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A/66/PV.11
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Official Records

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11th plenary meeting

Wednesday, 21 September 2011, 9 a.m.

New York

President: Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar)

The meeting was called to order at 9.05 a.m.

Agenda item 110

Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization (A/66/1)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): In accordance with the decision taken at its 2nd plenary meeting, held on 16 September 2011, the General Assembly will hear a presentation by the Secretary-General of his annual report on the work of the Organization, under agenda item 110. I give the floor to the Secretary-General.

The Secretary-General: ...

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In the Middle East, we must break the stalemate. We have long agreed that Palestinians deserve a State. Israel needs security. Both want peace. We pledge our unrelenting efforts to help achieve that peace through a negotiated settlement.

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Agenda item 8

General debate

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): ...

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We also welcome the newest Member State, South Sudan, to the United Nations. In doing so, it must be acknowledged that the issue of Palestine will be particularly crucial and will receive great attention this session. I look forward to working with all Member States for the attainment of a just, comprehensive and negotiated peace settlement in the Middle East, based on a two-State solution. I am fully committed to proceeding in a transparent, impartial manner and in keeping with the expressed

will of the collective membership of the United Nations. Fairness and justice will be key pillars of any sustainable political endeavour.

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Address by Ms. Dilma Rousseff, President of the Federative Republic of Brazil

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I regret, however, that from this podium I am still unable to welcome Palestine into full membership of the Organization. Brazil has recognized the Palestinian State as defined by the 1967 borders, in accordance with United Nations resolutions. Like most countries in the Assembly, we believe that the time has come for Palestine to be represented as a full Member in this forum.

The recognition of the Palestinian people's legitimate right to sovereignty and self-rule expands the possibilities and prospects for a lasting peace in the Middle East. Only a free and sovereign Palestine can respond to Israel's legitimate desire for peace with its neighbours, security within its borders and political stability in its region. I come from a country where descendants of Arabs and Jews are compatriots and live together in harmony, which is as it should be.

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Address by Mr. Barack Obama, President of the United States of America

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Now, I know, particularly this week, that for many in this Hall, there is one issue that stands as a test of these principles and a test of American foreign policy, and that is the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

One year ago, I stood at this podium and I called for an independent Palestine. I believed then, and I believe now, that the Palestinian people deserve a State of their own, but what I also said is that a genuine peace can be realized only between the Israelis and the Palestinians themselves. One year later, despite extensive efforts by America and others, the parties have not bridged their differences. Faced with this stalemate, I put forward a new basis for negotiations in May of this year. That basis is clear. It is well known to all of us here. Israelis must know that any agreement provides assurances for their security. Palestinians deserve to know the territorial basis of their State.

I know that many are frustrated by the lack of progress; I assure them that I am too. But the question is not the goal that we seek. The question is: How do we reach that goal? And I am convinced that there is no shortcut to the end of a conflict that has endured for decades. Peace is hard work. Peace will not come through statements and resolutions at the United Nations. If it were that easy, it would have been accomplished by now. Ultimately, it is the Israelis and the Palestinians who must live side by side. Ultimately, it is the Israelis and the Palestinians — not us — who must reach agreement on the issues that divide them: on borders and on security, on refugees and on Jerusalem.

Ultimately, peace depends upon compromise among people who must live together long after our speeches are over, long after our votes have been tallied. That is the lesson of Northern Ireland, where ancient antagonists bridged their differences. That is the lesson of the Sudan, where a negotiated settlement led to an independent State. And that is and will be the path to a Palestinian State — negotiations between the parties.

We seek a future where Palestinians live in a sovereign State of their own, with no limit to what they can achieve. There is no question that the Palestinians have seen that vision delayed for too long. It is precisely because we believe so strongly in the aspirations of the Palestinian people that America has invested so much time and so much effort in the building of a Palestinian State and in the negotiations that can deliver a Palestinian State.

But understand this as well: America's commitment to Israel's security is unshakeable. Our friendship with Israel is deep and enduring. And so we believe that any lasting peace must acknowledge the very real security concerns that Israel faces every single day.

