There were delays in providing entry visas. As a result, the mission was not able to fulfil its mandate in the necessary conditions.

This sets a rather dangerous precedent which should not be repeated, especially given that the missions' reports over the years, indeed since 1978, have been objective and impartial, and have significantly contributed to the presentation of rational proposals. Unfortunately, most of the missions' recommendations have not been followed by the Israeli authorities, who have pursued their colonization of Palestinian territories, thus violating international law.

The constant impoverishment of the Palestinian population and the decline in agricultural, industrial and manufacturing activities are the result of a military occupation and colonization policy which detracts from the Palestine national authorities' efforts to rebuild and repair the damaging effects of the colonization and expropriation of Palestinian land.

The denial of Palestinian workers' labour rights relating to working conditions, wages and social security is the result of a discriminatory policy which exposes workers to humiliation and sometimes even leads to death for no reason at all.

The policy of closure and collective punishment, the destruction of homes and the colonization of Palestinian territories, and in particular of the Arab town of Al Quds have all led to a significant decline in the economic and social circumstances of the Palestinian people - a decline which cannot even be remedied by international technical cooperation and assistance.

For these reasons, the countries of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, which firmly believe in the right of all peoples to a life of dignity, peace and freedom, wish once again to restate their support for the Palestinian people and other Arab peoples that are subjected to occupation. Colombia shares this position.

We wish once again to call for the end of the occupation of Palestine, for an end to the Israeli colonization policy, for the return of Arab territories to their owners and for an end to the use of security argument to justify the imposition of sanctions which have no legal or moral grounds. We urge the Israeli authorities to respect the principles of international humanitarian law, international labour standards and the principles and objectives of the ILO as well as the rules that state that there can be no peace without social justice, non-discrimination and the right of all peoples to self-determination.

That is why we support the establishment of an autonomous and independent Palestinian State.

The Movement of Non-Aligned Countries would once again insist on the need for the ILO to expand its area of interest and follow the situation of Arab workers in Palestine and in the other occupied Arab territories more closely. We suggest that the Governing Body should at its next session study the proposal to set up a Conference committee to examine the situation of Arab workers in Palestine and in the occupied Arab territories and to provide follow-up to the cooperation programmes that already exist for these workers. The Committee on Apartheid serves as a precedent which demonstrates the effectiveness of such instruments.

We consider that the Israeli military occupation that has lasted for more than 30 years and Israel's colonialization policies are just as serious as apartheid was in violating the human rights of workers. We hope that reason will triumph and that the Israeli authorities will revise their policies which have simply led to an increase in tension and insecurity in the region and greater violations of human rights.

Paradoxically, while the international community is celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Palestinian people is deprived of its most elementary fundamental rights, the first of which is the right to self-determination. The Movement of Non-Aligned Countries would urge Chairman Arafat to pursue his endeavours to achieve peace, justice, independence and autonomy.

Mrs. BUVERUD PEDERSEN Evy, Workers' delegate

Norway

- I would like to thank the Director-General for his valuable report. We do, however, regret that the report came so late, a fact which was mainly due to the Israeli obstacles with which the mission was met when they applied for authorization to travel to the occupied territories. We cannot stress enough that such a lack of cooperation is unacceptable.

Recent developments have made it urgently important to highlight the situation in the Middle East. The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO-Norway) therefore welcomes the reinstatement of a special sitting. At the last special sitting in 1995, we were all optimistic, hoping that the situation of the Palestinian people would improve and that the peace process would continue. After three years we find that the situation has got worse.

The Israeli closure policy has continued. Fewer work permits have been issued. Palestinian workers have been replaced by foreign workers. Work permits have been confiscated by Israeli soldiers at the checkpoints. There is discrimination in wages between Israeli and Palestinian workers employed in the same type of work. There is discrimination in social rights. The Palestinian trade unionists are still suffering under the lack of freedom of movement. They are unable to perform their legitimate work as trade union representatives.

The Israeli Government maintains that the closure imposed on the Palestinian territories is for security reasons. In our view, it has become a collective punishment against the Palestinian people. In addition to its economic effect, the closure has also had unsocial and psychological impacts. It has created a state of depression among the Palestinians. The isolation has resulted in a general feeling of frustration and anxiety.

In addition to this, the Israeli Government has refused to implement the agreements signed with Palestinian authorities and has also continued to build and expand Israeli settlements, both in East Jerusalem and in other Palestinian areas.

All these hostile and inhuman measures can only be interpreted as a lack of will on the part of the Israeli Government to promote peace and coexistence between the Israeli and the Palestinian peoples. I refuse to believe that this is in accordance with most of the Israeli people, and it is the opposite of a positive development for both populations.

It is therefore urgently important to follow up the agreed commitments, such as redeployment, release of prisoners, safe passage between Gaza and the West Bank, the operation of Gaza Airport and the construction of Gaza Port, with a view to entering into final status negotiations to resolve problems concerning Jerusalem, the settlements, refugees and borders.

Donor countries must increase their allocation of resources to Palestine for further investments on the West Bank and in Gaza.

The international community must escalate its pressure on the Israeli Government, which must respect international law and standards and implement all agreements signed with the Palestinian authorities in order to put the peace process back on the right track.

The international community must also increase its support to the democratic labour forces and peace movements inside Israel, to assist in their struggle for peace, and to counteract the obstinacy of the present Israeli Government.

It is, in this context, important to note that Histadrut is now facing serious problems. It seems that the organization suffers from attempts made by the Israeli Government to weaken its role and position.

LO-Norway will continue its long-standing cooperation with both Histadrut and the Palestinian General Federations of Trade Unions of the West Bank and of the Gaza Strip. We will support them according to their needs so that they can fulfil their role as trade unions and remain as a strong democratic force in their societies.

It is time for the Palestinians and for the Israeli people to live side by side in security and peace within independent States.

Mr. DAHLAN Abdullah Sadiq, Employers' delegate

Saudi Arabia

- In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate! I wish so much that this special sitting was not required. I could also have wished that we could live in the spirit of hope and the dream of peace, freedom and the guarantee of rights, in particular human rights. The absence of the fundamental principles of the International Labour Organization, in any country of the world, however, makes it necessary to hold a special sitting to appeal for the application of the principles which this Organization advocates.

The report of the Director-General prepared upon the basis of the special mission sent by the ILO, a mission which was not able fully to accomplish its task because of the obstacles which faced it, prompts me to ask to what sort of liberty we aspire and on what basis and principles we wish to establish the economy in the occupied Arab territories, enabling trade unions to defend the rights of the workers once again. An economy such as that of Palestine and the occupied Arab territories requires a firm position. The dream of peace is one of the main reasons that we have decided to hold this special sitting. This sitting is not against peace, it is a means to strive for peace.

On behalf of the workers of eastern Asia, we call upon all the countries of the world and all trade union and employers' organizations to join hands, and support peace in our region in every possible way. We appeal to all Muslims and Jews who are faithful to their religion to work together for peace. We also, we call upon the ILO to make every effort to ensure that its fundamental principles are observed.

We greatly regret to note the contents of the Director-General's report concerning the occupied Arab territories. The results fall short of our expectations. I hope peace can be achieved in the near future.

Mme DEL RIO Cinzia, Workers' adviser delegate

Italy

- I would like to underline that the three Italian trade union confederations, the CGIL, the CISL and the UIL, which I represent, appreciate the report of the Director-General concerning the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories.

This report, as the previous ILO reports on the same issue, is balanced and constructive. It highlights the main problems arising in the territories from the economic and social points of view, and it gives us a clear picture of the working conditions of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and of those working in Israel.

We support the remarks made and share the concerns pointed out in the report. It is a fact that the working conditions of Palestinians have not improved since two

years ago, when we discussed the problem at a similar special sitting of the Conference. At that time, we hoped that the peace process would help in the creation of a positive general political framework. Now we believe that the standstill of that process is the principal cause for the lack of real economic and social development. The cooperation activity carried out by the ILO and other organizations and governments on a bilateral basis, and which is aimed at maximizing the benefits of the peace process could not achieve the results we hoped for.

As far as industrial relations are concerned, we would like to underline the full support of the Italian confederations for the strong efforts of the present PGFTU leadership to build a truly independent and democratic trade union movement. We hope that under the auspices of the ILO a tripartite commission will be set up in order to adopt the Labour Code and deal with labour matters.

In this field we should support and encourage the efforts of the Palestinian and Israeli trade unions to cooperate on labour issues of common interest and encourage dialogue and in-depth analysis of specific issues.

We firmly believe that this dialogue can help the peace process.

Technical cooperation is a key element in the response to the problems of poverty and unemployment, with the aim of developing a democratic society. Therefore we strongly support the ILO programme and we think that more resources should be put into technical cooperation programmes. This is why we also call for a major Italian financial commitment in this area.

The Italian trade unions, as stated in the report, have provided the funds for an ILO project on "Workers' education assistance to the PGFTU on vocational training", and we hope that the conditions will be created in which to effectively start the project.

But today the question is what should be the follow-up to this report? We think that it is necessary that the ILO continues to follow the situation on a continuous basis, until the deadlock in of the peace process has truly been overcome.

We believe that the ILO Director-General, in view of the ongoing discussion, can make a suitable proposal in order to guarantee the regular monitoring of the economic and social situation in the occupied Arab territories.

We believe that this ILO initiative can help solve the problems arising in this difficult phase.

M. DIOP Assane, Minister of Labour and Employment

Senegal

- First of all I welcome the fact that the Director-General of the International Labour Office has made arrangements to hold this special sitting, and congratulate him on the quality of the appendix to his report which deals with the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories.

This initiative does credit to our Organization, whose assistance in the field is very often the only source of relief to the various populations concerned. These populations and in particular their children, women and senior citizens have been suffering from poverty and its corollary, malnutrition. Their bad state of health arising from this situation is also very worrying; a concern for the international community.

This dramatic situation has been aggravated by emergency operations which, on each occasion, have reduced to nought the efforts deployed on an individual and collective basis, very often at the price of considerable sacrifice.

Senegal chairs the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable rights of the Palestinian People, and is a member of the United Nations Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories. This is why Senegal is closely observing the situation of men and women living in these territories. That situation has been the subject of several resolutions and recommendations both in the United Nations and in the Human Rights Commission, as well as in meetings of special agencies, such as the WHO and the ILO.

I am delighted to recall the contents of the Resolution adopted in 1980 by the International Labour Conference, and I make an appeal for the determined support of the international community for the peace initiatives in order to ensure that all parties to the conflict can fully enjoy their right to development and security, and in mutual trust.

Furthermore, we have to note that the fundamental Conventions regarding the freedom of association, freedom of movement and non-discrimination that it is our duty to ratify and promote for the well-being of future generations are not respected on account of security imperatives in that region.

Work as a means of survival, however, has to be placed above political issues, even if the protection of work is inevitably contingent on the moral and human will to respect human rights. Moreover, our Organization, which is the depositary of the social values of mankind, is also duty bound to establish and build on those values, and ensure respect for them worldwide. Respecting human dignity and social justice, giving workers the universal means to fight all forms of discrimination - if it needs repeating - is the very foundation of our Constitution, and the basis of the draft Declaration of principles that we are now examining at this session.

Moreover, to say that child labour has to be abolished means, I firmly believe, to create a favourable economic climate in which children can enjoy schooling and a proper diet, and are not obliged to work in order to make up for their parents' diminishing incomes.

This serious and urgent issue is at the heart of the harsh realities that the occupied Arab territories are experiencing where more than 60 per cent of the population is under 20 years of age.

Many of the delegates have said in my presence that this session of the International Labour Conference must stand as a reaffirmation of our Organization's fundamental values. It will need to draw upon all of its credibility to maintain its special identity as a centre of excellence fostering justice, equity and humanism through social dialogue.

And that is why I believe that it is important for the ILO to step up its action in the field, in particular through programmes designed to secure job creation, to promote and develop the entrepreneurial abilities of Palestinian women, to care for and reintegrate former detainees, to enhance the administrative capacity of the Ministry of Labour, and to provide support for the Chambers of Commerce and Agriculture, etc.

This goes too far the creation of industrial zones, and support for a special programme to assist the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Labour and employers' and workers' organizations.

I salute these programmes which are designed to alleviate the problems of poverty and unemployment, and beyond that to create a new vision of life.

I therefore call for greater understanding between the parties concerned as a measure of improved cooperation in the field of labour in other fields. Peace and security are possible, but we have to ensure that security is guaranteed for all and peace is guaranteed for all. If we share that particular conviction then real negotiations can indeed take place.

