



# Press Release

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## COMMISSION APPROVES SPECIAL SITTING ON SITUATION IN OCCUPIED PALESTINE FOLLOWING ASSASSINATION OF SHEIKH YASSIN

### Countries Speaking on Right to Development Call for International Aid, Fair Economic and Trading Systems

The Commission on Human Rights decided by a roll-call vote this afternoon to hold a special sitting on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory resulting from the assassination of Sheikh Ahmad Yassin on the morning of 22 March 2004.

Commission Chairperson Mike Smith announced that the special sitting would be held from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Wednesday, 24 March.

The decision was adopted by a vote of 34 in favour and 3 opposed, with 14 abstentions. Voting against the proposal were the United States, Eritrea, and Australia. Among the abstaining countries were members of the European Union. A Representative of Ireland, speaking on behalf of the EU, said the Union condemned the assassination, but the Commission was shortly to take up its agenda item on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, and that would be the appropriate time to consider the issue.

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#### Action on Decision on Special Sitting

In a decision (E/CN.4/2004/L.3) on a special sitting of the Commission on Human Rights during its sixtieth session, adopted by a roll-call vote of 34 in favour and 3 opposed, with 14 abstentions, the Commission determined to hold a special sitting on an urgent basis to consider the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory resulting from the assassination of Sheikh Ahmad Yassin on the morning of 22 March 2004.

The results of the roll-call vote were as follows:

In favour (34): Argentina, Armenia, Bahrain, Bhutan, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Chile, China, Congo, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Ethiopia, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Mauritania, Mexico, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, Qatar, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Swaziland, Togo, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.

Against (3): Australia, Eritrea and United States of America.

Abstentions (14): Austria, Croatia, France, Germany, Honduras, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Republic of Korea, Sweden, Ukraine and United Kingdom.

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SHAUKAT UMER (Pakistan), speaking on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), said draft decision L.3 now before the Commission expressed indignation at the assassination of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, a violent act carried out against a non-military target. The decision condemned this grave violation of international humanitarian law which had resulted in worldwide outrage. The assassination could be added to a long list of such killings by Israel which had posed a grave threat to peace in the region. It was hoped that the Commission would support the OIC's request for an urgent special meeting to examine the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories in the wake of the assassination of Sheikh Ahmad Yassin on the morning of 22 March 2004.

NAELA GABR (Egypt) said Egypt was the first country that had sought peace in the Middle East. It believed that peace was the only choice for the security of the region. The assassination of Sheikh Yassin was an assassination of peace. The peace process had been endangered by the incident, and the situation would lead to further conflict. Egypt had condemned the assassination and supported the holding of a special session.

HAMATU MUKHTAR (Sudan) said the international community had been confronted with a very serious incident, the assassination of Sheikh Yassin. The Sheikh had been a handicapped old man, unable to do harm. Yet the Israeli Government was proud of its actions. The members of this Commission had a responsibility to condemn forthrightly such assassinations. Sudan supported the holding of a special session.

RODOLFO REYES RODRIGUEZ (Cuba) said Cuba also was in favour of holding of a special sitting of the Commission on the situation that had resulted from the assassination of Sheikh Yassin.

MOHAMED ABDULLA AL-DUHAIMI (Qatar) expressed support for the holding of a special session.

ABDULWAHAB ABDULSALAM ATTAR (Saudi Arabia) said this assassination was against international law and had been condemned as such. The Commission was the voice of the international conscience, and should be heard by the world, particularly in such a case. The Commission should raise its voice.

RICHARD S. WILLIAMSON (United States) said there was no doubt regarding Israel's right to self-defense, but the US Government was troubled about this event, since it had caused violence in Gaza. However, the United States opposed the resolution, since it was not germane to the work of the Commission and distracted from its ambitious programme of work. This politicization of the Commission's work discredited the Commission, and unfairly discriminated against one member. It was counterproductive political grandstanding that would not contribute one iota to the fragile peace process in the Middle East, nor advance the responsibilities of the Commission.

EDDI HARIYADHI (Indonesia) said the assassination was strongly deplored, and Indonesia was of the view that this was against international law. Violence would not solve the problem in the Middle East; it would cause further humanitarian tragedy. The assassination could cause an escalation of violent acts. Such a serious crime meditated by a Government as part of a pattern deserved a strong response from the Commission and Indonesia therefore supported this resolution.

SAEED MOHAMED AL-FAIHANI (Bahrain) said it was lamentable that Israel should assassinate a blind, disabled old man. This was an extra-

judicial act that deserved condemnation. The premeditated planning of this ignoble crime indicated that Israel did not respect the right to life or international law, and did not adhere to international conventions. This assassination would compound tensions in occupied Palestine and would worsen the tense relations in the area. The move towards peace would be undermined. The Commission should assume its responsibilities with regard to what was happening in the Middle East, particularly with regard to human rights and international humanitarian law.

