



Press Release

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ASSEMBLY IS TOLD SETTLEMENTS IN OCCUPIED TERRITORIES CAUSE DETERIORATION IN MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

**Islamic Conference Observer Says Adherence to Agreements Promises
'Immeasurable Benefits' of Peace for People of Both Palestine and Israel**

Continued construction of Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem and the occupied territories by the Israeli Government had led to the deterioration of the Middle East peace process, the General Assembly heard this afternoon as it continued its consideration of the question of Palestine. Speakers said peace could be accomplished only through full Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories and the scrupulous observance of Security Council resolutions.

The representative of Syria said that in a short period of time, the Likud government had cancelled out six years of progress and international efforts to achieve peace on the basis of justice and the restoration of rights to those people who deserved them. Prime Minister Netanyahu had replaced the logic of peace with the language of war and settlements.

The representative of Botswana said that as long as the settlements continued spreading in the occupied territories, men of violence would feel justified in sowing death and mayhem in Israel. The illegal settlements made it impossible for the Palestinian leadership to deal effectively with their anti-peace process fanatics, and were a boon to terrorism.

The Permanent Observer for the Organization of the Islamic Conference said the virtual stalemate in the peace process was the result of Israeli violations of the peace agreements and its blatant and renewed acts of aggression against the Palestinian people, especially by the new Government. If Israel implemented the peace accords with the same sincerity and vigour shown by Palestine, it would bring the immeasurable benefits of peace for the people of both Palestine and Israel.

Statements were also made by Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Ukraine, United Republic of Tanzania, Yemen, Pakistan, Iran, Botswana and Gambia.

The Assembly will meet again at 10 a.m., tomorrow, 3 December, to elect the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and begin consideration of the situation in the Middle East.

Assembly Work Programme

The General Assembly met this afternoon to continue its consideration of the question of Palestine. It had before it draft texts on the programme of work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People; on the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat; on the special information programme on the question of Palestine; on the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine; and on full participation of Palestine in the work of the United Nations. It also had before it a letter from the Permanent Representative of Namibia. (For further information see Press Release GA/9366 issued on 1 December.)

By the terms of a 21-Power text on the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (document A/52/L.49), the Assembly would endorse the Committee's recommendations contained in chapter VII of its report (document A/52/35).

The Assembly would authorize the Committee to continue to exert efforts to promote the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, and to mobilize support and assistance for the Palestinian people. The Assembly would ask the Committee to keep the question of Palestine under review and to report and make suggestions accordingly to the Assembly or the Security Council. It would also ask the Committee to extend its cooperation to non-governmental organizations for heightening international awareness of the facts relating to the question of Palestine and promoting support and assistance to meet the needs of the Palestinian people.

The United Nations Reconciliation Commission for Palestine and other relevant United Nations bodies would be asked to cooperate fully with the Committee. The Secretary-General would be requested to circulate the Committee's report to all competent United Nations bodies, and to urge them to take appropriate, necessary action.

The sponsors of the draft are Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, Cuba, Djibouti, Egypt, Guinea, Indonesia, Jordan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritania, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sudan, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Viet Nam and Yemen.

By the terms of a 20-Power draft on the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat (document A/52/L.50), the Secretary-General would be asked to provide the Division with the necessary resources, including for the further development of the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine, and to ensure the cooperation of the Department of Public Information (DPI) and other Secretariat units in enabling the Division to perform its tasks.

All governments and organizations would be invited to cooperate with the Committee and the Division in the performance of their tasks. The Assembly would note with appreciation the action of Member States to observe on 29 November each year the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

The sponsors of the text are Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, Cuba, Djibouti, Egypt, Guinea, Indonesia, Jordan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritania, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Viet Nam and Yemen.

By the terms of a 20-Power draft on the special information programme on the question of Palestine (document A/52/L.51) the Assembly would note with appreciation the action taken by DPI in compliance with its resolution 51/25 last year. It would consider the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Office of Communications and Public Information useful in raising the international awareness of the complexities of the question, and the Middle East situation in general, and in contributing effectively to an atmosphere conducive to dialogue and supportive of the peace process.