M. DJEMAM Hacene, Representative

International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions

- In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate!

I think that international public opinion realizes the seriousness of the situation in the Middle East and is losing patience with Israel and its submission to the extremist elements in its midst.

The Governing Body, heeding international public opinion, decided to hold a special sitting as the situation in Palestine and in other occupied Arab territories is similar to another situation in world history - that of apartheid.

The question of Palestine should be treated similarly, considering the effect it has on world peace. A Standing Committee should be set up to discuss the report of the Director-General and a special sitting should also be held for that purpose.

Recent events and the killing and injury of numerous Palestinians, as well as the attempts of extremists to build settlements, must be dealt with adequately in this Organization.

Israeli authorities allowed the ILO fact-finding mission to enter Israel only after four months of procrastination. However, this mission was not allowed to visit the Syrian Golan. Therefore, this report, through no fault of the ILO, falls far short of its objectives.

We find it therefore strange that the comments of the Arab group are not adequately reflected, and that Palestinian forces are considered questionable, whereas Israeli forces are considered credible. Unfortunately, internationally accepted terminology is not used: the report on the contrary uses Israeli terms and we wonder why when the ILO certainly knows the background of this conflict on terms and terminology. Neither did the report deal adequately with the question of settlements in the occupied Arab territories and in the Golan in particular, although these settlements pose a threat to the peace process and to peace in general.

It is regrettable that the report of the mission, which linked employment with illegitimate settlements, did not refer to the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), or to the harassment practised and threats made by the Israeli authorities against Palestinian workers. Although the report went into detail about the technical assistance provided to the Palestinians, we feel that Palestinian workers, in view of their vast needs, are far from receiving the minimum

required, and there is no technical assistance for the south of Lebanon or the Golan.

We condemn the practices of Israel and the support it receives from the United States. We condemn the violations of human rights and the rights of people which push this region and the world to breaking point. The withdrawal from the Arab/Palestinian territories and the creation of a Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital, the withdrawal from the occupied Golan Heights and from the south of Lebanon without any conditions are the prerequisites for a global, just and lasting peace in the region.

M. EL AMAOUI Noubir, Workers' delegate

Morocco

- On behalf of the Moroccan workers' delegation allow me to pay my tribute to the President and to the Conference. Distinguished participants at this 86th Session of the International Labour Conference, we salute you and undertake here before you to continue our struggle to achieve all the principles and lofty goals, objectives for which this Organization has striven, such as social justice, human rights and peace.

The convening of this sitting today is a source of great pride for us. It is a gesture of appreciation of the struggle and the sacrifices of a people - the Palestinian Arab people - that has given a great deal for its freedom and dignity and the right to live on its own land.

The annual reports prepared by the Director-General, the latest being the one submitted this year, truly reflect the situation in the occupied Arab territories. The deterioration of the situation, due to the Israeli aggressors placing themselves above international law, continues in disregard of all international covenants and resolutions adopted by the United Nations. Our Organization has played an important role in eliminating the system of apartheid. It is called upon to take similar action to do away with the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories and to lead Israel to respect the principles of the Oslo Agreement. Israel has continued in fact to surprise us every year by disregarding international decisions with the support of the American veto in the Security Council.

Anything that affects the Palestinian people affects us all. It affects human values and exposes the land of peace, of divine religions, the land of prophets, to destruction and death. Israel seizes land, and enslaves men. It even seizes churches, mosques and holy places. This reminds us of the dark history of the Middle Ages. Therefore, we join all those who call for freedom and who call for the drafting of effective resolutions by the International Labour Organization as this is one of the most important United Nations agencies that has continued to deal with such cases with wisdom in a timely fashion.

The refusal of Israel to receive the ILO mission responsible for this report is another insult to us all. In fact, it is a situation that calls upon us to reply in equal measure to the defiance and arrogance of Israel.

The Israeli Government seems to be determined to continue on the warpath, with total disregard for the danger this creates for the region and the world. The Israeli Prime Minister has threatened to reoccupy territories today under the Palestinian Authority. This, practically speaking, means a new declaration of war which will return this region to the pre-Oslo situation and will help the Israeli authorities in their expansion and occupation.

The suffering of the Palestinian people, the oppression and murder of children, women and the elderly, is the crime of this century and occurs most flagrantly and blatantly. If this Conference was concentrating on the exploitation of children, the situation of the children of the intifada must be a question for our consciences. The Israeli authorities have put the responsibility of resisting the occupation on the shoulders of Palestinian children. These children are entitled to their childhood yet they have been deprived of all means to do so and deprived of education. Therefore, we are called upon to help the generations of the Intifada, to provide them with all that they need and to train them so that they may build a new Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital.

On this occasion I would like to call upon this sitting firstly to provide possible assistance to the Palestinian people and to support their legitimate claims in order to bless the decision of the Palestinian Authority to declare an independent state; secondly, to declare a special day of solidarity with the workers in the occupied Arab territories; and thirdly, to suspend Israel's membership of this Organization, should it continue in its obstinacy to refuse to implement the decisions of the United Nations Security Council. Palestine is the land of peace and love. Therefore, it must remain a symbol in our minds of a place where everyone living, whatever their faith, may enjoy peace and prosperity.

We would now like to express our tribute to the Palestinian people for all that they have done to defend their territory. May Palestine live long, democratically and in solidarity with all its brethren.

Mr. HARAK Ahmed Ibrahim, Workers' adviser and substitute delegate

Egypt

- In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. On behalf of the workers of unions, I would like to express our appreciation for the excellent decision taken by the Conference to hold this special sitting to discuss the situation of Arab workers in Palestine and the occupied Arab territories, Golan and southern Lebanon. This confirms the Federation of Egyptian Trade Unions' solidarity with the Arab workers.

Only yesterday did we hear in this hall a great and wonderful speech about noble human values and principles of which we are all proud and which we all defend. The speech that we all applauded was about human rights. In our opinion, this special sitting is but an extension of yesterday's sitting. It is but a complement to the issue which was dealt with by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, because the situation of Arab workers in Palestine and in Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon will be in vain if we do not talk about the human rights of the Arab inhabitants. The injustice suffered by Arab workers at the hands of Israeli occupation is a violation of these human values. The world is a witness through the mass media.

We thank the Director-General for the report of the ILO mission although we have some criticisms as to this report. However, this report has confirmed once again that the continuation of the situation shames humankind and calls upon our conscience to put an end to it. How can we call for the respect of the rights of Arab workers in Palestine and the other occupied territories while they are deprived of their sovereign right to their land and its resources? How can we request that, when they are suffering from unemployment, poverty, hunger and displacement? What is left to a man when he loses his right to his land, when he loses his freedom, his dignity and his property? The rights of the Arab people in Palestine and the occupied Arab territories will continue to be lost, will remain lost as long as occupation continues, as long as peace is not established. We must work together in order to put an end to the worst tragedy witnessed by humankind. However, the world witnesses Israel practising the worst forms of colonialism. Israel puts obstacles in the face of all sincere and genuine efforts to establish peace.

Israel does not content itself with violating international conventions and resolutions. It goes back on its word. It denounces conventions as though we are living in a world where the law of the jungle prevails, where international community is incapable of enforcing the international law. This is the impression we are getting from the Israeli Government which prefers to retain land and sacrifice peace, with the excuse that it is doing so for security reasons. However, security may not be secured unless the Palestinians' rights are restored. How can the international community continue to ignore this issue? How can the international community content itself with just organizing demonstrations and meetings? The world of work, which is represented here at this session of the Conference, on a tripartite basis, should call for positive steps in order to put an end to the tragedy of the Arab peoples in Palestine and the occupied Arab territories in Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon.

We should reconsider the membership of Israel in the ILO as long as the Israeli Government continues to insist on its policy. This is one of the measures that we can take in order to bring pressure to bear upon the Israeli Government so that it can stop this colonialist policy which destroys peace.

Mr. HELFI Habib, Workers' adviser and substitute delegate

Islamic Republic of Iran

- In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. We are meeting today at this sitting to discuss an important issue which concerns workers in the Islamic world. This issue is the unjust practices of the Zionist authorities which violate the rights of workers in Palestine and southern Lebanon.

We, the workers of the Islamic Republic of Iran, are fully prepared to provide all forms of assistance in order to ensure that the rights of our oppressed brothers in the abovementioned area are restored. We would like to urge the Director-General of the ILO to continue to follow up closely the situation of workers in Palestine and southern Lebanon and to solve the problems resulting from Zionist injustice.

We hope that this issue will be regularly discussed during a special sitting and the regular sittings of the Conference.

In conclusion, we would like to thank the ILO for holding this special sitting. May the peace of God and his blessings be upon you.

Sra. HERNANDEZ OLIVA Gretel, Government adviser and substitute delegate

Cuba

- At the outset I would like to thank the Director-General and his staff in the Office for their report, which describes the results of a series of technical cooperation measures and activities and enlarges our understanding of the situation facing Arab workers in the territories occupied by Israel. At the same time, it provides us with an opportunity to look more closely at ways of counteracting the negative effects of the occupation and colonization which Israel has deliberately fostered. Unfortunately, despite the efforts that have been undertaken, the peace process has ground to a halt as a result of the intransigent position adopted by Israel, which insists on continuing and intensifying its policies of colonization in the occupied Arab territories. The proliferation of settlements and the confiscation of land belonging to Arabs considerably reduce the resources available to the Palestinian population for their survival. The report refers to repeated acts of humiliation inflicted on Palestinian workers, such as the frequent closure of the occupied territories by the Israeli authorities and abusive treatment by the military. The employment situation has worsened substantially as a result of discriminatory measures on work, wages and working conditions. The predicament of the Arab workers in the Golan, which was illegally occupied by Israel in 1967 and annexed without United Nations recognition, is also described in the Director-General's Report, and the description gives rise to concern. There is discrimination in access to schools, confiscation of land and access to water resources. Action must be taken against the policy applied by Israel. Dialogue must be restored so that violence perpetrated against Palestinian workers in the occupied territories can be stopped. Paragraph 80 of the report states that "many of the points raised in this report are a consequence of the state of occupation of the territories". This situation is completely the responsibility of Israel and until such occupation ceases the labour problems described in the Report are going to need a very careful follow-up by the ILO. It is therefore necessary to strengthen the resources of the Palestinian authorities and of Palestinian workers' and employers' organizations so that they can take on the task of representing direct the interests of the Palestinian people in bringing to an end the Israeli policies that have caused this situation. We hope that within the scope of its competence the ILO will take the necessary steps to restore the labour rights of Palestinian workers. We continue to support negotiations, as part of the peace process, but if no progress is made and the desired results do not emerge then it will be necessary to advocate the establishment of a special Conference committee that will be responsible for following up the problems facing Palestinian workers as they are presented in the Director-General's report.

M. KANAIEV Gueorgui, Representative General Confederation of Trade Unions

- I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Mr Oechslin on his election to the high post of President of the Conference. I have known him for many years, and know that he is skilled and very experienced and that thanks to him the work of our Conference will be crowned with success. For many years now we have had on the agenda of our Conference the complex fundamental issue of the rights of Palestinian workers in the occupied Arab territories occupied by Israel. We must focus on this issue at this session because this is the 50th anniversary of the adoption by the United Nations Organization of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the adoption by the ILO of the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87). It is unacceptable that now at the dawn of the twenty-first century, hundreds of thousands of Palestinian workers and families are living under conditions of military occupation, subject to persecution, suffering poverty and unemployment. Their most fundamental rights are being flouted daily. The Director-General's Report quotes very worrying statistics to highlight the situation: 21 per cent of persons who are able to work are unemployed; 20 per cent of persons live on an income - if you can call it an income - which is below US\$2 per day per person; periodical closure of the territories places enormous numbers of Palestinians at risk of death from hunger. We are concerned at the fact that the Government of Israel has virtually sabotaged the ILO Group of Experts and thus demonstrated that it does not care about the wishes of the representatives of the vast majority of the countries of the world. I think this position should be condemned at this session of the ILC since it runs counter to the principles and values of the Organization and violates obligations accepted by Israel when it became a Member of the ILO. Our Confederation of Trade Unions supports the rightful demands of the Arab workers, and today from this rostrum we state that we will continue actively to show our support. The trade unions of our countries advocate a peaceful settlement of the Middle East problem. We are greatly concerned at the lack of progress in resolving the Palestinian problem. Our Confederation unwaveringly supports the establishment of an independent national Palestinian State on the basis of full implementation of the relevant United Nations resolutions, taking into account the rights of all States in the region. Peace in the region should be secured, taking into account the rightful demands of the Palestinian people. We support the idea of a broad-based international conference with the participation of all those interested in peace in this region. We think that the International Labour Organization should also have its part to play in such a conference and it should also involve all the trade unions.