SHA ZUKANG (China) said historical events often bore striking similarities. Two years ago, during the fifty-eighth session, held against a background of violence in the Middle East, the Commission had decided to conduct a special sitting on the topic of the Middle East, and the United States had voted against the proposal. Two years later, the Commission was discussing the same problems. The most basic human right, that to life, could be taken away at any moment by a bullet, and the event of the 22 March had further aggravated the situation in the Middle East. There was an ever-growing need to have a special session on this issue.

ROGER JULIEN MENGA (Republic of the Congo) said the African Group had been deeply moved to learn of the assassination, and expressed its grave concern regarding the effect that this odious act would have on the future of the region. A special session should be held.

MOHAMED SALECK OULD MOHAMED LEMINE (Mauritania) said Mauritania supported the appeal made by Pakistan. Mauritania had condemned and would continue to condemn such acts as this assassination, and it supported the suggestion of Pakistan to discuss these events.

YAAKOV LEVY (Israel), speaking as a concerned country, said if the Commission voted to hold the special sitting, it would be the first time in the history of the United Nations that a session was dedicated to lauding, supporting, and glorifying a major leader of a terrorist organization. Every man and woman of conscience, any objective follower of the debate would cringe in horror, recoil in disgust that a United Nations body devoted to upholding human rights would, in effect, support the terrible wrongs the Hamas terrorist group, under Sheik Yassin, had committed. The bias and distorted standards manifested in the Commission year after year and in an increasing manner since the beginning of its deliberations last Friday had once again been expressed. Israel strongly urged all to vote against the holding of such a biased special sitting that only served as another occasion for distorted standards, wild accusations, and inflammatory speech, and not to lend their voices and hands to further reducing and degrading the credibility of the Commission and the United Nations as a whole.

NABIL RAMLAWI, (Palestine), speaking as a concerned country, said what had happened yesterday was a flagrant violation of human rights. The Commission had been condemning this sort of thing for the last 35 years. Israeli violations of human rights were not the aim of the sitting -- it was known that Israel did not abide by international norms and the resolutions of the Security Council. Israeli radio had broadcast that the Prime Minister and the Defense Minister had decided upon the assassination of Sheikh Yassin. The Prime Minister had lauded the killing of Yassin and had promised to continue Israel's policy of the assassination of Palestinians. The Commission had to look at this Israeli policy of assassination. The Commission sought to achieve a better future for humanity, and it should take a stand against the flagrant crimes Israel was committing in the occupied Palestinian territories. The Commission, which was established under international law, had the right to examine the situation in the region.

MARY WHELAN (Ireland), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said in an explanation of the vote before the vote that the Council of the European Union had condemned the extrajudicial killing of Sheikh Yassin and seven others yesterday. Not only were extrajudicial killings outside the law, they undermined international law, which was a key component of the fight against terrorism. The European Union had also repeatedly condemned the terrorist actions of Hamas. The Commission was shortly to take up its consideration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, and that would be the appropriate time for the Commission to consider this issue. Moreover, extrajudicial killings had long been a subject of the Commission's consideration. Those EU members that were also members of the Commission would therefore abstain from the vote in light of these considerations.

AMARE TEKLE (Eritrea) said Eritrea was categorically opposed to assassination as the means of achieving any political goals whatsoever. However, Eritrea did not feel that the holding of a meeting on a subject that would be discussed under two other separate agenda items would be useful. Eritrea would therefore vote against the proposal.

VLADIMIR PARSHIKOV (Russian Federation), in explanation of the vote after the vote, said Russia had voted in favour of the special session based on the consideration that the meeting would be devoted to the situation in the Middle East, which had significantly worsened after the death of Sheikh Yassin. The prospects of peace had been considerably worsened by his assassination.

HARDEEP SINGH PURI (India), in explanation of the vote after the vote, said India was appalled by the killing of Sheikh Yassin yesterday. India felt that the action would only exacerbate the cycle of violence upon violence, both in Gaza and elsewhere in the region. India had supported the Palestinian cause since its own independence in 1947 and felt that the people of Palestine deserved the full support of the international community. There could be no military solution to the problems of the region. There could be no justification for any act of terror. As a victim of terror itself, India knew that no compromise could be made with terrorists and urged the international community to be firm in combating terrorism. While States had the right to defend themselves, States must also be judged by higher norms and standards than terrorist entities, as they were the main upholders of international law. With those considerations in view, India had voted in favour of the holding of the special session.

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