Let us be honest with ourselves: Israel is surrounded by neighbours that have waged repeated wars against it. Israel's citizens have been killed by rockets fired at their houses and suicide bombs on their buses. Israel's children come of age knowing that throughout the region other children are taught to hate them. Israel, a small country of less than 8 million people, looks out at a world where leaders of much larger nations threaten to wipe it off of the map. The Jewish people carry the burden of centuries of exile and persecution and fresh memories of knowing that 6 million people were killed simply because of who they are. Those are facts. They cannot be denied.

The Jewish people have forged a successful State in their historic homeland. Israel deserves recognition. It deserves normal relations with its neighbours. And friends of the Palestinians do them no favours by ignoring that truth, just as friends of Israel must recognize the need to pursue a two-State solution with a secure Israel next to an independent Palestine.

That is the truth. Each side has legitimate aspirations, and that is part of what makes peace so hard. And the deadlock will be broken only when each side learns to stand in the other's shoes and each side can see the world through the other's eyes. That is what we should be encouraging. That is what we should be promoting.

This body — founded as it was out of the ashes of war and genocide, and dedicated as it is to the dignity of every single person — must recognize the reality that is lived by the Palestinians and the Israelis alike. The measure of our actions must always be whether they advance the right of Israeli and Palestinian children to live lives of peace and security and dignity and opportunity. And we will succeed in that effort only if we can encourage the parties to sit down, to listen to each other and to understand each other's hopes and each other's fears. That is the project to which America is committed. There are no shortcuts. And that is what the United Nations should be focused on in the weeks and months to come.

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Address by His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Amir of the State of Qatar

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The major problems in the Middle East region are the question of Palestine and the continued Israeli occupation of Arab territories in the West Bank, the Golan Heights and the Shaba'a farmlands in southern Lebanon, in addition to the threat of war and the strangulating Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip.

For over four decades, all peace efforts that have been deployed have resulted in failures to reach a just settlement that would ensure a lasting and comprehensive peace in the region. This is because of Israel's intransigent position, which seems to be that its military might enable it to guarantee peace and security, and its insistence to play for time and to use the negotiations to preserve the status quo by continuing Jewish settlement.

Faced with this stalemate in the Palestinian cause, the continued suffering of the Palestinian people under occupation and persistent violations of their human and national rights, we urge all Member States of the United Nations to listen to the voice of right. We urge them to respond to the Palestinians' legitimate request for a Palestinian State that will become a full-fledged member of the United Nations, on an equal footing with all other Member States. This will pave the way for the realization of peace in our region.

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Address by Mr. Felipe Calderón Hinojosa, President of the United Mexican States

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Finally, I should now like to discuss a crucial issue that has to do with the transformation and modernization of the United Nations. The conflict in the Middle East is a matter that has clearly tested the capacity of the Organization. We are particularly concerned about the stalemate in negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian National Authority. The United Nations bears the responsibility for making a constructive contribution to the peaceful resolution of this conflict — one that makes possible the existence of two States, reaffirms the recognition of Israel's right to exist and makes the establishment of a Palestinian State a reality. Of course, we must bear in mind that this must be a genuine, viable and negotiated solution in which legitimate and balanced mediation plays a fundamental role. Such a solution must also be politically and economically viable and enable Israel and Palestine to truly exist side by side in peace, so that new generations of Israelis and Palestinians can truly know what it is to live together without hatred or violence.

We should also remember that no solution can be found while either of the sides, explicitly or implicitly, desires the annihilation of the other. In addition, we must make progress on compliance with United Nations resolutions in order to put an end to policies that we all know are contrary to international law.

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Address by Mr. Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of the Republic of Kazakhstan

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The complex question of Palestine has been actively discussed these days. Kazakhstan supports the creation of a Palestinian State. A difficult issue, however, has been placed on the scales of history; President Obama spoke about this. For the long-suffering Palestinian people, like the Israeli people, the negotiating process has been ongoing for more than 50 years. Without independence and their own State, the Palestinians will not be able to achieve sustainable peace in the Middle East.

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Address by Mr. Nicolas Sarkozy, President of the French Republic

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Peace will indeed be made by the Israelis and the Palestinians, and by no one else. No one can expect to impose it on them. But we must help them.

The method no longer works. Let us together acknowledge that setting preconditions for negotiation is to condemn ourselves to failure. Preconditions are the opposite of negotiation. If we wish to enter into negotiation, which is the only possible path for peace, there must be no preconditions.