Mr. KARA Yousef, Workers' adviser and substitute delegate Israel

- I would like first of all to warmly congratulate the President on his election to preside over this 86th Session of the International Labour Conference. I would like to wish him and all participating delegations a successful session which will help to raise the standards of working people and their living conditions so that they may be active members in the improvement of their societies and earn a decent living for their families. From the outset I would like to express our opposition in principle to the convening of this special sitting, especially as these sittings were cancelled two years ago. However, the Organization has resurrected the practice. In protest, my country's delegation will not be attending this sitting to express its dissatisfaction with this injudicious step. I have a direct question to ask you: Of what possible use are these sittings? Do they improve the situation of workers in the territories or do they just lead to sterile discussions? Instead of all of us joining our efforts - we the Israelis and those who do indeed wish to improve the situation of Palestinian workers in Israel and under the Palestinian Authority - instead of us together seeking to convince the International Labour Organization and donor countries to provide more funds and resources, here we are back again in this sterile debate. The provision of such resources could be used to educate Palestinian workers, contribute to their vocational training, increase technical cooperation and job creation under the Palestinian Authority and in Israel. From this rostrum I tell you we are ready to shake hands with you, we are ready to work together to achieve this noble goal, because improved work opportunities and the creation of jobs is a clear goal of all Israeli institutions and especially the Histadrut, the General Federation of Labour, which I have the honour to represent. Here, I would like to recall what I said in previous years, the Histadrut has sought to provide trade union protection to Palestinian workers in Israel. The general wage agreements also cover Palestinian workers and guarantee them the minimum wage applied in Israel. This wage today amounts to US\$738. They are also provided with social security benefits such as pensions. These employees are also protected in the case of their employers' insolvency, in the form of a guarantee paid by the national insurance institute. The Histadrut also provides them with legal protection should their rights be flouted by their employers; they are given access to local lawyers to defend their rights. The Histadrut pursues these activities out of a firm conviction of the rights of these workers and because it is a solid institution that believes in peace and the peace process and which continues, despite its stumbling, to seek to propel it forward. The general elections of the Histadrut were recently held in Israel. Our Chairman Amir Ibretz, a Knesset member, was re-elected for a further four-year term. These elections will give him another opportunity to continue in his policy for the pursuit of peace. This peace-loving trade union has very strong relations with Palestinian trade unions. This is something of which we are proud. Two months ago, Mr Ibretz, on his own initiative, visited President Arafat. The meeting was attended by the Secretary-General of the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions, Mr. Shaher Sa'ad and his deputy. When President Arafat was informed of the Histadrut's activities he requested Mr. Shaher Sa'ad to step up relations between his Federation and the Histadrut, the trade union which aspires to peace for all. We hope that these relations will be strengthened in the interests of the workers and peoples of the region. As we are discussing the report of the Director-General on the situation of Palestinian workers, I would like to inform you that the number of Palestinian workers who have permits to work in Israel is currently 45,000, 40,000 others work without permits - Israel disregards these violations. There are also approximately 10,000 workers from the territories working in East Jerusalem and others still, bringing the overall number to about 110,000 workers. The Histadrut is seeking to increase these figures. The Histadrut is working in collaboration with the Government to reduce the number of foreign workers in Israel, which totals about 25,000 persons, and is seeking to replace them by Palestinian workers. We believe that Palestinian workers have a priority over other foreign workers. We have high hopes that we shall be able to

overcome the hardships of Palestinian workers by establishing vast projects such as industrial parks, sponsored by donors, which would be closure-free. I would like to remind you that last year there was not one single day of closure. It has been decided that extensive negotiations will be undertaken between employers in Palestine and in Israel to develop the economy. The establishment of these projects with the support of donors will enable us to achieve our objectives.

I am not a Government representative, but I would like to recall here that the Israeli authorities have cancelled quotas for Palestinian workers, have reduced to 23 the age required to work in Israel and intend to reduce it further, and intend to allow a majority of Palestinian workers to enter Israel and work there even during periods of disturbances. For more information I refer you to the Director-General's Report to the 86th Session of the International Labour Conference.

There is certainly a lot more that could be done on both sides to clear the air and promote reconciliation, which will help in the establishment of joint Palestinian and Israeli projects.

To return to what I said at the beginning, the convening of this special sitting is in fact turning the clock back, it is an expression of failure and a lack of confidence in the peace process. This is why we are not in agreement that it has been convened.

It is true that the peace process is currently going through a very sensitive and dangerous phase. It needs the support of all peace-loving people. Let us work together, hand in hand, to push the peace process forward for our children's sakes, for our peoples' sakes, for all our sakes. We, my brothers, have opted for peace and there are no other alternatives, let us seek to achieve it together.

M. KHALIL Ali, Minister of Social Affairs and Labour Syrian Arab Republic

- There is a famous Arab saying: "I hear what you say and I admire you for what you say, but when I see what you actually do I wonder whether you are being sincere". Please allow me once again to transmit to you on my own behalf and on behalf of the Syrian delegation our sincerest congratulations to the President and to the two Vice-President on their election to. We hope the special sitting will reach conclusions which reflect the discussions therein.

I would like to express our appreciation to the Director-General of the International Labour Office for continuing to follow up the implementation of the two ILC resolutions adopted in 1974 and 1980 on the situation of Arab workers and on the settlements in Palestine and the other occupied territories respectively. I would also like to commend the continued efforts of the mission sent by the Director-General, and to the obstacles and difficulties imposed by the Israeli authorities at the beginning of its visit. This mission did not receive authorization to visit Israel and the occupied Arab territories until very intensive bargaining and pressure was imposed over a period of some 125 days. The mission was not authorized to visit the Arab Syrian Golan and had to content itself with the little information it could obtain from other sources, that the situation remains unchanged.

Regarding access to higher education and to employment, new students are not allowed to travel to Damascus to study at the University of Damascus. Arab teachers are not allowed to fill teaching positions. Arabs are subject to discrimination in the export and agricultural sectors, land is confiscated and they are not denied access to water resources.

Paragraphs 48 and 49 are the two most positive paragraphs in the report of the mission, and explain why working conditions continue to be a major concern to Palestinian workers. The system of work permits, non-payment of wages and termination benefits, border-crossing problems, human relations and harassment, discrimination and inequality of pay are all matters of concern.

However, I would also like to refer to the negative aspects of the report.

One, the mission did not comment on the Israeli's obstruction of the mission's work.

Two, it ignored the observations of the Arab group at the end of the 85th Session of the International Labour Conference, whereas it referred to the contents of an Israeli letter, dated 28 January 1998, commenting on the report of the Director-General of 1997, although the letter came a year and a half after the report was published.

Three, paragraph 13 refers to the fact that, on the basis of the Israeli Government's comments on the mission's report, assurances were given that the report would in the future focus on the needs of the Palestinian people and on ILO activities and assistance. We wonder how such assurances could have been given while Israel continued to violate the ILC resolutions adopted in 1974 and 1980, and its continued occupation.

Four, the report failed to employ the terminology agreed in international law. It should have described the Arab occupied territories as "areas", and to Jerusalem as the annexed city of Jerusalem and not an Arab occupied territory; it should not have referred to the Arab population in the Golan, but to the Arab Syrian nationals in the occupied Arab Syrian Golan.

Five, the mission ignored the provisions of international law which are relevant to the occupied Arab territories, particularly The Hague Convention of 1907 and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 which were both signed by Israel. These two instruments are the main legal references in connection with the Israeli military occupations since 1967.

Six, the report exceeds its mandate by investigating the situation of the Palestinian and occupied Arab territories under Palestinian authority, completely neglects the situation of Palestinian workers living under Israeli occupation.

Seven, the report fails to refer either to the situation in occupied East Jerusalem, or to the arbitrary procedures and practices of the Israeli authorities in changing the geographic and demographic features of the region and of the Holy City by withdrawing ID cards from the Palestinian nationals, and through discriminatory access to services.

Eight, the report also committed a very serious error in ignoring the subversive and destructive effects of Israeli settlements on Palestine and on the occupied Arab Syrian Golan. This is where the true mandate of the mission lies, especially since the recent Israeli settlement offensive has been widely condemned by the international community, and several General Assembly Security Council sessions have been convened in order to urge Israel to halt its settlement activity.

Nine, the report did not give to the ILO's position vis-à-vis the continued Israeli discriminatory practices against the Palestinian workers, such as the minimum age condition which has been set at 25 years of age. Nor did it comment on the Israeli procedures which require Palestinians to return work permits personally instead of submitting them to the Palestinian employment officers. We are all aware that these procedures are imposed in order to bring personal pressure to bear on Palestinian workers and to use a carrot and stick policy to force them to collaborate with the Israeli authorities.

Ten, we have noted that paragraphs 38-44 of the report discuss "Employment in Israel and in settlements". We are wondering why employment in Israel should have been linked to employment in settlements, when the mission was fully aware that settlements are illegal under international law and the ILC resolution of 1980.

Eleven, regarding employment in Israel, the report does not present a view of the Israeli and Palestinian sides. It takes Israeli views for granted, especially on the subject of a plan which would allow Palestinian workers to enter Israel. But when it refers to the views of the Palestinian side, it uses words such as "claimed" or "alleged".

Twelve, the report discusses in detail (13 paragraphs out of 79) the past achievements of the technical cooperation programme but fails to discuss future programmes and potential technical cooperation projects. The report does not even mention the fact that ILO technical assistance was requested for Arab workers and employers in the Arab Syrian Golan. Although we long for a just and lasting peace, we shall not remain silent while mistakes and violations continue to be committed by the Israeli occupier. We are quite sure that freedom will come to the Arab Syrian Golan, south Lebanon and Palestine, and we hope that the Director-General of the ILO will take into consideration all these observations for future reports on the situation of Arab workers in the occupied Arab territories.

Mr. LAURIJSSEN Eddy, Representative International Confederation of Free Trade Unions

- The ICFTU regrets that unfavourable developments at the political level have turned the clock back and led to the holding of a special sitting during this year's session of the International Labour Conference.

Three years ago, when we last held a special sitting, we had reason to be more optimistic. The peace process was well on track and there was a good hope that the problems and injustices confronting the Palestinian people would soon be tackled in an overall climate of political progress and stability in the region.

The ICFTU firmly believes that, in spite of recent setbacks to the peace talks, political leaders will have to recognize that the only way out of this dangerously explosive situation is by restoring non-confrontational dialogue and policies based on the 1993 Oslo Agreements.

We therefore take every opportunity to appeal to all sides to show a stronger commitment to conciliation and a greater willingness for compromise. Negotiations should take place in a spirit of mutual respect on an equal basis for the legitimate rights of both the Israeli and the Palestinian peoples. In this connection, the ICFTU has always defended the right to self-determination of all peoples and maintains that Palestinian self-rule cannot be avoided or denied and must be implemented in line with the peace accords.

It is disappointing that the ILO secretariat mission, which produced the Director-General's Report before us at this session, was not given the time to elaborate a full report, as it was on previous occasions. Nevertheless, the document clearly indicates that there has been hardly any progress with regard to the hardships and the bad conditions suffered by workers in the occupied territories. Unemployment remains devastating, at almost 30 per cent in the West Bank and close to 40 per cent in Gaza. Wages are reported to have declined even further and non-payment of wages is not uncommon. Safety and health conditions at the workplace are often precarious and, on top of that, there are growing concerns about child labour. A widespread lack of respect for trade union rights by many employers is not unrelated to these situations. Consequently, the social situation remains one of the most serious impediments on the road to lasting progress and development.

We welcome the positive steps taken since August 1997 to facilitate the employment of Palestinian workers in Israel and to improve conditions at the checkpoints. However, the Israeli authorities should make further efforts to ensure that, even during sensitive security periods, Palestinian workers are not victimized and refused entry. Furthermore, we trust that the experiment allowing Palestinian workers to stay overnight in Israel will be a positive and mutually beneficial one and that it can be expanded in the future.

