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QUARTET'S ROAD MAP STILL BEST WAY TO ACHIEVE LASTING PEACE IN MIDDLE EAST, GENERAL ASSEMBLY TOLD

As tributes once more rang out in the General Assembly this afternoon in memory of the late Yasser Arafat, acknowledging his leadership in the struggle to give his people their right to self-determination, almost all speakers reaffirmed that the Quartet-backed Road Map was still the best, if not the only, way to bring about a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine.

The Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Paul Badji (Senegal), stressed that Israel continued to violate the provisions of the Road Map, with settlement activity and construction of the separation wall continuing at a considerable pace. It continued to confiscate Palestinian land, destroy homes and farmland and isolate communities, despite an advisory opinion handed down by the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The current situation required that both parties, as well as the international community, recommit to restoration of the peace dialogue.

Israeli incursions, closures and curfews, he warned, had brought the Palestinian economy to the verge of collapse, and living conditions had declined dramatically. Countless individual tragedies continued to occur, as Israel had maintained the illegal practice of extrajudicial assassinations where innocent bystanders were often killed. Those acts were strongly condemned, as were suicide bombings against Israelis; all such acts only pushed the goal of peaceful coexistence ever farther away.

Responding to criticisms about its policies, Israel's representative said Prime Minister Sharon's proposed disengagement plan for Gaza and parts of the West Bank constituted a courageous initiative. Moreover, it could help pull the region back to negotiations by giving the Palestinian people greater control over their lives, improving the security and humanitarian situation for both peoples and working to remove terrorism from the equation. The plan constituted both a physical and a symbolic move – it signified Israel's commitment to creating opportunities for a better future.

The coming Palestinian elections would serve as a critical opportunity and important test, he said. He hoped the Palestinians would elect a leadership to serve their interests, and work towards peace and development and an end to terrorism. Corruption had plagued Palestinian leadership, while terrorism had endangered both Israeli and Palestinian lives. Israel had responsibilities, he acknowledged, and was ready to fulfil them. But a new Palestinian leadership must emerge to meet the needs of its population, to serve the imperatives of peace and to fulfil the expectations of the international community.

The one voice today not giving blanket approval to the Road Map was the Observer of Palestine, who underscored that its essential flaw could undermine the realization of just peace. While the first three phases contained time-bound objectives, the last phase of the Road Map offered no clear solution to the delineation of final borders, the status of Jerusalem, the dismantling of Jewish settlements or the return of Palestinian refugees. And it appeared that full implementation would have the Palestinian people depend on the good intentions of the Israeli Government. Israeli Prime Minister Sharon, through his words and policies, however, had not been expressing any such good intentions.

Unfortunately, despite any efforts its people would undertake on their own behalf, Palestine was still suffering under brutal occupation, similar to that, which had hung over South Africa, he stated. The occupation of Palestine was clearly obvious as Palestinian towns and villages were bulldozed, olive trees and groves were uprooted, and suffocating checkpoints and curfews were imposed. A dire economic crisis had been caused by the restriction of movement of Palestinian people and goods. Students did not have access to schools and some 1.2 million in Gaza lived in abject poverty, while thousands and thousands — large numbers of women and children — suffered in Israeli prisons.

Syria's representative said his country remained committed to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, on Palestinian land, with Al-Quds as its capital, as well as to the return of the Syrian Golan and the liberation of the remaining occupied Lebanese territories. It was time for the international community to oppose the actions of Israel, and enable the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights.

There was now a window of opportunity open to revive the Middle East peace process, stated the representative of the Netherlands, speaking on behalf of the European Union. The Palestinian Authority must halt terror against Israel, maintain unity, avoid provocation and undertake the necessary preparations for coordination with Israel over the disengagement plan. At the same time, Israel should lift restrictions on the freedom of movement of people and goods, release Palestinian prisoners or administrative detainees, halt settlement activity and cease the construction of the separation barrier, as well as coordinate disengagement with the relevant Palestinian authorities.

Statements were also made by the representatives of Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Algeria, Lebanon, Sudan, Egypt, Zambia, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. The report of the Palestinian Rights Committee was presented by its rapporteur, Victor Camilleri (Malta).