The Assembly would request DPI, in cooperation with the Palestinian Rights Committee, to continue its special information programme on the question of Palestine for the biennium 1998-1999, with particular emphasis on public opinion in Europe and North America. The DPI would be asked to disseminate information about United Nations system activities on the question of Palestine; to issue and update publications on the various aspects of the question, including those concerning recent peace prospects; to maintain production of its audio-visual material on the question; and to organize fact-finding news missions for journalists to the area, including the territories under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority and the occupied territories.

The draft would further request that DPI organize international, regional and national seminars/encounters for journalists; and continue media development assistance to the Palestinian people, particularly to strengthen the training programme for Palestinian broadcasters and journalists initiated in 1995.

The sponsors of the text are Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, Cuba, Djibouti, Egypt, Guinea, Indonesia, Jordan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritania, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Viet Nam and Yemen.

By the terms of a 23-Power text on the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine (document A/52/L.52), the Assembly would call on the concerned parties, the co-sponsors of the peace process, interested parties and the international community to exert all the necessary efforts and initiatives to bring the peace process back on track and ensure its success.

Member States would be urged to provide economic and technical assistance to the Palestinian people during this critical period. It would express its full support for the peace process, emphasizing the importance for the United Nations to play a more active, expanded role in the process and in the implementation of the 1993 Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements.

The Assembly would stress the need for commitment to the "land for peace" principle and the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which form the basis of the Middle East peace process, as well as the need for immediate, scrupulous implementation of the agreements reached between the parties, including the redeployment of Israeli forces from the West Bank and the start of negotiations on the final settlement.

The sponsors of the text are Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, Cuba, Djibouti, Egypt, Guinea, Indonesia, Jordan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritania, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Viet Nam and Yemen.

By the terms of a 20-Power draft resolution (document A/52/L.53) on the full participation of Palestine, the General Assembly would decide to confer on Palestine the same rights and privileges of participation in Assembly sessions and work, and United Nations international conferences, as those conferred on Member States, except for voting and candidature. The Assembly would authorize the Secretary-General to implement the provisions of the draft as expeditiously as possible.

The sponsors of the draft are Afghanistan, Algeria, Bangladesh, Cuba, Djibouti, Egypt, Guinea, Indonesia, Jordan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Mauritania, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Viet Nam and Yemen.

The letter from Namibia (document A/52/704) dated 1 December, states that Namibia wishes to become a member of the Committee on the Exercise on the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to reaffirm its solidarity with the Palestinian people.

Statements

HERMAN de SILVA (Sri Lanka) said hopes for a peace settlement had not materialized; the situation had taken on a gloomy aspect and the chill winds of despair were blowing again. Israel's construction of a settlement in Jabal Abu Ghneim called Har Homa to the south

of East Jerusalem had brought new tensions, heightened the sense of crisis and impeded the peace process. Terrorist bombings in Israel were to be deplored and could not be condoned as they aggravated the situation. Yet, Israel could not disclaim its share of blame, because such desperate acts were to be expected when oppression increased and hopes were blasted. Those unfortunate occurrences might have been avoided if Israel had heeded international concern as expressed in repeated Assembly resolutions. Israeli actions revealed a determination to carry out its policies, regardless of admonitions, in a unilateral fashion violating all principles of international law that regulated the conduct of an occupying Power. They also indicated an unwillingness to honour agreements and a resolute attempt to alter the status and demographic character of Jerusalem.

He said the United Nations had a moral obligation to ensure the restoration of the inalienable rights of the Palestinians. Sri Lanka did not share the view that the Organization was not the best forum for the resolution of the dispute, although it welcomed every effort, from whatever quarter, to achieve a peaceful solution. Israel should adhere to the basic principles reflected in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the fundamental principle of exchanging land for peace. It should complete its withdrawal from areas B and C of the occupied West bank. He called on all parties concerned to help reactivate the peace process in the interests of the whole Middle East region. It was futile to pay lip service to the peace agreement while systematically seeking to erode its efficacy by creating conditions on the ground that were at variance with the foundations of peace.