Let us change the method. All the elements of a solution are known — the Madrid Conference of 1991, President Obama's speech of 19 May, the Road Map, the Arab Peace Initiative and the parameters agreed by the European Union. So, let us stop endlessly discussing the parameters and allow negotiation to begin in line with a concrete and ambitious timetable. Sixty years without one centimetre's progress — does that not compel us to change the method and time frame to one month to resume discussions, six months to reach agreement on borders and security, and one year to reach a definitive settlement?

As of this autumn, France proposes hosting a donor conference so that the Palestinians can complete the construction of their future State. France wishes to say that we must not immediately seek the perfect solution, because there are no perfect solutions. Let us choose the path of compromise, which is neither renunciation nor repudiation, but which allows us to move forward, step by step.

Thus, for 60 years the Palestinians have been waiting for their State. Has the time not come to give them hope? For 60 years, Israel has suffered from not being able to live in peace. For 60 years, the question of the peaceful coexistence of the two peoples — Palestinian and Israeli — has continued to fester. We can no longer wait to take the path of peace. Let us put ourselves in the place of the Palestinians. Is it not legitimate that they claim their State? Of course it is. And who does not see that creating a democratic, viable and peaceful Palestinian State would be, for Israel, the best guarantee of its security?

Let us put ourselves in the place of the Israelis. Is it not legitimate that, after 60 years of war and attacks, they demand guarantees of that peace, so long awaited? Of course it is. I say that forcefully. If anyone anywhere in the world were to threaten the existence of Israel, France would immediately and wholeheartedly stand alongside Israel. Threats made against a State Member of the United Nations are unacceptable, and they will not be accepted.

Today, we are facing a very difficult choice. Each of us knows — and let us stop with hypocrisy and one-off diplomacy — that full recognition of the status of a State Member of the United Nations cannot be attained at once. The first reason for that is the lack of trust between the main parties. But let us tell the truth: who can doubt that a veto in the Security Council will engender a cycle of violence in the Middle East? Who can doubt that?

Must we therefore exclude an intermediate stage? Why not envisage offering Palestine the status of United Nations Observer State? That would be an important step forward. After 60 years of immobility, which has paved the way for extremists, we would be giving hope to the Palestinians by making progress towards final status.

To show their determined commitment to a negotiated peace, the Palestinian authorities should, as part of that approach, reaffirm Israel's right to exist and to its security. They should commit to avoiding using this new status to resort to actions that are incompatible with the pursuit of negotiations.

We have but one alternative — immobility and negotiations that go nowhere or an intermediate solution that would give hope to the Palestinians with the status of an Observer State.

In parallel, Israel must observe the same restraint. It must abstain from any actions that would prejudice the final status.

The ultimate goal must be mutual recognition of two nation-States for two peoples established on the basis of the 1967 lines with agreed and equivalent exchanges of land.

The General Assembly, which has a power to do so, should decide to move ahead, leave behind the fatal trap of paralysis, missed appointments and short-lived attempts to relaunch the process. Let us change our approach. Let us change our state of mind. Each should try to understand the reasoning, sufferings and fears of the other. Each must open its eyes and be ready to make concessions.

In conclusion, I would like to say to the Palestinian people with the deep and sincere friendship I hold for them: "Think of the Israeli mothers grieving for their family members killed in terrorist attacks. They feel the same pain as the Palestinian mothers confronted with the brutal death of one of theirs".

I would like to say to the Israeli people with the deep and sincere friendship I hold for them: "Listen to what the young people of the Arab Spring are saying: 'Long live freedom!' They are not crying 'Down with Israel'. You cannot remain immobile when this wind of freedom and democracy is blowing in your region".

I say with deep and sincere friendship for these two peoples who have suffered so much that the time has come to build peace for the children of Palestine and for the children of Israel. But it would be a great shame if the General Assembly did not seize the opportunity of the reawakening of the Arab peoples to democracy to settle a problem that brings unhappiness to these two peoples, who are in any event condemned to live alongside each other. If we take a compromise solution, we will rebuild trust and we will give people hope.

I say that with the utmost gravity to the representatives of all nations. We must assume an historic responsibility. It is the General Assembly of the United Nations that must keep this appointment with History.