The Assembly will meet again at 10 a.m. tomorrow, 30 November, to continue its debate on the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East.

Background

The General Assembly this afternoon began its consideration of the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East.

Before the Assembly is the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (document A/59/35), which states that the Committee's utmost concern during the review period (10 October 2003 to 10 October 2004) has been the failure of efforts to reawaken the peace process. Attempts to establish a ceasefire and stabilize the security situation did not achieve lasting results.

Disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force, the practice of collective punishment, extrajudicial killings, and the detention and imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians by the Israeli military have resulted in the further destruction of Palestinian society.

Maintaining that the continuing Israeli occupation is at the core of the conflict, the Committee believes that a negotiated solution that would end the occupation and enable the Palestinian people to exercise its inalienable rights is urgently needed. The Committee continues to believe that the Road Map remains the best way to achieve the goal of a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine through the establishment of two States – Israel and Palestine – based on the 1967 borders. A settlement should be based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), in particular, and other relevant resolutions.

While welcoming the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the position of the General Assembly, the Committee remains concerned that the illegal construction of the wall on Palestinian land has not stopped. Its harmful effects continue to plague the daily lives of the thousands of Palestinians. The existence of the wall will hamper efforts to resolve the conflict and renders the vision of a two-State solution almost impossible. The Committee's position is that the international community must ensure that the occupying Power abide by the provisions of the Court's ruling and immediately stop and reverse the construction.

The Committee considers that its programme of international meetings and conferences highlight the most pressing issues, such as the need to end violence, stop settlement activities and improve the living conditions of the Palestinian population. Such events mobilize international support for efforts to resolve the conflict and implement the Road Map. In 2005, the Committee intends to address such issues as the application of international law to all aspects of the question of Palestine; the significance of the ICJ's advisory opinion; the implementation of the Road Map; the adverse consequences of the settlement policy and of the construction of the wall for the achievement of a two-State solution; the need to protect the Palestinian people; and the humanitarian and socio-economic situation, including the plight of Palestinian women and children.

Also before the Assembly is the report of the Secretary-General on the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine (document A/59/574-S/2004/909). Despite the efforts of the international community through the Quartet (United Nations, European Union, Russian Federation and United States), and the stated commitment of the parties to the Road Map, the Middle East situation is characterized by a stalled peace process and continuing high levels of violence, states the Secretary-General. As of 16 September 2004, 825 Palestinians and 136 Israelis had lost their lives in the conflict in the preceding year. In the four years since the eruption of the violence in September 2000, no fewer than 3,633 Palestinians and 966 Israelis have been killed.

The report notes that neither side has taken adequate steps to protect civilians, and both are in breach of their international legal obligations. Palestinian civilians continue to be killed and injured in Israeli military operations, and Israeli civilians continue to suffer terrorist attacks from Palestinian militant groups. Neither the Israeli Government nor the Palestinian Authority have made any first steps to end violence and combat terror. Israel has failed to implement its core commitments under the Road Map. Despite repeated promises, settlement activities continue at a rate that observers describe as unmatched since 1992. Security measures taken by the Palestinian Authority are still limited and unclear.

Israel continued construction of the barrier in parts of the West Bank during the year, states the report. Assembly resolution ES-10/13 of 21 October 2003 demanded immediate stoppage and reversal of the construction of the wall. On 8 December 2003, the Assembly adopted resolution ES-10/14, requesting the ICJ to urgently render an advisory opinion on the legal consequences of the wall. On 9 July, the Court rendered an advisory opinion declaring the construction of the wall to be contrary to international law; that Israel is obligated to terminate such breaches and make reparation for all damage caused by the construction of the wall; and that the Assembly and the Security Council might wish to consider further action to end the illegal situation. The Assembly, on 20 July, adopted resolution ES-10/15, demanding that Israel comply with its legal obligations and asked the Secretary-General to establish a register of damage caused by the construction of the wall.