All in all, the problem of Palestinian workers in general, and in the occupied territories in particular, remains one of the most unacceptable situations we are confronted with in the world of labour today, and we all have a responsibility and a role to play in making sure that this matter will be dealt with effectively, unambiguously and without further delay. The peace process must be put back on track at the point where it was derailed. The international community must continue its efforts to provide the necessary economic and social development assistance. Productive investments should be given priority consideration and remaining trade restrictions and other obstacles should be removed.

We are pleased that ILO support has been substantial and possibilities should be examined for a further strengthening of cooperation, particularly in the fields of social security, vocational training, occupational health and safety, employment creation and management training, as well as social dialogue and freedom of association. As far as the latter question is concerned, we cannot stress enough the crucial role to be played by strong and independent trade unions in the national development process as a social partner and as a promoter of workers' interests. In this connection, the ICFTU, together with many national trade unions and international trade secretariats, as well as the ILO, has given its active support to the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions and we will continue to do so.

With respect to key labour issues in general, not least on the question of trade union rights, and the overdue reform of labour laws, we trust that the Palestinian authorities will allow themselves to be guided by the relevant ILO Conventions and will take full advantage of the ILO's advisory services to translate these standards into reality to meet Palestinian needs.

Mr. SMITH (Government delegate, United States) - The United States takes the position today, as it has in the past, that it is inappropriate to hold a special sitting on the occupied territories. We object because the practice singles out one member country, Israel, for treatment to which other members are not subjected, and because the ILO is not a forum for political discussions.

The United States strongly agrees that the ILO needs to focus on improving the situation of workers in the occupied territories. In that regard, we would note that the United States provides substantial assistance to the Palestinians. The US is the largest donor to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which is the main UN agency assisting Palestinian refugees. Each year the US contributes over \$70 million of UNRWA's budget. Just two weeks ago, we agreed to contribute an additional \$7 million this year. This support is important to the Palestinian people, and it will continue. We have also provided vehicles, spare parts and medical equipment for the police and the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Health.

These contributions are above and beyond our pledge to provide \$500 million in assistance to the Palestinian people. In all, the \$500 million pledge will encompass \$375 million in grants from the US Agency for International Development and \$125 million in loans from the Overseas Private Investment Corporation. To date, we have contributed about \$280 million in grants and loans. We have provided support for water and other infrastructure projects, private sector promotion, housing and governance, including support for the Palestinian Council elections. We have also channelled funds to support administrative activities of the Palestinian Authority.

In October 1993, the US hosted a conference which resulted in pledges of \$3.6 billion over a five-year period, towards helping the Palestinian people. This five-year period will end in October, but we believe that the international effort should continue. The US recognizes the critical role being played by other donors and, in addition, commends the ILO technical assistance programmes discussed in the Director-General's report. We are actively working with the Palestinians, Israelis and other donors to identify strategies to facilitate private sector development in the West Bank and Gaza.

Without entering into discussion of the peace process, we want to emphasize that opening the Gaza airport, opening the proposed Gaza seaport, and providing for safe passage between the West Bank and Gaza has important labour, economic, security and humanitarian ramifications for both the Palestinians and Israelis. We are actively urging both sides to resolve these complex issues.

The recurrence of terrorism and the Israeli closure policy have had a lasting negative impact on workers in the occupied territories. When this policy was in effect, workers could not travel to their jobs. Security considerations also restricted trade flows in and out of the West Bank and Gaza. The Palestinians still have no independent access to a seaport or airport, which means that, during periods of closure, the Palestinian economy is completely cut off from the outside world. We are pleased that the closure is no longer in effect, and hope that the ongoing negotiations will ensure that this remains a policy of the past.

In the interests of strengthening the Palestinian economy, the US has proposed the creation of a Gaza Industrial Estate (GIE) on the border between Gaza and Israel.

We hope that an agreement on security arrangements for the site will be reached soon. When the GIE becomes operational it will create up to 20,000 jobs for Palestinians. USAID is helping Israel and the Palestinian authorities to define the specific arrangements, and other potential sites are also under discussion. While the GIE cannot resolve the underlying problems between the Israelis and the Palestinians, it will serve to further the development that is an essential part of a lasting solution.

The United States is pleased to assist and work with the Palestinians, particularly with respect to initiatives to jump-start their economy. In the long term however, it is neither assistance nor government programmes, but private investment and private sector development that will vitalize the Palestinian economy. The United States hopes that this will be the last such special sitting, and that in future the ILO can focus on practical efforts to assist workers in the occupied territories.

Mr. LI Qisheng, Workers' delegate

China

Every year since the 1970s missions have been sent to the occupied territories in Israel every year by the ILO Director-General to look at the labour market and the workers' employment situation, their life and working conditions and to study the ILO's role in the territory. And almost every year in this solemn hall we discuss the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories and express our solidarity with the just struggle of the Palestinian people. However, because of the hard-nosed and stubborn position of the Israeli Government we have seen the Middle East peace process stagnate, failure to reach a rational solution to the problem and the Palestinian people still living in misery.

The Palestine issue is at the core of the Middle East issue. For a long time the absence of a just and a reasonable solution has not only dampened peace and development in the Middle East but also impaired peace and stability in the world at large. Since the signing of the Oslo agreements in 1993, the employment and income situation of the workers in the occupied territories has continuously worsened rather than improved. Between 1992 and 1996, we saw a sharp decrease in per capita income - the average living standard fell by more than one third - and a big increase in unemployment. Statistics show that in 1997 the unemployment rate of the Palestinian labour force in the occupied territory was as high as 21 per cent, sometimes 30 or even 40 per cent. What makes it even worse is that the Israeli Government often uses security reasons as an excuse to halt the movement of people between Gaza, Jericho and Israel. This affects the work and life of tens of thousands of Palestinian people. The Israeli authorities have even adopted discriminatory policies against the Palestinians, such as different pay for the same work and even non-payment of their salaries. The life, property and basic subsistence of the Palestinians cannot be protected. According to the statistics, about 19 per cent of the Palestinian people living in the West Bank and Gaza - some 500,000 people - are living below the poverty line owing to unemployment, insufficient employment or unstable working conditions. That being so, we urgently call on the Israeli Government to implement the relevant United Nations resolutions and fulfil the promises of the previous Government: that is, adhere to the principle "land for peace", withdraw from the West Bank and stop building settlements in the territory so as to ensure an early solution to the Palestinian issue and enable the people in the occupied territory to live a happy and peaceful life.

Chinese workers and trade unions have always given their support to the Palestinian workers and people in their just struggle for the restoration of their legitimate rights. We will, as always, continue to support the Middle East peace process. We appreciate the ILO's remarkable role in promoting democracy and workers' basic rights, combating unemployment and poverty and protecting workers in the occupied territories. We hope that the ILO will continue, and strengthen, its technical cooperation in line with the peace process so as to improve the working and living conditions of the workers in the territories and bring benefit to all the Palestinian workers and people. We, the Chinese workers and the people, will, as always, continue our unremitting efforts for the realization of peace and stability in the Middle East.

Mr. LIN Maizhu, Government adviser and substitute delegate

China

- The fact that the International Labour Conference is holding a special sitting on the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories shows very clearly that the member States of this Organization are very concerned about the problems in the Middle East.

For a number of years now, the very agitated situation in this region has been a considerable obstacle to employment for the Palestinian people, and has had very serious consequences for all of the peoples in the region. Consequently, we must pay great attention to this issue.

The Chinese Government too has been extremely concerned about the situation in the Middle East and has been observing the peace process, which is now deadlocked. It believes that the relevant resolutions of the United Nations and the principle of land for peace has to be the basis for a peaceful resolution to the situation in the region. In order to get the peace negotiations out of this impasse, the concerned parties have to implement the accords that have already been reached between them.

China has great sympathy for the Palestinian people, which for over half a century has been deprived of its land and also supports the just claims of the Palestinian people and the Arab peoples for the return of their legitimate national rights. We call on all the parties to fully apply the United Nations resolutions in order to bring the peace process out of this impasse and ensure a just and lasting peace in the region.

As a permanent member of the Security Council of the United Nations, China supports the peace process in the Middle East. It supports the peaceful negotiation process in the region and will continue to work together with the international community in order to promote that process and to make its own contribution.

In order to make progress in the peace process we have to further improve the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories. We must also improve the situation with respect to the unfair treatment to which the Palestinian people are subjected. We call upon the International Labour Organization to take effective measures and, in the light of the realities of the occupied territories, to help develop employment policies, to make good use of human resources, to improve workers' skills and to create the greatest possibilities for job creation, in order to resolve the problems of unemployment and poverty and to improve further the situation of the workers in the occupied Arab territories.

Mr. MAHENDRA Shri K.L., Workers' adviser delegate

India

- It is shocking to note the conditions of workers in the occupied Arab territories in spite of earlier ILO resolutions. The Government of Israel did not cooperate with the ILO mission sent to enquire into the situation there.

There are also townships of Israelis within Palestinian territory which have been constructed in spite of international protests, and in violation of Palestinian sovereignty in those areas. In those territories it is the law of Israel that applies and not the law of Palestine, which has no legal rights whatsoever.

Palestinian workers are issued work permits to work in Israeli territory but in spite of that they are prevented from entering Israeli territory, sometimes on the frivolous grounds that the workers have to clear debts or the factory does not require work.

They have work for about 190 days a year. In some cases there are group contracts and workers do not get even the minimum wage laid down by law. They cannot use the courts for redress as the fees are too high. If a worker wants to use the courts he must obtain a guarantee from the Palestinian Government that it will pay the damages if the employee loses his case.

The number of unemployed in the occupied Arab territories is too high. A permit holder is denied entry if he has been absent through illness or if he is no longer required by his employer.

There are also permits for working in the Israeli settlements, or industrial zones within Israeli settlements. Those that work in East Jerusalem are reported as working in Israel. There are settlements on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip although these are recognized as Palestinian territories. The Israeli forces have not vacated the Golan Heights area belonging to the Syrian Arab Republic.

In 1997, 21 per cent of the labour force remained unemployed. Those who are employed for 35 hours a week are underemployed.

According to independent surveys, the average wage between 1987 and 1995 fell by 45 per cent in Gaza and by 30 per cent in the West Bank, about half a million of the population in Gaza and the West Bank live below the poverty line.

The age limit for a work permit to work in Israel is 23 years and the person must be married.

The system of work permits is affected by Israeli border closures and workers lose their jobs for being late or absent. Workers from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank are considered outside Israeli jurisdiction.

During border closures children are forced to work because of the fall in family income.

In spite of steps taken by the ILO, Palestinians working in Israel or the illegally occupied Arab territories are in violation of ILO standards and of human rights. The occupation of the Golan Heights or the setting up of settlements in Gaza and the West Bank are a violation of the sovereignty of Palestinians and other Arabs, which are no doubt political questions. But the Israeli Government should be dealt with firmly for violation of workers rights recognized by the ILO and violation of human rights.

The ILO Conference should unequivocally condemn the policies of the Israeli Government and take steps to ensure that human rights are recognized and the absence of labour standards is corrected.

In the end, I appeal to the Israeli Government to vacate the occupied Arab territories and recognize the sovereignty of Palestine and the Arab territories. This alone will pave the way for peace and progress in the whole region.

Mr. MANNAN M.A., Minister of Labour and Manpower

Bangladesh

- Mr. President, I would like to begin by thanking the Director-General for presenting the report on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories. Tributes are due to the ILO for its commendable work over the last two decades in improving the conditions of workers in the occupied Arab territories.

We note with concern that the situation of the workers in the occupied territories has not substantially improved since last year's report. Unemployment and poverty continue to rise and discriminatory practices directed at the people living in the occupied territories have not abated.

The frequent closure of the occupied territories and restrictions on work permits issued to its inhabitants on the one hand, and the construction of Israeli settlements on the other, have gravely affected the economic and social well-being of the Palestinian people.

As the report indicates, the situation is no better in the Syrian Golan. We entirely concur with paragraph 80 of the report which states that many of the points raised in the report are a consequence of the state of occupation of the territories. Indeed the mere fact of occupation is a denial of the fundamental rights of the occupied people as a whole and of workers in particular. The suffering of working people under occupation is a special situation and therefore deserves our special attention. The holding of today's special session is therefore most appropriate and we welcome it.