ALI HACHANI (Tunisia) said the international community affirmed through Security Council resolutions that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was the core of the Middle East conflict. The General Assembly had expressed the hope that the peace process would reach a settlement which included a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine. However, the Assembly's call for full implementation of the agreement between the two parties went unheeded, and today the peace process was blocked because of the policies of Israel. It was not respecting the agreed timetable for redeployment, and had stepped up settlement activity despite appeals from the Assembly to cease from doing so.

He said Israel must end its intransigence, its illegal acts in Jerusalem and the occupied Palestinian territories, its attempts to change their demographic composition and its blockade against the Palestinians. It must engage in negotiations and keep to the agreed timetable.

The international community must pressure Israel to respect its commitments, including the exchange of land for peace and the observance of Security Council resolutions 242 and 338. The Assembly's historic responsibility to the Palestinian people must be shouldered until their legitimate rights were realized. The United Nations must continue its economic and social support, and donors must continue reconstructing the Palestinian economy. The international community must also pressure Israel to withdraw from the Golan.

VOLODYMYR YEL'CHENKO (Ukraine) said peace in the Middle East could be achieved only by implementing the agreements reached in the framework of the Madrid peace process, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and the land for peace principle. Ukraine welcomed efforts by the peace process co-sponsors, the European Union and other international bodies and prominent political figures to bring the parties back to the negotiating table. It also condemned all acts of terrorism, whatever their motivations. Although any terrorist attack required retaliation, vengeance should not be a guiding principle and measures should not be excessive.

All parties must refrain from actions that would undermine the fragile peace, he said. They must return to the negotiating table -- any other option would lead nowhere. A peaceful settlement was impossible without economic development of territories under the Palestinian Authority's control, and assistance from the international donor community was vital. The United Nations should continue mobilizing international economic support and financial assistance to the Palestinians. It should also ensure the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including self-determination. The United Nations should be involved in the settlement of the Palestinian question and prove it had enough authority to influence the process.

DAUDI N. MWAKAWAGO (United Republic of Tanzania) said there had been significant movement towards the achievement of a lasting peace in the Middle East in the last six years; the Oslo accords, the Madrid Peace Conference, and the Washington Declaration stood as testimony to that important movement. The agreement between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Government of Israel leading to the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Hebron was welcomed.

The turn of events following the Hebron agreement was a matter of public record and it was profoundly disappointing that Israel reneged on its negotiated commitments and took measures which seriously undermined the progress towards regional peace and stability. In spite of two emergency Assembly sessions, and a series of other meetings, the confidence shattered by the actions of the Israeli authorities had yet to be recovered.

He said the current stalemate in the Middle East peace process was not in the interest of any of the parties and augured badly for world peace. The Palestinian people, as well as the Israelis, had an inalienable right to live in peace and security in a homeland of their own. Peace could come only as a product of justice, and not from war or the unilateralism of one of the parties. The parties must recommit themselves to working for peace based on justice for all without exception.

The Assembly and the international community, he went on, had a stake in preserving the integrity of the process while both parties should also be encouraged to sustain it. The Israeli Government had a particular responsibility in that regard and should not be allowed to flout the international community with impunity. It was the responsibility of the international community and the co-sponsors of the peace process to ensure that Israel complied with all its commitments. The Assembly could not, and should not, condone any actions which sought to deny the Palestinians of their rights or undermined the peace process.

IBRAHIM SAID AL-ADOUFI (Yemen) said the General Assembly had been taking up this item for the past five decades and adopted many unimplemented resolutions. What made this session unique was that it was taking place following the tenth emergency special session on illegal Israeli acts in East Jerusalem and the occupied territories. Yemen supported what was said at the special session, particularly the call for the convening of a Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention.