The Secretary-General also notes that during the reporting period, there has been a disturbing increase in acts of violence against and harassment of United Nations staff and property. Israel has a clear obligation to ensure the safety and security of United Nations staff and property, in accordance with the privileges and immunities accorded to the Organization's staff members.

In February, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon announced an initiative to withdraw Israeli armed forces from Gaza and parts of the West Bank and to evacuate all settlements in the Gaza Strip, as well as four settlements in the northern West Bank. The Secretary-General hopes that both the Israeli and the Palestinian sides will focus on the tasks at hand in order to make withdrawal and its aftermath a new beginning of the peace process. The United Nations, and the international community at large, is ready to assist the parties in this endeavour, if they make the right choices.

On the economic front, the picture remains grim. The Palestinian economy stands little chance of recovery unless immediate action is taken. Forty-seven percent of the Palestinian population currently lives in poverty. At present, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the World Food Programme (WFP) are providing regular food aid to as many as 1,480,000 beneficiaries – 39 per cent of the total Palestinian population in the occupied territory – 10 times as much food since September 2000.

A recent World Bank study found that the deep economic crisis in the West Bank and Gaza is one of the worst recessions in modern history. The primary cause of this crisis is the closure regime imposed by Israel. Without a significant change in this regime, the Palestinian economy will not be revived. The World Bank has emphasized that Israel's disengagement plan will have limited impact on the Palestinian economy and Palestinian livelihoods if it is not accompanied by a radical easing of the closure.

The Secretary-General calls on the international community to provide the resources necessary to support United Nations programmes in

addressing the deteriorating economic and humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people. So far this year, UNRWA has received pledges covering less than one-half of its financial requirements for its emergency appeal for refugees in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Only \$89 million of the almost \$210 million needed has been pledged. With insufficient financial resources, the quality and level of the Agency's emergency humanitarian assistance will suffer. Later this year, the Agency will launch a five-year medium-term plan covering the approximately 2 million registered refugees throughout its area of operation.

The report of the Secretary-General on the situation in the Middle East (document A/59/431) notes that in resolution 58/22 the Assembly deplored the transfer by some States of their diplomatic missions to Jerusalem in violation of Council resolution 478 (1980), and called once more on those States to abide by the provisions of the relevant United Nations resolutions. In resolution 58/23, the Assembly demanded once more that Israel withdraw from all the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967, in implementation of the relevant Council resolutions. Also, on 12 April, the Secretary-General addressed notes verbales to the Permanent Representative of Israel and other Member States, requesting them to inform him of any steps that their governments had taken or envisaged taking in regard to the implementation of the relevant provisions of the two resolutions. As of 30 September, replies had been received from Estonia, Israel, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Syria.

According to Israel, which voted against these resolutions and similar ones adopted by the Assembly previously, resolutions 58/22 and 58/23 are unbalanced and threaten to prejudice the outcome of the Middle East peace process. The one-sided approach undermines a fundamental principle of the peace process, according to which the achievement of a just and lasting peace in the region is possible only through direct bilateral negotiations. Israel goes on to say that the time to put an end to such biased United Nations resolutions is long overdue, requiring immediate and serious consideration by the Secretary-General. Rather than promoting a vision, which recognizes the rights and obligations of both sides, as articulated in the Road Map, such resolutions obscure the efforts of the parties to achieve a negotiated outcome.

In its response, Syria states that a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East can be brought about only through a just and comprehensive peaceful settlement. The decision taken by Israel on 31 December 2003 to increase the number of its settlements and expand settlement activity in the occupied Golan are an indication of its intentions to hold the resolutions of the Council and the Assembly in contempt, including Assembly resolution 58/98 of 9 December 2003, which reiterated the demand for the complete cessation of all Israeli settlement activities. Syria calls on the international community to exert pressure on Israel to end its occupation of the Arab territories occupied by it in 1967, including Jerusalem, and calls on all States to comply fully with Assembly resolution 58/22.

The draft resolution entitled Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (document A/59/L.34) would have the Assembly ask the Committee to continue to exert all efforts to promote the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, to support the Middle East peace process and to mobilize international support for and assistance to the Palestinian people. In addition, the Secretary-General would be asked to continue to provide the Committee with the necessary facilities for the performance of its tasks.