The issue of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination is essentially a political one. The suffering of workers is only one aspect of a whole range of consequences of occupation. The ultimate solution to this problem is the return of all Palestinian people to their homeland and the establishment of an independent State on their national soil with Jerusalem as its capital. As long as these territories remain occupied the ILO will need to consider the situation of its workers separately. The need for a special sitting on the occupied Arab territories will cease only when they are no longer occupied by Israel and the "core problem" of the Middle East is resolved.

Mr. MBOWENI T., Minister of Labour

South Africa

- May I also, on behalf of the OAU Labour and Social Affairs Commission, congratulate the President on his election.

On behalf of the OAU Labour and Social Affairs Commission, it is an honour and a great pleasure to address this Special Sitting of the 86th Session of the International Labour Conference, which is devoted to the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories.

We thank the Governing Body for recommending the holding of this special sitting due to the deterioration of the social and economic situations in this region, and

the gravity of the persistent practices of the present Israeli Government.

As in previous years, the report of the Director-General on the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories provides us with an opportunity to confront the realities in that region.

The report highlights many flagrant violations of human rights which still continue despite the signing of many agreements between the Israelis and the Palestinians, in particular the Oslo agreements, which had raised new hopes and expectations for a peaceful settlement.

We are also deeply concerned that the extension of illegal Israeli settlements into the occupied Arab territories is a source of tension and gross inequality in this region. Recent experiences of unrest have been indicative of such tension. This also restricts the already scarce opportunities and resources of the Palestinian people, and represents a growing obstacle to a peaceful settlement.

In fact, workers continue to be in a very vulnerable position without any protection. The situation of the Palestinian workers continues to be precarious.

We call upon Israel to put immediately to effect the numerous agreements and United Nations Security Council resolutions.

We have repeatedly expressed great concern about the policy of extending settlements into the occupied Arab territories, which endangers all peace processes under way.

We do not believe that the economic and social problems can be solved or improved as long as the occupation of these territories continues, and the settlements continue to be built.

We call upon the ILO to continue its technical assistance which is vital to the social partners in Palestine and request the Governing Body to consider the establishment of a special committee to monitor and report on the situation in the Palestinian and other occupied Arab territories.

May I conclude on a note of hope and optimism that the Israeli Government will heed the call to adhere to the international agreements mentioned above.

M. NORDMANN Jean-Luc, Director, Federal Office for Industry, Arts and Crafts and Labour (OFIAMT)

Switzerland

- The very fact that we are gathered here today for the first time in some years now, in a special session devoted to the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories shows that the situation is still very worrying for the international community and that long-term solutions to this issue must be sought more urgently than ever.

The aim of the report of the Director-General is to contribute to a better understanding between the parties concerned and an improvement in the situation with regard to employment. In our opinion we need an objective analysis based on various sources and data in order to achieve this aim. The report of the Director-General, we feel, meets these requirements and this is why we support and encourage such an approach.

The link acknowledged in the report between the situation of Palestinian workers and the policy of closure of the occupied territories has caught our attention. Since the previous report the situation with regard to the employment of persons affected by these closures has by and large improved considerably. Nevertheless, we are still concerned by the economic, social and human repercussions of hindrances to freedom of movement for the whole of the population of the occupied territories. Similarly, the conclusions of the report commissioned by the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) underline the link between child labour in the occupied territories and economic problems, which in turn are linked to measures hampering freedom of movement, including border closures, which have been carried out by the State of Israel.

Another point raised in the report, and which has been the focus of Swiss attention, is that of the situation of Palestinian workers in Israel. At previous International Labour Conferences, Switzerland has regularly echoed the concerns expressed by the international community regarding their situation. This is why we welcomed the adoption by the Israeli Government of measures aimed at making a number of substantial improvements in the situation of the Palestinian workers, in particular, by abolishing the quota system and offering a number of them the possibility of spending the night in Israel. The State of Israel has also changed its policies with regard to the possibilities for Palestinian workers to change Israeli employers. Nevertheless, some problems which were raised during the mission sent by the Director-General still exist and deserve further attention. These are, in particular, those questions associated with the often precarious status of these workers and the lack of social security cover.

Furthermore, the independent and democratic character of a Palestinian trade union movement is a prerequisite for real enjoyment of trade union rights. In their own interests, and for the general well-being of the workers, Switzerland calls for objective and unpolitical cooperation between the parties concerned in order to alleviate, as soon as possible, the problems of poverty and unemployment in the occupied Arab territories and to contribute to compliance with the fundamental rights and principles recognized in the Constitution and Conventions of the ILO.

Similarly, we support any technical cooperation efforts undertaken with the help of the ILO, particularly as far as child labour is concerned. Indeed, Switzerland has developed a specific action programme in this region, covering many aspects of development including social and economic rehabilitation of former political prisoners. Through such measures, Switzerland hopes to contribute in a constructive way to this necessary and objective cooperation between the parties to whom we have just referred.

Mr. SABBAH Mohammad Mahmoud, Representative

Palestine

- On behalf of the delegation of Palestine, I would like to express to the President and members of the Governing Body of the ILO our gratitude and appreciation for their interest in the situation of the workers and people of Palestine, and I am honoured to convey to you all the greetings of President Yasser Arafat.

The tragic situation in Palestine is constantly deteriorating. Social, economic and human suffering mounts as Israeli authorities impose their arbitrary policies and procedures on the Palestinian people, over four years after the Declaration of Principles was signed between Israel and the PLO.

The interest of the ILO in the situation of the workers and people of Palestine is greatly appreciated by President Yasser Arafat and the National Authority, as it is based on the resolutions relating to international legitimacy adopted by numerous United Nations organization agencies, and which Israel has continuously flaunted in total defiance of the international community for over 50 years now, in the knowledge that it is backed by the United States and its double standards.

The stance adopted by the ILO reflects its belief in the principles of justice and peace informing the social conscience of the peoples of the world. The visit of the Director-General, Mr. Michel Hansenne, to Palestine in 1995 demonstrated the desirability of laying the foundations for stability, peace and justice in the region. It also provided evidence of the ILO's intention to continue supporting the Palestinian people in its homeland. The visit of the Chairperson of the Governing Body, Mr. Chotard and, more recently, the Assistant Director-General responsible for ILO affairs in the Arab States, Mr. Ibrahim Souss served the same end.

The report of the Director-General this year was based on the last fact-finding mission to look into the situation of workers in Palestine, under the ILC resolutions of 1974 and 1980. Unfortunately, the Israeli authorities once again obstructed the work of this mission. Over four months, they refused to grant the members of the mission visas into Palestine and the other occupied territories, thereby preventing them from fully executing their task, in addition to the fact that they were not permitted to visit the Syrian Arab Golan which has been occupied since 1967.

The attitude of the Israeli authorities towards the international mission offers an eloquent indication to the international community of Israelis' treatment of Palestinian nationals on a day to day basis. Indeed, it is the corollary to the Israeli authorities' control of border crossings and of the movement of Palestinian persons and goods over these crossings, between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and between the villages and towns on the West Bank. Hence, the West Bank is cut off when closures are imposed for various security reasons, to the extent that the situation of Palestinian citizens is worse today than it has been at any time during the peace process. In short, the occupation goes on and Israeli practices continue to deteriorate, in total disregard of international resolutions, with the intention of derailing the peace process and delivering the region into a state of war and destruction. The problems experienced by the Palestinian economy and labour market have declined dangerously over the past four years as a result of Israel's closure policies, in the context of collective sanctions that are continually inflicted on the Palestinian people which ultimately cause loss of jobs, violations of workers' rights, unfair dismissals and the gravest forms of exploitation by Israeli employers.

Since 25 February 1996, the Israeli closures have acquired alarming dimensions, since the total closure of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip has completely stopped any movement between them. During the course of 1997, 85 days of total closure were imposed. This policy has exacerbated unemployment, reduced family earnings, eliminated savings, cut daily wages, curtailed productivity and the level of development forecast for 1997. The conditions suffered by the Palestinian workers are more than tragic, as a result of the policies adopted by the Israeli occupation which violate the fundamental human rights embodied in international covenants and conventions.

You are no doubt aware of the extremely precarious situation of the peace process, as a result of the fact that the Netanyahu Government refuses to honour its commitments under the agreement signed before the entire international community. Political analysts should review their forecasts on a 24-hourly basis, to take

account of the endless declarations intended to destroy the peace process, going so far as to state that it has already been dead for two years. Indeed, we would like to ask the international community what has become of the accords of Madrid, Oslo, Washington, Cairo and Taba. It would appear that all these agreements are forgotten on the pretext of security, always security. The executioner asks his victims to watch over his security, while the Palestinian citizens and workers continue to be murdered in cold blood at the Israeli military checkpoints. The latest incident occurred at the Tarkoumia checkpoint where workers returning to their homes were murdered by soldiers who were subsequently found innocent by the Israeli Military Court, on the grounds that they were merely following orders.

The fact that Israel pursues its policies on all fronts eloquently demonstrates that it rejects the peace process and wishes to pursue its expansionist goals at the expense of the Arab people in Palestine, the Golan and South Lebanon. Likewise, it continues to endeavour to present a *fait accompli* by stepping up its colonisation activities, confiscating lands, Judaizing the city of Jerusalem, building ring-roads, destroying homes, confiscating the identity cards of Palestinians in Jerusalem, repeatedly desecrating Muslim shrines and holding 3,500 Palestinians in detention, many of whom are cruelly tortured by order of the Israeli courts which permit and declare torture to be legal. Unquestionably, this is the quickest way to provoke an explosion in the Middle East, and a return to the spiral of violence, thereby destroying any possibility of finally achieving stability in the region.

Everybody is now aware of the real nature of Israeli policies and thus we appeal to the international community and to all peace-loving nations, and to all those who wish for peace and stability in the Middle East and throughout the world, to adopt a collective position in order to halt this decline and end the Israeli policy of occupation. We appeal also to them to insist on compliance with the resolutions of the United Nations, the Security Council and other international organizations which provide for Israel's withdrawal from Palestine, the Arab Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon.

While the international community endeavours to bring Israel to comply with international resolutions, it is essential that it should offer its genuine and continued support to the Palestinian people in order to alleviate their daily suffering and restore their enjoyment of the legitimate rights to return, to self-determination and to the creation of an independent State, with Jerusalem as its capital. The Palestinian people know that their cause is just and call for your continued support in working towards the establishment of a standing committee responsible for examining the situation of workers in Palestine and in the other occupied Arab territories, for as long as the Israeli occupation continues.

M. SAHBANI Ismail, Workers' delegate

Tunisia

- In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful! Allow me at the outset to express our deep gratitude to the Director-General for the report submitted to the Conference this year on the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories. This report is comprehensive and full of useful information, although it was prepared very quickly in view of the short period allotted to the fact-finding mission owing to the stalling tactics of the Israeli authorities as referred to in the report. I would also like to thank the members of the mission who were objective and based their work on the principles and objectives set out in the ILO's Constitution and in its standards, and this despite the complicated nature of the situation under a continuing occupation, with no single legislative framework for labour in the occupied Arab territories.

The report of the Director-General reviews the actual situation of Palestinian workers. It is a situation which is worsening because of the closures of the territories and the continuing confiscation of Palestinian lands, and because of the construction of a new settlement and the constant insults and threats that are meted out to Palestinian workers. This has led to a deterioration of living conditions for the entire Palestinian people and to worsening unemployment and poverty.

Per capita income has fallen by more than 20 per cent since 1993, and the number of days worked by Palestinian workers within the green line dropped from 9.7 million in 1993 to just 4.1 million in 1996, when the Netanyahu Government came to power.

Statistics given by the international specialized agencies indicate that the unemployment rate in 1997 reached 27.5 per cent in the West Bank and 37.5 per cent in the Gaza Strip. The general average reached 30 per cent of the active Palestinian population. This deterioration led in recent years to a sharp drop in income levels and in salaries, causing still greater poverty. The World Bank estimates the number of Palestinians living under the poverty line in 1977 at half a million people.

We believe that the fight against poverty and unemployment and the improvement of material and moral living conditions of life for the Palestinians cannot be achieved unless there is a breakthrough in the peace process. However, such a breakthrough is impossible as long as the Israeli Government continues to deny its obligations, continues to build more settlements and to destroy Palestinian homes, while continuing to occupy the south of Lebanon and the Syrian Golan Heights in direct and clear violation of United Nations resolutions.

A genuine peace is a peace that offers the people of the region real opportunities for development and cooperation. A real peace can only be achieved by a full Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories and the respect of the right of the Palestinian people to independence. Similarly, the policy of collective punishment that is imposed on the people of Iraq and the people of Libya must be stopped.