He said the peace process which began when the PLO and Israel had signed the Declaration of Principles stalled because Israel had shirked from its previous commitments. The peace process must be resumed, based on the Declaration of Principles and all subsequent agreements. The

United Nations and the international community must continue to provide assistance to the Palestinian administration. Israel must renounce its policy of economic siege of the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. Yemen also called on States to bring pressure on Israel to cease building settlements and seizing land by force.

He said he was gratified that at its summit meeting in Florence, the European Union supported the Palestinian right to self-determination, and resumption of the final status negotiations based on the Oslo Agreements and subsequent agreements. Today's Assembly meeting, he continued, coincided with new dangerous developments, such as Israel continuing to alter Jerusalem and other illegal practices against the Palestinian people. Yemen denounced the repeated attacks on Arabs in East Jerusalem and condemned the demolition of homes and the building of bypass roads, for the use only of settlers, and its refusal to withdraw forces from the occupied territories. There must be rapid progress towards lasting peace based on the Madrid Conference and Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.

KHALIL ABOU-HADID (Syria) said the international community recognized the danger arising from Israel's expansionist plans, which would destroy the peace process and create tension in the Middle East. In the wake of Ms. Albright's visit to the region, and on the eve of tripartite negotiations in Washington, Israel had announced the confiscation of more Palestinian land. When the Netanyahu government continued its settlement activity, it pursued a programmed policy designed to thwart United States efforts, thus making it impossible to save the peace process. Peace could be accomplished only through full withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories, and the scrupulous observance of Security Council resolutions.

He said Syria was grateful to the Committee on Palestinian Rights for its support of the Palestinian people in its just struggle to establish a State on its national soil. The Committee expressed grave concern at the situation of human rights in the occupied territories as a result of Israeli policies. Since 1992, he said, 194 settlements had been built. Settlement activity was expected to expand in the Golan. Earlier this year construction of the settlement of Jabal Abu Ghneim had begun, and this would complete the surrounding of Al-Quds.

He said the Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and other Arabs of the Occupied Territories had reported that land in the Golan was still being confiscated to build settlements. The authorities strengthened their grip over water resources. Expressions of nationalist feeling for the Syrian motherland had been repressed.

All efforts to save the peace process were facing Israeli extremism, he continued. Netanyahu had replaced the logic of peace with the language of war and settlements; the Likud government in a short period of time had cancelled out six years of progress, and international efforts to achieve peace on the basis of justice and the restoration of rights to those people who deserved them.

BURHANUL ISLAM (Pakistan) said that despite international appeals and efforts, there had not been any substantial improvement in the situation. Illegal Israeli practices in the occupied territories continued unabated, vitiating the peace process initiated six years ago. Israel had totally disregarded the calls of the international community.

He believed no lasting peace in the Middle East would be possible without achieving a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine; the realization of the inalienable right of the Palestinian people and the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory were essential for any meaningful progress in the peace process. Israel must rescind its policies aimed at changing the physical character, demographic composition, institutional structure and status of the Palestinian and other Arab territories. Israeli action to alter the legal status and demographic composition of Jerusalem was deplorable.

He said Al-Quds Al-Sharif, occupied by Israel since 1967, remained central to any comprehensive settlement, and no lasting peace in the region was possible without the return of the city and all occupied territories to the Palestinian people. It was incumbent on the international community to salvage the stalled Middle East peace process by injecting it with a new spirit and momentum. It must encourage the parties, particularly Israel, to faithfully implement all the agreements and accords so as to avoid any derailment of the peace process.

He said he hoped the Israeli leadership would acknowledge the realities on the ground and resolve all pending issues with the Palestinian National Authority. He hoped the draft resolutions would be adopted without a vote, particularly the text relating to the full participation of Palestine in the work of the United Nations system.

MAJID TAKHT-RAVANCHI (Iran) said the Assembly's recent tenth emergency special session had demanded the immediate and full cessation of an illegal activity in the occupied territories, but the Israeli response to that and other calls by the international community, reflected in numerous United Nations resolutions, had been negative. Israel continued to disregard those calls with impunity. The occupation of the territory of others, with massive violation of basic rights, constituted the main causes of the Middle East crisis.