By the draft resolution on the division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat (document A/59/L.35), the Assembly would ask the Secretary-General to provide it with the necessary resources and to ensure that it continues to carry out its work programme as detailed in earlier resolutions, in consultation with the Palestinian Rights Committee. Also, the Assembly would ask the Committee and the Division, as part of the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on 29 November, to continue to organize an annual exhibit on Palestinian rights or a cultural event in cooperation with the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations.

According to a text on the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat (document A/59/L.36), the Assembly would ask the Department, in full coordination with the Committee, to continue its special information programme for the biennium 2004-2005, in particular to: disseminate information on all the United Nations activities relating to the question of Palestine; to continue to issue and update relevant publications; to expand its collection of audiovisual material on that question; and to organize and promote fact-finding news missions for journalists to the area, including the occupied Palestinian territory and East Jerusalem.

The Department would also be asked to: organize international, regional and national seminars or encounters for journalists, aiming in particular at sensitizing public opinion to the question of Palestine; and continue to provide assistance to the Palestinian people in the field of media development, in particular to strengthen the training programme for Palestinian broadcasters and journalists initiated in 1995.

A further text, entitled Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine (document A/59/L.37), would have the Assembly stress the need for Israel's withdrawal from the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967 and the realization of the Palestinian people's inalienable rights, primarily the right to self-determination and to their independent State. The Assembly would further stress the need for a speedy end to the reoccupation of Palestinian population centres and for the complete cessation of all acts of violence, including military attacks, destruction and acts of terror.

In addition, the Assembly would call on both sides, the Quartet and other interested parties to exert all efforts necessary to halting the deterioration of the situation, to reverse all measures taken on the ground since 28 September 2000, and to facilitate a speedy resumption of the peace process and conclusion of a final peaceful settlement. The Assembly would also stress the need to respect the advisory opinion of the ICJ, and to comply with the legal obligations identified therein, which would contribute greatly towards the peaceful and just settlement of the question of Palestine.

The draft resolution on Jerusalem (document A/59/L.39) would have the Assembly reiterate its determination that any actions taken by Israel to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration on Jerusalem are illegal and, therefore, null and void and have no validity whatsoever. It would also deplore the transfer by some States of their diplomatic missions to Jerusalem in violation of Security Council resolution 478 (1980), and call once more upon those States to abide by the relevant provisions of United Nations resolutions. Also, the Assembly would stress that a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Jerusalem should take into account the legitimate concerns of both the Palestinian and Israeli sides and should include internationally guaranteed provisions to ensure the freedom of religion and of conscience of its inhabitants, as well as permanent, free and unhindered access to the holy places by the people of all religions and nationalities.

The text on the Syrian Golan (document A/59/L.40) would have the Assembly stress the illegality of the construction of Israeli settlements and other activities in the occupied Syrian Golan since 1967. It would also express its grave concern over the halt in the peace process on the Syrian track, and express the hope that peace talks would resume from the point they had reached. It would call upon Israel to resume the talks on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks and respect the commitments and undertakings reached during the previous talks. The Assembly would declare that Israel has so far failed to comply with Council resolution 497 (1981) and, therefore, declare that Israel's decision of 14 December 1981 to impose laws, jurisdiction and administration on the occupied Syrian Golan is null and void and has no validity whatsoever, as confirmed by Council resolution 497. The Assembly would call on Israel to rescind that decision, and once more demand that Israel withdraw from all the occupied Syrian Golan to the 4 June 1967 line.

Statements

PAUL BADJI (Senegal), Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, introduced four draft resolutions before the Assembly related to the work of his Committee, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information, as well as the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine. He also noted that the international community joined the Palestinian people during this time of sorrow following the death of President Yasser Arafat, and welcomed the immediate steps taken to ensure a smooth transition of power that had been taken by the Palestinian leadership. Urging the Palestinian leadership to prepare for the election of a new President, he stressed the urgency of maintaining calm and public order, and reiterated that his Committee would support all efforts to resume political dialogue with Israel to pave the way for implementation of the Quartet's Road Map.