This meeting today complements the efforts made by the international community to support the proponents of peace and freedom and to isolate extremist forces that try to undermine any chances for a just and lasting peace in the region.

It is our view that the ILO should set up a standing committee to follow the conditions in the Arab occupied territories, just as we did for with South Africa in the days of apartheid. That will permit our organization and workers' organizations all over the world to play their part in bringing peace to the region and in promoting cooperation among its peoples.

M. SIDI SAID Abdelmadjid, Workers' delegate

Algeria

- Mr. President, on behalf of the General Union of Algerian workers - the UGTA - and its Secretary-General I would like to express my thanks to those who have taken the initiative to organize this special session, which gives us the opportunity to express our support for the Palestinian workers and people and for all other workers in the occupied Arab territories.

We would like to take the opportunity to thank the Director-General for the interest he has shown in the situation now prevailing in the occupied Arab territories.

As you know, over the last few weeks the media have given exclusive coverage to the anniversary celebrations of the State of Israel. Some elements of the media have also the honesty to recall that this anniversary is also the anniversary of the dispossession of a people, the Palestinian people.

For 50 years, the Palestinian people have been paying for a crime that they did not commit, a crime committed by others. For 50 years, they have been forced to take the road, crammed into refugee camps, and expelled to other countries. For 50 years, they have been deprived of their land, and hounded from their villages and towns. Even their very existence has been denied, their very right to exist as a people. The propaganda has been very clever. They talked only about Arab tribes, which are more or less nomadic, giving the impression that they did not really have any particular attachment to Palestinian land and therefore no rights over it.

For 50 years the Palestinian people have been fighting to gain recognition of their rights, their rights to their land, their rights to exist as a people and a nation. This struggle, which is constantly renewed in its objectives, its means and its methods, led ultimately to the intifada which broke down the wall of lies. The intifada was a popular uprising against political deadlock and Israeli intransigence. It showed the entire world that the Palestinian people were indeed a real entity and that they were still there on their land, oppressed, but still fighting. Since then the struggle has continued. It is harsh and complex, with ground being gained and lost again, but the legitimacy is undeniably ever greater and ever more accepted by international public opinion.

In this struggle, the Palestinian workers are the ones who bear the brunt. They and their children are the ones who pay the heavy price for demonstrating against the new settlements. They are the ones who are arrested, held in administrative detention for weeks and months on end, and it is they who are tortured. They are the ones who suffer the effects of restrictions on their movement imposed on them by the occupiers. They are the ones who are turned back at the frontiers of their own country, prevented from working, unable to earn a livelihood, and support their families because of these infamous closures of the territories which are a deadly form of blackmail, and it is they who continue to resist, who daily devise new forms of resistance, and who will advance this struggle in this true passing of the torch from generation to generation, this vast and dramatic struggle of a people for its very survival.

This is why, on behalf of the Algerian workers, on behalf of the UGTA, I would like to pay great tribute to them here. Our organization, the General Union of Algerian Workers, has always proclaimed its solidarity with its workers and their people and with all the peoples of the occupied Arab territories.

In honouring our duty of solidarity with the workers of the entire world, our thoughts today go out first and foremost to them. Because they are the strongest expression of their people's struggle, it is with them that I invite you to express your solidarity.

Through this message and through them, it is their entire people who will know that we stand side by side with them in their demands for justice, freedom and dignity. We ask the ILO to set up a standing commission for Palestine.

Mr. SKOGMO Bjørn, Government adviser and substitute delegate

Norway

- Norway would like to thank the Director-General for the comprehensive report before us. We share the concerns voiced in the report regarding the difficult economic situation in the Palestinian areas. The difficulties in the peace process have had negative economic effects. It is equally evident that the peace process in the Middle East will not succeed unless it creates jobs and economic growth in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in addition to those created in Israel since 1993. Norway is also seriously concerned about the continued Israeli settlement activities in the Palestinian areas which are contrary to international law and the spirit of the Oslo Agreement. We reiterate our call to the parties to resume direct contact at the highest level with a view to starting final status negotiations as soon as possible. The Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for economic assistance to the Palestinians which Norway is chairing is working continuously to improve economic conditions in the Palestinian areas, particularly with regard to employment. The donor countries have agreed to continue economic assistance to the Palestinians beyond 1999. In this context, Norway appreciates the valuable contribution of the ILO's technical cooperation programmes in coordinating with all the relevant actors for strengthening the position of Palestinian workers, thus implementing its mandate and supporting the peace process in the Middle East.

Mr. SMITH Gare A., Government delegate

United States

- The United States takes the position today, as it has in the past, that it is inappropriate to hold a special sitting on the occupied territories. We object because the practice singles out one member country, Israel, for treatment to which other members are not subjected, and because the ILO is not a forum for political discussions. The United States strongly agrees that the ILO needs to focus on improving the situation of workers in the occupied territories. In that regard, we would note that the United States provides substantial assistance to the Palestinians. The US is the largest donor to the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which is the main UN agency assisting Palestinian refugees. Each year the US contributes over \$70 million of UNRWA's budget. Just two weeks ago, we agreed to contribute an additional \$7 million this year. This support is important to the Palestinian people, and it will continue. We have also provided vehicles, spare parts and medical equipment for the police and the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Health.

These contributions are above and beyond our pledge to provide \$500 million in assistance to the Palestinian people. In all, the \$500 million pledge will encompass \$375 million in grants from the US Agency for International Development and \$125 million in loans from the Overseas Private Investment Corporation. To date, we have contributed about \$280 million in grants and loans. We have provided support for water and other infrastructure projects, private sector promotion, housing and governance, including support for the Palestinian Council elections. We have also channelled funds to support administrative activities of the Palestinian Authority.

In October 1993, the US hosted a conference which resulted in pledges of \$3.6 billion over a five-year period, towards helping the Palestinian people. This five-year period will end in October, but we believe that the international effort should continue. The US recognizes the critical role being played by other donors and, in addition, commends the ILO technical assistance programmes discussed in the Director-General's report. We are actively working with the Palestinians, Israelis and other donors to identify strategies to facilitate private sector development in the West Bank and Gaza.

Without entering into discussion of the peace process, we want to emphasize that opening the Gaza airport, opening the proposed Gaza seaport, and providing for safe passage between the West Bank and Gaza has important labour, economic, security and humanitarian ramifications for both the Palestinians and Israelis. We are actively urging both sides to resolve these complex issues.

The recurrence of terrorism and the Israeli closure policy have had a lasting negative impact on workers in the occupied territories. When this policy was in effect, workers could not travel to their jobs. Security considerations also restricted trade flows in and out of the West Bank and Gaza. The Palestinians still have no independent access to a seaport or airport, which means that, during periods of closure, the Palestinian economy is completely cut off from the outside world. We are pleased that the closure is no longer in effect, and hope that the ongoing negotiations will ensure that this remains a policy of the past.

In the interests of strengthening the Palestinian economy, the US has proposed the creation of a Gaza Industrial Estate (GIE) on the border between Gaza and Israel.

We hope that an agreement on security arrangements for the site will be reached soon. When the GIE becomes operational it will create up to 20,000 jobs for Palestinians. USAID is helping Israel and the Palestinian authorities to define the specific arrangements, and other potential sites are also under discussion. While the GIE cannot resolve the underlying problems between the Israelis and the Palestinians, it will serve to further the development that is an essential part of a lasting solution.

The United States is pleased to assist and work with the Palestinians, particularly with respect to initiatives to jump-start their economy. In the long term however, it is neither assistance nor government programmes, but private investment and private sector development that will vitalize the Palestinian economy. The United States hopes that this will be the last such special sitting, and that in future the ILO can focus on practical efforts to assist workers in the occupied territories.

Mr. SUNMONU Hassan A., Representative

Organization of African Trade Union Unity

- Firstly I would like to thank the President for giving me the floor. I would like to associate the Organization of African Trade Union Unity with the sentiments expressed by the Honourable Minister of Labour for South Africa and Chairman of the OAU Labour and Social Affairs Commission on behalf of the African tripartite delegation.

Permit me, on behalf of the Organization of African Trade Union Unity and all African workers, to express my appreciation to the ILO Governing Body for approving this special sitting of the Conference to consider the report of the Director-General on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories. I also congratulate the Director-General for the excellent report which was prepared in very difficult circumstances.

Going through the report, any impartial observer will conclude that the human and trade union rights of the Palestinian and Arab workers in the occupied Arab territories have been, and continue to be, violated by the Israeli occupation authorities. In this 50th anniversary year of both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention (No. 87) this is not acceptable.

When viewed from the moral point of view that these violations are perpetrated by a Government whose people have been subjected to horrendous atrocities for hundreds of years, then it becomes even more morally indefensible.

Allow me to cite some examples from the report: (1) in paragraph 17 it is said that, and I quote: "The Israeli authorities did not allow new students from the occupied Golan to travel to study at Damascus University and local Arab teachers still had problems obtaining places to teach in the region's schools despite their qualifications"; (2) in paragraph 20 we are told of the cold-blooded murder of three Palestinian workers and the wounding of five others by Israeli border guards on 10 March 1998; (3) arbitrary confiscation of land and building of illegal new settlements on Palestinian land; (4) frequent closures of the occupied Arab territories up until September 1997 and I refer to paragraphs 23, 26, 27 and 30 of the report; and (5) harassment of Palestinian workers with valid permits by Israeli bodyguards, paragraph 42.

These grave violations of the human and trade union rights of Palestinian and Arab workers in the occupied Arab territories are of great concern to African workers and trade unions. In our opinion these problems cannot be treated separately from a comprehensive settlement of the Middle East crisis.

It is noted with concern that since the change in the Israeli Government two years ago, the hope for peace generated by the Oslo agreement has evaporated, giving rise to frustration and anxiety. There is an urgent need for peace in the Middle East. It is a universally acknowledged fact that there can be no peace without justice. If there is no justice for Palestinians and Arabs who have been victims of the gross injustice which has been perpetrated in the past 50 years and is still being perpetrated today, there can be no peace in the Middle East. The intransigence of the current Israeli authorities in faithfully implementing agreements read to the Palestinians, coupled with the gross violation of human and trade union rights of the Palestinians and Arabs, some of which are contained in the Director-General's report, is responsible for the resurgence of retaliatory terror by a minority Palestinian group against Israelis, namely the bombings in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv in June and September 1997 that are contained in the Director-General's report.

Strict compliance by the Israeli authorities with the relevant Security Council resolutions, namely Resolutions Nos. 242, 338 and 425 will pave the way for peace in the Middle East.

The return of Golan to its rightful owner, the Syrian Arab Republic, the withdrawal of Israeli forces from south Lebanon, the establishment of the State of Palestine with Jerusalem as its capital, the Israeli recognition of its Arab neighbours and good neighbourliness are the essential ingredients for durable peace in the Middle East.

I would like to commend the invaluable technical assistance the ILO has been giving to the Palestinian Authority and its tripartite constituencies. The acute situation

of Palestinian and Arab workers and peoples under Israeli occupation calls for greater assistance from the ILO and the international community.

I cannot end this speech without informing this august gathering of the unanimous support of the Organization of African Trade Union Unity, its affiliates, and the entire African Workers for the just cause of the Palestinian workers and people.

At the 21st session of the Organization of African Trade Union Unity General Council held in Cairo early last month, a unanimous resolution of support and solidarity for the Palestinian workers and peoples was adopted.

In conclusion, the Organization of African Trade Union Unity supports the creation of a permanent special conference committee to consider the report of the Director-General on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories until the final resolution of the Middle East crisis.

Mr. TARMIDZI Agus, Government adviser and substitute delegate

Indonesia

- Allow me, first of all, to welcome the decision of this Conference to hold this special sitting to consider the report of the Director-General on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories. This decision reflects our grave concern over the continuing hardships faced, on a day-to-day basis, by the workers of occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories. This decision also reflects our anxiety over the fact that the uncertainty in the Middle East peace process, as Israel has reneged on its commitments to agreements already reached, has been the ultimate stumbling-block to the protection and promotion of the rights of the people in the occupied territories, including the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to determine their own destiny and establish an independent State of their own with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

My delegation has noted with appreciation the factual and statistical framework provided in the Director-General's report on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories. This report opens up the window of opportunity for us to better comprehend the realities on the ground and, subsequently, to formulate better policies which could solve the problems effectively. However, my delegation deems it necessary that there should be a series of follow-up studies conducted by the ILO to provide us with an analytical framework and a set of recommendations to deal with the situation. It is also of particular concern to my delegation that the ILO mission encountered difficulties in receiving the necessary authorizations to travel to Israel and the occupied territories, delaying the mission and leaving it with a very limited time to conduct its work.