He said expansion of settlements, in spite of its undertakings and in contravention of United Nations resolutions, showed that the Israeli regime considered itself above and beyond international law. It continuously sought to consolidate its occupation through demographic and geographic changes in the occupied territories, particularly in Al-Quds Al-Sharif/Jerusalem. The report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and other Arabs of the Occupied Territories indicated that the relentless policy of settlement was currently being pursued by Israel, regardless of the expression of deep concern by the international community.

The Middle East crisis could be solved, he added, only through the full realization of the rights of the Palestinian people -- in particular their right to self-determination, with the return of refugees and the liberation of all occupied territories, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif/Jerusalem, southern Lebanon and the Syrian Golan.

LEGWAILA J. LEGWAILA (Botswana) said a just and permanent peace continued to elude the Palestinian people, and the people of the Middle East at large, including the Jewish people. The Oslo Agreements and the historic Declaration of Principles had yet to bring peace and justice to the Palestinian people. They remained partially implemented and consistently violated.

He said the world community believed that the Palestinian people and the Israelis had an equal claim to Palestine as their common

heritage. They did not see why the Israelis could not embrace their Palestinian brethren, to put an end to the needless and unjust denial to the Palestinians of their right to self-determination. That denial had caused untold misery and suffering to both Palestinians and the Israelis. As long as the settlements continued to be spread in the occupied Arab territories, in defiance of the spirit of Washington and Oslo, then so long would "the men of violence in the occupied territories feel justified to sow death and mayhem in Israel."

If they were to survive and deliver peace to Israel and its Arab neighbours, the Oslo Agreements must be complied with by both parties, he said. Each had a responsibility not only to live up to its share of the commitments, but also to protect and defend those commitments from their predators, who had struck deadly blows at every measure of progress in the peace process.

He said Botswana had consistently insisted that the construction of Jewish settlements in the occupied territories was a provocation that could not by any stretch of the imagination promote the peace process. They made it impossible for the Palestinian leadership to deal effectively with their anti-peace process fanatics. For the sake of progress they should be discontinued.

ABODULIE A. SALLAH (Gambia) said his country welcomed the signing on 15 January of the Protocol on deployment in the Hebron/Al Khalil, and the various bilateral Israeli and Palestinian accords. All those gains, however, were being nullified by events, actions and ominous statements of the Israeli Government. He cited the construction and expansion of settlements, the demolition of Palestinian houses, and various economic measures which had resulted in the loss of income for Palestinians in the occupied territories. Israeli actions had contravened the principles of international law, and ignored various resolutions of the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) on the crisis in the Middle East. The peace process should be revived in earnest and Israel should be made to adhere to Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 425 (1978) and to the principle of land for peace.

AHMET ENGIN ANSAY, Permanent Observer for the Organization of the Islamic Conference, said the virtual stalemate in the peace process was the result of Israeli violations of elements of the peace agreements, and its blatant and renewed acts of aggression against the Palestinian people, especially following the installation of the new Government in Israel. The Palestinians within their national right, had continued to resist the Israeli aggression. They had shown a remarkable capacity to shoulder nation-building responsibilities, despite the hurdles put in their way by Israel, particularly relating to their reconstruction and development efforts. The Palestinians had been helped by concerned members of the international community, including friendly governments and non-governmental organizations. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) should be put on a sound financial footing to avoid the downgrading of services to Palestinian refugees.

He said the uncooperative attitude of the Israeli authorities was hindering much needed international humanitarian and technical assistance to the Palestinian people. Israel was still subjecting the people of Palestine to the restrictive bureaucratic formalities that were designed to deal with people living under military occupation. There was an urgent need for immediate change. If Israel implemented the peace accords with the same sincerity and vigour shown by Palestine, it would bring the immeasurable benefits of peace for the people of both Palestine and Israel. The Islamic Conference had affirmed its full support for granting Palestine the status and facilities accorded to Member States, including its placement among Member States in the General Assembly Hall.

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