Calling upon Israel to refrain from any action that could further destabilize the region — particularly settlement activity and the construction of the separation wall — he stressed Israel's responsibility, as the occupying Power, to facilitate preparations for and conduct of the election, including the participation of the Palestinians of East Jerusalem. Israel must also take significant steps to improve the humanitarian situation of the Palestinians by lifting curfews and easing restrictions on the movement of persons and goods.

Israeli incursions, closures and curfews had brought the Palestinian economy to the verge of collapse, he stressed, and living conditions had declined dramatically. Countless individual tragedies continued to occur, as Israel had maintained the illegal practice of extrajudicial assassinations, including in densely populated areas where innocent bystanders were often killed. Those acts were strongly condemned, as were suicide bombings against Israelis; all such acts only pushed the goal of peaceful coexistence ever farther away.

Israel continued to violate the provisions of the Quartet's Road Map, he stressed, with settlement activity continuing at a considerable pace, and construction of the separation wall continuing apace in the West Bank. Israel continued to confiscate Palestinian land, destroy Palestinian homes and farmland and isolate Palestinian communities, despite the advisory opinion handed down by the ICJ, as well as the General Assembly's own resolution to reconfirm that decision. The current situation required that both parties, as well as the international community, recommit to restoration of the peace dialogue, he concluded.

VICTOR CAMILLERI (Malta), Rapporteur, Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, presented the report of the Committee. He said the Committee expressed concern over the failure of efforts to reawaken the peace process against the backdrop of continuing violence, tragic loss of life, and the deepening humanitarian crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. It further expressed its strong opposition to the continued construction of the wall on Palestinian land and the expansion of settlements. The continuing Israeli occupation remained the core of the conflict, and a negotiated solution was urgently needed to end the occupation and enable the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights.

He said the Committee believed that the Road Map was the best way to achieve the goal of a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine through the establishment of two States — Israel and Palestine — based on the 1967 borders. The Committee welcomed the advisory opinion on the illegal construction of the separation wall issued by the International Court of Justice and the position of the Assembly in that regard. It expressed concern, however, that construction had not stopped. That would hamper efforts to resolve the conflict and render a two-State solution almost impossible. The international community must ensure that the occupying Power abide by the provisions of the Court's opinion.

The Committee expressed appreciation for the involvement of governments, intergovernmental organizations, the United Nations system and civil society in the programme of international meetings and conferences that facilitated discussion and analysis of the various aspects of the question of Palestine. It commended civil society organizations for their efforts to uphold international legitimacy with regard to the question of Palestine through advocacy and the mobilization of public opinion, as well as for their unremitting initiatives to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people. In wishing to make its contribution to the achievement of a just and lasting peace settlement and in view of the many difficulties facing the Palestinian people and the peace process, the Committee called on all States to join the endeavour and invited the Assembly to again recognize the importance of its role and reconfirm its mandate with overwhelming support.

FAROUK KADDOUMI, Observer for Palestine, said that today, the opposing forces of peace and war were being further polarized, and it was at such a juncture that the Assembly could play its role as a major supporter of freedom of all oppressed and colonized peoples. The body could also continue to be one with the forces of justice and peace, and to promote the exercise of freedom and self-determination of all peoples. Recalling the myriad peace and conciliatory efforts undertaken by the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, who died last month in Paris at the age of 75, he said that it was in the spirit of mourning that he was addressing the Assembly. The people of Palestine were in a period of crucial transition in which all needed to stand together to re-launch a peaceful democratic State based on international legality.

Unfortunately, despite any efforts its people would undertake on their own behalf, Palestine was still suffering under brutal occupation, similar to that which had hung over South Africa, he continued. The occupation of Palestine was clearly obvious as Palestinian towns and villages were bulldozed, olive trees and groves were uprooted, and suffocating checkpoints and curfews were imposed. A dire economic crisis had been caused by the restriction of movement of Palestinian people and goods. Students did not have access to schools and some 1.2 million in Gaza lived in abject poverty, while thousands and thousands — large numbers of women and children — suffered in Israeli prisons.