The peace process has been paralysed over the past two years, as Israel has reneged on its commitments to agreements already reached and subjected the people in the occupied territories to various provocative measures. The Israeli occupation authorities have continued such illegal actions as the confiscation of lands, the imposition of collective punishments by way of economic blockades and the demolition of homes. The escalation in the construction of illegal Israeli settlements on occupied Arab lands, including those in and around Jabal Abu Ghneim, is particularly reprehensible. This brazen attempt to alter the geographic and demographic composition of the occupied territories has been condemned by the international community as a flagrant violation of the 1993 Declaration of Principles and subsequent agreements, as well as of relevant United Nations resolutions, the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and various other international laws. These actions of oppression and provocation taken by Israel have inflicted great suffering on the people living in the occupied territories and stymied any efforts to resume the peace negotiations. The cycle of repeated crises and stalemates in the negotiations cannot go on without having disastrous consequences.

It is therefore very important to ensure the unconditional withdrawal of all Israeli forces from all the Palestinian and Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, the Syrian Golan and Lebanon, in accordance with Security Council Resolutions 242, 338 and 425 as well as the application of the principle of "land for peace". The peace process must be resumed and Israel must implement the agreements it has reached with Palestine in their entirety and with consistency and fairness, and not selectively, sporadically or conditionally.

Furthermore, the tensions and frustrations gripping the occupied territories are heightened by an economy crippled by decades of foreign occupation. For too long now, the people in the occupied territories have lived in abject economic conditions as Israel has systematically curtailed all opportunities to earn a decent livelihood. The workers of the occupied territories have been subjected to hard labour, low wages, discrimination and isolation from the outside world. In the awareness that peace and development are intertwined, it is therefore imperative for the international community to expeditiously provide vital development assistance to the people in the Palestinian and Arab occupied territories to better equip them with the necessary means and resources to develop their own economies.

For its part, the ILO should maintain its presence in the territories, including enhancing its technical cooperation programmes. It would also be very useful if the ILO could prepare the next mission to the occupied territories in a more timely and effective manner. It is therefore very important that this Conference call upon the Israeli authorities to fully cooperate with the ILO missions.

To conclude, my delegation is of the view that the report of the Director-General on the situation of workers of the occupied territories as well as the proceedings and conclusions of this special sitting should be widely disseminated.

Mr. THÜSING Rolf, Employers' delegate

Germany

- I do not think that anyone is pleased that this sitting is taking place, not even any of those who requested it. In view of the welcome signs that there might be lasting change in the state of affairs which gave rise to this special sitting we had hoped and greed that in future we would be able to refrain, and we should indeed refrain, from holding such sittings. But unfortunately our hopes were not borne out by events.

The grounds for such hopes have nevertheless not disappeared. Even today we should and must continue to hope that events will not bear out our fears.

We can conclude from the report that at least in some areas of the labour market there is a slight tendency towards improvement and this is certainly to be welcomed. But unfortunately one cannot deny that this improvement is only slight and is certainly very fragile. It took the shape, in the public sector at least, of engaging new employees in administration and the education sector. These were, and still are, pressing needs. But once these needs were met, then one cannot expect the public sector to take any more of the strain of unemployment. On the contrary, it would be disastrous to try to create jobs by inflating the public sector unnaturally, and this temptation, as past experience might suggest to us, is something that must be resisted.

A truly lasting improvement of the employment situation can only be achieved through the private sector and the most important focus for this approach must be small and medium-sized enterprises. I think this is above all the most realistic and promising approach and this is where we should be concentrating our efforts. So I attach particular importance to the project "Integrated small enterprise development". Employers' associations have a major strengthening function here which should be used to the full.

The focus of all ILO measures must continue to be technical cooperation. But here again the limited resources available mean that we have to set priorities. The yardstick must always be the question of whether positive and lasting effects can be expected on employment, and the quicker the measures take effect, the better it will be.

But there is one important area where the criterion of speed of results must take second place and that is the area of training, especially the training of young people. They are investments in the future really. We are not just providing prospects for these young people as individuals for their futures, they are something that the economy will depend upon, that the economy needs. In the current situation, every job, as long as it pays for itself, is a step forward. But in the longer term the economy is going to need more and more skilled workers in order to be able to survive internationally. Ignoring this need at this stage, would be the expression of resignation and would actually undermine the point of all other measures.

Lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice. This truth is actually the first sentence of the Constitution of the ILO, but the opposite is true as well, for social justice can only be brought about in a context of peace, and that is my most fervent wish.

M. THYS Willy, Representative

World Confederation of Labour

- My organization the World Confederation of Labour (WCL) has asked me, as Secretary-General, to take the floor because the importance we attach to this issue.

The WCL has always affirmed peoples' rights to economic, cultural, political and social enhancement. It also supports peoples' rights to self-determination, to establish their own system of government, to draw up their own development plans and to live in total freedom, in compliance with the requirements of democracy.

The right to self-determination is universally recognized today, particularly if we refer to the provisions of the international covenants on civil and political rights. We cannot fail to note that the situation of the Palestinians in the occupied Arab territories is still a precarious one, despite the Oslo agreements. Over the past few years the Palestinians have experienced a considerable decline in their ownership of land. According to some sources Palestinian-owned private land has decreased to 15

per cent of the total figure in 1947. Today the Palestinian Authority controls only 60 per cent of the territory of the Gaza Strip, even though it is home to some one million Palestinians; the other 40 per cent is still occupied by about 5,000 inhabitants of 19 Jewish settlements. Almost 75 per cent of the area of the West Bank is controlled by the Israeli army.

Border closures cause enormous difficulties to Palestinian workers, with harmful consequences for the needs of their families. The closures also affect education and training. The 1997 report of the Director-General of the ILO noted the difficulties encountered by 1,200 pupils in attending courses at the schools on the West Bank where they were registered.

Out of an active population estimated at some 540,000, only one third finds employment in the occupied territories. The others are forced to seek work in Israel despite the administrative and tax harassments. Some employers treat the Palestinians in a discriminatory way and underpay them, and these workers have the greatest difficulty in obtaining justice in Israeli courts. Several other problems exist. For example, compulsory deductions are made for social security, penalizing Palestinian workers, who do not receive the supposed advantages because the benefits are linked to residence. The minimum wage is not applied in the industrial areas and the working conditions in these areas are not subject to official controls.

Because of this situation the WCL once again urges that resolutions should be implemented and that the appeals of the international community for an equitable solution to the claims of the Palestinian peoples to an independent State should be heard. The WCL also calls for an immediate halt to settlements and the cessation of any expansionist policies. The WCL solemnly appeals for the implementation of the peace agreements, in the fullest respect for the parties involved. It also calls for respect for and implementation of the labour codes for Palestinian workers, without discrimination or distinction and especially for their right to be represented by the trade union delegates of their choice particularly for those who work in Israel.

We support the technical cooperation project, for inter alia human resources development, promotion of employment, training, promotion of tripartism, labour inspection, health and safety at work, the drawing up of a draft labour code and the enhancement of the social dialogue and of labour relations. These technical assistance projects in the occupied territories will certainly contribute to improving industrial relations policies. The ILO is called upon to continue its training for trade unions on subjects pertaining to collective bargaining, the rights of the workers, freedom of association and fundamental freedoms.

It is obvious that the workers and their families cannot fully develop, unless they are offered an environment of stability, security and peace. Therefore our organization supports any sincere effort to restore and strengthen peace so that all mankind may live a life of dignity, with equitable distribution of economic resources.

On the eve of this third millennium, the WCL frequently desires that new relations will ultimately prevail and a new era of hope ensue, contributing to a lasting peace in the Middle East, which will be possible only if justice is rendered to the Palestinian people.

M. VERONESE Alphonse, Workers' adviser delegate

France

- Once again the international community must devote a special sitting to make its voice heard on the situation of workers in the Arab territories occupied by Israel.

French trade unions welcomed the signing of the peace accords.

They encouraged the cooperation policies pursued by France and Europe with the Palestinian authority, fostering economic development and social progress, in particular for emergency relief in health care and education, as well as for the creation of institutions.

A decisive commitment was thus made to promote a peace process which would make possible the establishment of a Palestinian State, with beneficial effects for the whole of the region, and in particular for the Golan Heights and southern Lebanon.

They welcomed, with the majority of the international trade union movement, the rapprochement which came about between Palestinian and Israeli trade unions. The whole of this process was blocked by the political options taken by the current Israeli Government.

The results have been disastrous.

Apart from the withdrawal from Hebron, none of the 34 major commitments in the Accord have been met. On the contrary, Palestinian workers have witnessed the extension of Israeli settlements, the destruction of their homes and the seizure of their land.

Travel and residence are still subject to the control of the Israeli army. Periodic closures of the autonomous Palestinian territories give rise to considerable suffering. For example, they prevent people from going to work, they deprive them of their income, and even the quality of the water ends up going unchecked.

In these conditions, unemployment and destitution persist and spread, and with them so does frustration.

When a people's dignity and aspirations for well-being are flouted in such a way, how can we be surprised to see them - and especially their youth - revolt?

The Israeli policy is an obstacle to the implementation of the assistance programmes concluded by France and the European Union and with the Palestinian Authority.

We do not, however, believe in a return to the situation that existed before September 1993, even if the Israeli Government is violating international law, including a number of ILO Conventions and agreements that have been signed. Palestinian workers, and the Palestinian people as a whole, enjoy the fundamental support of the international community.

The international community must clearly reaffirm its will to establish a just and lasting peace based on United Nations resolutions Nos. 242 and 338, which link the Palestinian people's return to its land to a restoration of peace among all the peoples of the region.

The Israeli workers' and people's right to security is very closely linked to the legitimate rights of the Palestinian workers and people to live freely in their own country, on their own land, with their own State, including a resolution of the issue of Jerusalem.

The International Labour Conference must call upon the Governing Body and the Director-General to give a new boost to the commitment made by governments, employers and their organizations to muster financial and technical support for the West Bank and for Gaza.

The social needs are considerable in terms of housing, schools, the building of hospitals and rural clinics and the development of agriculture and of the economy in general.

The European Union must step up its commitment in order to meet the immense need for infrastructure, and in particular to complete a water supply system and a telecommunications network.

Finally, a solution must be found to release political prisoners rapidly and to reintegrate them into society.

These are just some of the points that the French trade union movement and French workers firmly support because they are decisive for the effective exercise of the social, economic and cultural rights of the workers of Palestine. They are a decisive contribution to peace in this part of the world.

M. VITTORI Jacques, Representative

Pax Christi International

- The Israeli authorities delayed considerably in replying to the letter of the Director-General, dated 22 January, 1998, requesting authorization for an ILO mission to Israel and the occupied Arab territories. The visas were only granted on 8 May and as a result the mission could stay only two and a half days in the country. It was therefore unable to carry out its work in proper conditions and the report is consequently shorter than previous reports and much less detailed.

The Israeli Government justified its delay by invoking disappointment caused by the contents of the previous report which according to it was politicized and biased in criticism. How can the Israeli Government imagine that an honest report can fail to address the political system affecting the Arab workers. These are a people forced to submit to its control and subjected to a jumble of laws, rules and regulations, influenced by the Ottoman Empire, the mandate of the British whom the Jewish settlers fought against during the war, Egyptian and Jordanian law and the orders of the occupying Israeli military. The standards of the ILO are not formally applicable even in the minute areas controlled by the Palestinians. The Palestinian Authority cannot ratify any international convention until it acquires the status of a State. The Israeli Government is therefore right in using the word biased. But who is to blame? Obviously the ILO mission cannot be blamed. In its analysis of the situation it had no choice but to refer to the principles, the spirit of the Constitution and the fundamental standards of the ILO. We have noted that the cautious criticism expressed therein simply reflects criticism which has been made in the Italian press and by the United Nations and its specialist agencies. Facts, and not allegiances, will reveal the truth of the complaints expressed by the Arabs and the comments of the Israeli authorities.

The report was accused of skimming over the security concerns of Israel. It is very difficult to admit that a general closure of frontiers is simply a protective measure as opposed to a measure of collective punishment. It is a well-known fact that the green line can be crossed easily, if thousands of Palestinians can work illegally in Israel each day how can you stop terrorists even if the border is sealed off.