Let us reassure Israel and give hope to the Palestinian people. The solution is on the table. Let us take this compromise solution over deadlock. Deadlock might satisfy everyone here, but it will create violence, bitterness and opposition that will imperil the resurgence of the Arab peoples. To that, France says that the tragedy must cease for a simple reason: it has gone on for too long.

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Address by Ms. Cristina Fernández, President of the Argentine Republic

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In my most recent statement before the Assembly (see A/65/PV.14), I believe I concluded by expressing my hope that this year Palestine would become the 194th Member of the concert of the United Nations. My country, Argentina, like most South American nations, has recognized the State of Palestine.

I sincerely believe that blocking the entry of Palestine could perhaps be seen by some as benefiting the State of Israel. But allow me to say to Assembly members, on the authority we have as a country that has suffered from the scourge of international terrorism, that to prevent Palestine from becoming a member of this Assembly means to continue providing alibis to those who engage in international terrorism and who in that repudiation find precisely one of the false arguments they use to justify their crimes.

I believe that the non-inclusion of Palestine this year, far from providing greater security and stability in the world, will bring about greater insecurity and conditions that are utterly unfavourable to what should be the prestige of a body that should represent the interests of all citizens of the world.

For that reason, I ask that God will enlighten those who must make this historic and structural decision of global significance so that greater balance can be achieved and so that this year Palestine will be able to take its seat number 194. I am sure that if we succeed in that endeavour we will help to create a world that is not only safer, but more just.

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Address by General Michel Sleiman, President of the Lebanese Republic

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In that connection, it is important to underscore the right and just Palestinian effort to earn full recognition of the State of Palestine and for its full membership in the United Nations, in accordance with the right to self-determination. Lebanon will work for the success of those efforts, with the coordination and cooperation of brotherly and friendly countries. However, recognition of the Palestinian State and its accession to the United Nations, though greatly important, would neither restore full rights to the Palestinians nor represent a final solution to the Palestinian question.

Until a final and just political solution to the question of Palestine is reached — one guaranteeing the Palestinian refugees' right of return — the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) remains responsible for the relief of Palestinian refugees, in cooperation with the host countries. Along with our Palestinian brothers, Lebanon rejects any form of permanent settlement of those refugees. For that reason the UNRWA budget must be

constantly maintained. The Agency must not be merged with other United Nations bodies, which would weaken its capacity.

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The United Nations has played an ever-growing role in maintaining international peace and security and in intervening to resolve disputes in many troubled regions of the world. So far, however, it has been unable to show effectiveness in the Middle East, where grave dangers still threaten international peace and security as a result of Israel's ongoing defiance of resolutions of international legitimacy; its unacceptable rejection of the basic conditions required for peace; and its persistence in conducting abusive practices in Gaza and the occupied territories, such as the illegal construction of settlements and violations of human rights.

This demands that negotiations on reform of the Security Council come to fruition, so that the Council can be brought more into line with the new geopolitical situation and be capable of ensuring the implementation of its binding resolutions.

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Address by His Majesty King Abdullah II Bin Al Hussein, Head of State of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

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We in Jordan are also working with our partners to address another global danger, namely, the immense negative impact of regional conflict. The central — the single greatest driver of division and instability — is the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

We are today at a dangerous impasse. The opportunities of a year ago to move talks forward to a clear-cut endgame failed to gain momentum. Negotiations have come to a halt. Frustrations are at a peak. Even as we speak, Israeli settlement activity is ongoing, despite every ruling of international law and in the face of strong international protest.

We are seeing settlement activity in Jerusalem, although that is one of the key final status issues that can only be resolved through negotiations. It is a global concern. In my great-grandfather's words, a sacred chain binds Muslims around the world to that holy city. I cannot overstate the crisis that would arise from harm to the holy sites of any faith or from efforts to annihilate the Arab character of East Jerusalem.

A two-State solution that ends the conflict by meeting the needs of both sides is, and can be, the only secure and lasting peace. A solution comprised of two States — a sovereign, independent and viable Palestine and Israel, accepted and secure — is the core of all major international proposals, including the Arab Peace Initiative.