But despite the generally bleak political and economic situation, the international community had exerted great efforts on behalf of the people of the occupied territories, he said, noting the Assembly's recent endorsement of the International Court of Justice's decision condemning Israel's construction of a separation wall in Gaza and the West Bank. On the other hand, he outlined United States President George W. Bush's position on outstanding issues between the two sides, which made it clear that Israel should retain airspace, land passages and air bases, among others, even after withdrawal. From that position, one would imagine that Israel was a weak unarmed State under constant threat. But everyone knew that that was not the case. Israel was powerful, maintained the region's overwhelming military might and advanced weaponry, and, worst of all, was without ethical or moral constraint or human rights concerns.

Israel was always trying to put the blame of the peace process' failure on the Palestinian side. It had been worth noting that the European Union, among others, had been expressing a firm stand on the need for a two-State solution leading to peace in the wider Middle East. Turning to the Quartet-backed Road Map peace plan, he said that its one essential flaw could undermine the realization of just peace. While the plan's first three phases contained time-bound objectives, crucial elements in the final phase remained mysteriously open-ended. The Road Map offered no clear solution to the delineation of final borders, the status of Jerusalem, the dismantling of Jewish settlements, or the return of Palestinian refugees.

Indeed, he added, for the full implementation of the Road Map, it appeared that the Palestinian people would have to depend on the good intentions of the Israeli Government. But Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, through his words and policies, had not been expressing any such

good intentions.

DAN GILLERMAN (Israel) said the question of Palestine could be solved; the answer lay in mutual understanding, mutual acknowledgement and mutual respect — in commitment to negotiations and renewal of the Road Map's implementation. For too long, the region had been dominated by conflict due to unwillingness on the part of all to look inward, to take responsibility for their own actions. Moving forward would require directing energies against common enemies and towards common goals. Every party must take ownership of their obligations, and be as conscious of their responsibilities as their rights.

Recalling that on 29 November 1947, the General Assembly had recommended the establishment of two States — one Jewish and one Arab — but that the Arab world at the time had rejected that recommendation, he deplored the sad paradox by which the world body had come to commemorate that rejection. However, he continued, his country felt that the winds of change were blowing in the Middle East. Israel's disengagement plan constituted a courageous initiative. Moreover, it could help pull the region back to negotiations by giving the Palestinian people greater control over their lives, improving the security and humanitarian situation for both peoples and working to remove terrorism from the equation. The disengagement plan constituted both a physical and a symbolic move; it signified Israel's commitment to creating opportunities for a better future.

The coming Palestinian elections, he added, would serve as a critical opportunity and important test. His country would enable international observers to monitor the elections, and do all it could to facilitate a smooth, fair, transparent and democratic electoral process. It was to be hoped that the Palestinian people would elect a leadership to serve their interests, work towards peace and development, and push for construction of an architecture of peace and an end to terrorism.

He said both Israelis and Palestinians had suffered too long — physically, economically and psychologically. Corruption had plagued the Palestinian leadership, and the morally bankrupt strategy of terrorism had endangered both Israeli and Palestinian lives. Israel recognized that it had responsibilities, he acknowledged, and remained ready to fulfil them. However, a new Palestinian leadership must emerge to meet the needs of its population, to serve the imperatives of peace and to fulfil the expectations of the international community.

That leadership, he concluded, must end incitement in the media and in religious and education institutions, and halt the use of cultural and sporting events as rallies to encourage further terror. Most of all, the Palestinian leadership must work to eliminate terrorism, as well as the elements that fuelled it. Where the world saw opportunity, organizations such as Hezbollah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad — as well as regimes such as that of Iran, which supported them — saw only threat. They would undoubtedly attempt to undermine every effort for reconciliation; they must not be allowed to succeed. On behalf of Israel, he extended his hand to his Palestinian neighbours to work as partners in peace, facing firmly away from the acrimonious past.