We have noted that from September 1997 onwards the number of work permits has increased, and there is a strong chance that it will increase even more in the future.

Quotas have been lifted and the official age to work in Israel has been lowered to 23 years. These positive developments, however, should not be overestimated because a work permit does not necessarily mean that you will have a regular full-time job.

Temporary or partial border closures provide ways and means of withdrawing work permits and there are many other ways of causing work days to be lost and encouraging Israeli employers to employ foreign workers. It is a well-known fact that the Palestinians are simply cross-border workers and do not have the same rights as resident workers. They are forced to provide themselves with a guarantor if they wish to lay a complaint with the Israeli legal system against an employer. Similarly, they have to pay compulsory national insurance contributions without being able to benefit from the health service provided.

There are many impediments to freedom of movement and this prevents Palestinian workers and their families from going to the hospitals they need for health care. This is the case, for instance, with the hospitals and specialist practices in East Jerusalem which was annexed by Israel in violation of international law. The World Health Assembly passed a resolution on 16 May expressing its condemnation of this absolutely unacceptable situation.

The report says very little about working conditions in the settlements and says nothing about social discrimination between Israeli civilians and Palestinians in the occupied Arab territories. Regardless of whether it is housing assistance, the issue of building permits, water supplies, land use, production commercialization, there is still discrimination and one wonders as to the legal basis of all this. According to international law, home for the Palestinians is in the occupied Arab territories and it is pleasing to know that many Israeli citizens recognize this and actively advocate that the territories be handed over in exchange for peace. Let us hope that this view will prevail, as it would be the best guarantee of security for Israel. Injustice gives rise to revolt and the authors of injustice cannot condemn revolt without condemning their own hypocrisy.

This year we are celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, therefore we can dream. The ideal environment for promoting the objectives of the ILO would be the respect of those universally recognized rights in the occupied Arab territories and the countries of the region. Safety for one is safety for all. The first condition is that Palestinians have their own State and that foreign armies withdraw from the sovereign territories they are occupying.

Mr. WARRINGTON Guy, Government adviser and substitute delegate

United Kingdom

- I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the European Union.

We have read the appendix to the report of the Director-General on the situation of workers of the occupied territories with great interest. We welcome the considerable work that has gone into the production of this report. We believe that if such reports are to be useful, the team that produces them needs to be able to gather the full range of relevant data and information. We welcome the fact that the Government of Israel gave permission for the mission to visit Israel. However, we note with regret that this permission was only granted late in the day. We urge all parties to cooperate fully with the ILO in the production of these reports.

The European Union believes that reports such as this should concentrate on issues which are directly related to the ILO's mandate. In this context we welcome the serious analysis of labour issues contained in this report. We also note with concern that since the signing of the Oslo Agreement, the economic situation in the occupied territories has deteriorated. We note the linkage made in the report between economic decline and closures.

The European Union understands Israel's need for security. We think, however, that security should be guaranteed for all. The EU has made it clear to Israel that it is in its interest to relax all closure restrictions except where legitimate security interests are manifestly at stake. We are deeply concerned at the economic hardships which closures impose on Palestinians and we are aiming to ease restrictions by various means including dialogue with Israel aimed at finding practical solutions to the problems faced by the Palestinian economy.

The European Union also believes that the ILO's technical assistance programme, which receives support from EU Member States, can play a significant role in reversing the trend of economic decline. In particular, the European Union welcomes the focus of resources in the 1996-97 biennium on assistance to the countries and territories in the subregion with a view to maximizing economic and social benefits. We also believe it is right for the ILO to continue to focus its efforts on capacity building for officials responsible for labour and social policies and for the representatives of employers and workers. We look forward to seeing proposals for new forms of technical assistance including programmes focusing on child labour, gender equality and social security. We welcome the activities undertaken by the ILO's International Training Centre in Turin, in particular the project for the development of technical colleges for the Palestinian Authority.

The European Union remains committed to progress in the peace process. We hope that this is the last time that we will need to have a special session and a report such as this. In the meantime, we stand ready to work with the ILO in promoting social justice throughout the region.

Mr. ZAHNAN Mounir, Government delegate

Egypt

- The decision of the ILO to hold this special sitting to consider the situation of workers in the Arab territories shows that Israeli policies have become harsher and are now more severe than at any time since the Madrid Conference. This has led to a deterioration in the situation of workers. The ILO should continue to monitor the situation and find ways and means to improve it.

There are numerous points that should be made on the Report of the Director-General. Firstly, the dilatory tactics adopted by the Israeli authorities in granting visas to the mission members led to the fact that the report was very short. They also affected the efficiency and performance of the mission, which could visit the territories for only two-and-a-half days and was unable to visit occupied Jerusalem or the occupied Golan Heights. That is why the report submitted to us is very weak.

Secondly, the report we are dealing with simply lists statistics and gives various opinions. It does not include any profound observations or analysis on the basis of what was witnessed by the members of the mission. As I said, it does not deal with East Jerusalem, even though East Jerusalem comes within the areas occupied by Israel since 1967. We would like to draw the attention of the ILO to that fact.

What is clear from the report is that Israeli policies are the main cause of the deterioration of conditions in the occupied territories. The repression which is a corollary of occupation takes the form of killing, torture and detention. It is a malignant phenomenon, which takes lands and resources from their owners. It is a very dangerous phenomenon.

On the other hand the policy of closure and the lack of safe openings for the Palestinians at the economic level are also dangerous and a violation of Israel's obligations. This is one of the worst forms of economic exploitation in the occupied Arab territories. Even fisheries are affected, in violation of the texts of the Oslo, Cairo and Madrid agreements.

Unemployment is on the rise and this has serious effects which could lead to an explosion, or an undermining of the social fabric. Unfortunately, whatever work is provided for Palestinians is hard and demeaning. Treatment of workers is insulting and the system of labour authorization is based on discrimination. There is also discrimination in wages.

These awful conditions can only make us call for full support for workers and employers in the occupied Arab territories. As conditions get worse, support must be stepped up. The ILO must take measures in the coming period on the implementation of ILO resolutions and it must prepare further missions to the occupied Arab territories.

I would like to specify certain steps that should be taken. Early planning should be made for the next mission and a schedule should be drawn up for field interviews and meetings, which should not be limited to official meetings with certain functionaries. The ILO should also issue a report specifically devoted to this special sitting which should be as widely disseminated as possible. The ILO should also publish, as widely as possible, the Report before us today. Furthermore, an item should be placed on the agenda for the November meeting of the Governing Body to look into the establishment of a committee to follow up violations of workers' rights in the occupied Arab territories and to deal with all aspects of such violations. The Conference Committee on Action against Apartheid provides a useful precedent.

While Egypt supports the serious efforts made to revive the Middle East peace process, we maintain that until these efforts bear fruit we must take all possible steps to improve living conditions for Palestinians, Lebanese and Syrians under Israeli occupation. If an explosion in the region is to be avoided and if people are to be encouraged to return to peace and to the peace process, I think that the ILO has a crucial role to play.

Mr. ZELHOEFER Jerald A., Workers' delegate

United States

- I would like to thank the President for giving me the opportunity to address this special sitting to discuss the appendix to the Director-General's Report on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories.

I do hope that circumstances will prevail next year that need not result in another special sitting like this.

The ILO's mandate is not political. The ILO is a unique and specialized United Nations body with a universally accepted and respected competence. A competence and mandate which are well-defined and have their limits. Bypassing the ILO's time-tested normal machinery and other accepted procedures in order to hold special sittings like these only serves to politicize and, regrettably, weaken the ILO's effectiveness and credibility.

Unfortunately there are some who would prefer to see the ILO weakened, or worse, and there are some who would prefer to see the peace process undermined or worse.

There is clearly, however, a proper and constructive role for the ILO to assist in the process underpinning genuine peace, security, democracy and social justice, which is within its mandate and competence.

The appendix to the Director-General's report has noted the array of programmes and activities, much of them through technical cooperation that the ILO has provided to the authorities and social partners concerned. Clearly more needs to be done, with more resources.

The assistance provided to the trade unions is an essential component and in consultation with the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) this should be expanded to help build their capacity. The role of independent and democratic trade unions is critical in building economic and social justice, certainly in general, and especially both in the current circumstances in the area concerned, and just as importantly, in the wider geographic region.

The supportive and cooperative role played by Histadrut was not, unfortunately, given sufficient note in the Director-General's Report. There are, however, a number of points raised in the Report that clearly call for focused follow-up concerning the principles of freedom of association, collective bargaining, the elimination of discrimination and child labour. These include the detention and dismissal of Palestinian teachers' union leadership, conditions in the Erez, Atarot, Mishor, Adumin industrial parks and settlements overnight and other conditions concerning work in Israel, follow through on the ILO-IPEC research work concerning child labour and systemic extermination faced by women seeking and maintaining employment in the territories.

These are daunting, but nevertheless serious, challenges for an effective ILO response. These are all the more daunting given the circumstances in the wider surrounding region. Human dignity, and thus human potential, have been kept repressed by all too many regimes in the wider region through the repression of fundamental human rights - including one of the most basic - freedom of association.

The constructive social justice, democracy-building roles that genuine independent trade unions play has been repeatedly blocked. All too often violently. The national trade union I belong to, the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) is gravely concerned with the overall situation in the wider region. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions released, just two days ago, its annual survey of violations of trade union rights. It confirms the deplorable state of rights' violations in the wider regions.

From that report, and other sources, the following is clear: unions are simply banned in three countries; no collective bargaining is permitted in four; in one, organizing a strike is punishable by death; outright government control of trade unions is the norm in three countries and only a few governments in the region permit unions to act, with limited independence. The lack of democracy underscored by the absence of genuine independent trade unions and difficulties in developing supportive, civil, democratic institutions when linked to immense social inequalities and appalling poverty in the wider, greater surrounding region continued to be fertile grounds for fanatic, violent extremism.

Responding to this challenge, here in the ILO and elsewhere, is the real challenge.

Mr. ZHARIKOV Alexander, Representative World Federation of Trade Unions

- On behalf of the World Federation of Trade Unions I would like to welcome the decision of the 86th Session of the International Labour Conference to hold this special sitting on the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories.

We also appreciate the Director-General's report on this subject that has been presented to this Conference, despite the irregular circumstances surrounding the last mission of the ILO to the occupied territories.

Since we last had such a special sitting on the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories, the denial of basic human rights and trade union rights of the Arab working people in the Syrian Golan, South Lebanon and the Arab Palestinian territories occupied by Israel has become increasingly intolerable. The Israeli policy of confiscating Arab lands to build new illegal settlements, the arbitrary interference in the movement of Arab workers to and from their workplaces, the continuing repression and collective punishments are creating an explosive situation and threatening the peace process. If you look at the situation of the Palestinians in particular, you can recognize that instead of the homelands promised to them they find themselves in a ghetto with all its consequences. The combination of a military regime, colonial rule, ethnic cleansing and apartheid, in fact genocide, perpetrated against the Arab population of the territories occupied by Israel, represents the remnants of a stage in modern civilization which we all thought had passed.

As the modest report of the ILO also points out, Palestinian workers are not treated with justice. The Palestinian economy has become completely dependent on Israel. Isolation, insult and harassment from the Israeli authorities have become part of daily life. Massive unemployment, poverty and miserable living and working conditions, violations of elementary rights and freedoms, the denial of freedom of association, and manipulation are only some aspects of the situation which is similar in the other occupied territories well. All this is the direct consequence of the state of occupation of this territory, as the Director-General's report has made clear.

This situation, more than ever, calls for collective intervention by the international community, including the ILO, to protect Arab workers and their families, to ensure full Israeli withdrawal from all occupied territories and to achieve a comprehensive and just peace in the region.

We also think that the ILO should use all the means at its disposal, including missions, and technical assistance, to keep this Conference permanently informed and involved until the occupation ends and the conditions of workers improve.

We face a situation where the Israeli delegation will not participate in this sitting. How in this situation can real dialogue be conducted? This is the situation Palestine workers are facing every day. I think that some suggestions regarding the establishment of some sort of permanent mechanism to monitor the situation, in the form of a special committee for special sittings of this Conference, were very relevant.

To conclude, I would like to stress that the World Federation of Trade Unions will promote all kinds of assistance to the workers of Arab countries living in the occupied territories and to their trade unions, especially with the Palestinian Trade Union Federation.