All are agreed that negotiations must go forward, and soon, resolving the final status of all four key issues — borders, Jerusalem, refugees and settlements. Only then will the conflict cease to be a flashpoint for global violence, and people on both sides will be able to get on with their future in peace.

President Obama recognized that strategic imperative when he set the parameters for a solution on 19 May. The Arabs viewed these parameters positively. Israel built settlements. The Quartet, the European Union, President Sarkozy and other representatives of the international community have put workable ideas on the table. The Arab States welcomed them. Israel built settlements. That is where we find ourselves today.

We cannot teach the next generation respect for law and mutual acceptance if they see law and compromise repeatedly fail. Yet we must uphold the law, or civilization falls. We cannot teach the value of peaceful process if peaceful process repeatedly fails. Yet we must uphold peaceful process, or humankind is lost.

In this impasse, Jordan and the Arab States are holding fast to our principles of peace and law. We have come here — to the house of nations — to seek the justice of nations.

We will continue to strongly support the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to Statehood, in fulfilment of their aspirations, in accordance with United Nations resolutions and within a comprehensive and just settlement, including the resolution of all final status issues. It is their right to seek it here, in the home of nations, the United Nations. That we must all support.

We seek a new and vigorous international push, with concrete steps toward the endgame. We seek not words, not process, but a decisive end to conflict and a new beginning in peace — the peace that comes from real Statehood. We seek recognized rights for Palestinians — the rights that allow people to look forward in dignity and hope. We seek a peace that brings real security for Israelis — who will put aside their fortress mentality and achieve acceptance in their neighbourhood and the world.

Men and women everywhere share basic concerns — a better life for themselves and their families, security to plan for the future, a say in how society is organized and rights they can depend on. For too many, these hopes have been unanswered. But a new era is beginning in my region, with new opportunities to move forward in democracy, security and peace.

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Address by Ms. Tarja Halonen, President of the Republic of Finland

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Reaching a solution to the Middle East conflict is more pressing than ever. The Palestinians have a right to their own State, Palestine. The international community gathered here in the General Assembly must show that it is united in its message to the parties. We need the urgent resumption of negotiations that will lead, within an agreed on time frame, to a two-State solution, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable State of Palestine living side by side in peace and security. There is no time to waste.

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Address by Juan Manuel Santos Calderón, President of the Republic of Colombia

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What I have said so far can also be applied to long-standing conflicts, such as that between Israel and Palestine. Advances can be achieved if, and only if, direct dialogue and effective mediation are employed. Along with the rest of the international community, we are concerned by the suspension of peace negotiations, and we urge — in fact, we implore — both parties to return to the negotiating table as soon as possible. That is the only — I repeat, the only — path that leads to what we all wish to see: two States living in peace and security.

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Address by Mr. Toomas Hendrik Ilves, President of Estonia

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Here today in the United Nations, our attention is also focused on Israel and Palestine. A viable two-State solution must take into consideration the legitimate concerns of both sides for their well-being, safety and prosperity.

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Address by Her Excellency Ms. Micheline Calmy-Rey, President of the Swiss Confederation

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I note with regret that the spirit of optimism borne of the Arab Spring has not breathed new life into the Middle East peace process. We remember the words of President Obama before the General Assembly a year ago well — words that encouraged us to hope for change. For a few minutes, we dreamed together of

“the young girl in Gaza who wants to have no ceiling on her dreams or the young boy in Sderot who wants to sleep without the nightmare of rocket fire”
(A/65/PV.11, p. 12).

We entertained the hope that, together with Palestine and Israel, we could succeed in reaching an agreement that would allow us to welcome a new Member to the United Nations — a sovereign and independent Palestine, living side by side in peace with Israel.

Somberly, we note instead that the past year has been a year of deadlock with no progress but stagnation, and even a hardening of positions. For more than 60 years, the international community has failed to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The so-called peace process has replaced peace. In order to return peace to the centre of the stage, influential people on both sides have attempted to implement a tangible and lasting vision. We gave them our support and facilitated a model agreement. The Geneva initiative is today a consolidated, detailed proposal compatible with internationally accepted parameters, including the Arab Peace Initiative. It remains at the disposal of the decision-makers, as well as of the populations whose right it is to demand peace.

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The meeting rose at 2.55 p.m.

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