DIRK JAN VAN DEN BERG (Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the European Union and associated States, expressed his delegation's solidarity with the Palestinian people in this difficult moment, and said that there was a window of opportunity open to revive the Middle East peace process. Therefore, he called on all parties to demonstrate the necessary courage and leadership to break through the present deadlock, put an end to the hostilities and re-engage in the serious political process outlined in the Road Map. He also believed that the Palestinian Authority should make a 100 per cent effort to halt terror against Israel, maintain unity, avoid provocation and undertake the necessary preparations for coordination with Israel over the Israeli disengagement plan.

At the same time, Israel should lift restrictions on the freedom of movement of people and goods, release Palestinian prisoners and/or administrative detainees, halt settlement activity and cease the construction of the separation barrier. Israel should also coordinate disengagement with the relevant Palestinian authorities. Further, while the European Union reaffirmed its commitment to High Representative Javier Solana's short term assistance programme, it also believed that immediate action was required in three interrelated priority areas: presidential elections, improvement of the security situation and financial support to the Palestinian Authority.

He went on to say that elections played an indispensable role in the process of establishing strong democratic institutions. In that regard, the European Union stood ready to assist the Palestinian Authority financially, technically and politically. He called on Israel to facilitate smooth and orderly elections by allowing proper voter registration and movement of Palestinian politicians, legislators and other officials to prepare and hold elections. Israel must also allow presidential candidates to campaign and the Palestinians to cast their votes. In addition, it must lift closures and remove roadblocks.

TAWFEEQ AHMED ALMANSOOR (Bahrain) said a sad and major event had been the loss of Yasser Arafat, the late Palestinian leader who struggled until the last moments of his life for the cause of his people, always calling for a just and comprehensive solution, including their right to self-determination. He was a symbol of peace. The debate on Palestine had been a difficult issue for the past five decades, without a glimmer of hope to shed any light on overcoming the obstacles along the way. Israel's intransigence had blocked all efforts and its Government had adopted a policy of rejection, believing that such policies would silence Palestinian demands.

Israel had created crisis after crisis, he said. That coupled with an unjust use of force that flew in the face of the United Nations and international legitimacy had led to more bloodshed, more use of military force and more settlements that were cancerous parts gnawing at Palestinian land. Israel believed that such a policy would lead to control of all the territories and cause desperation among the Palestinian people by forcing them to believe that whatever rights they had would be compromised by Israeli military might. That persistent Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people, with worsening forms of terrorism, had been totally rejected by the entire international community, which had called on Israel to implement all resolutions and arrive at a just and lasting peace, in which both countries would respect each other, uproot hatred and get rid of the conflict that had evolved from decades of strife.

He underscored the need for an immediate and just solution, stressing that Israel must withdraw from the territory it had occupied since June 1967. The Palestinians had signed peace accords and Arab countries, including his own, had spared no efforts to push various peace initiatives forward. All those efforts, however, had been dispersed and destroyed by Israeli rejection. The Palestinian Rights Committee had concluded that Israel's behaviour was the crux of the trouble in the region and highlighted the urgency for a negotiated settlement. Israel had also showered disdain on the International Court of Justice's (ICJ) advisory opinion and continued with the construction of the separation wall. The Road Map remained the best way to arrive at a comprehensive and just solution with the establishment of two States, based on the 1967 border and Council resolutions, including 242 and 338.

ABDULAZIZ NASSER AL-SHAMSU (United Arab Emirates) said the Israeli Government's present policies were part of an expansionist plan begun with Israel's establishment in 1948. Its objective aimed to consolidate the status quo of occupation; change the demographical, political and legal nature of the Palestinian territories; and mark Israel's international borders before beginning to negotiate a final solution. That would explain the statistical information and documented facts contained in annual reports of United Nations committees and agencies. The most

recent report of the Palestinian Rights Committee indicated that, during the 2003-2004 review period, the Israeli Government had continued to confiscate Palestinian lands and property and set up dozens of new settlements in most Palestinian territories, particularly in Jerusalem and adjacent areas. The consequences of ignoring the Palestine question was of serious concern, he said, adding that it had fuelled frustration and despair and increased violence among Palestinians.

The international community must find a solution for the Palestinian people, he said. The Security Council must pressure Israel to cease its constant military attacks, including collective punishment and State terrorism, against Palestinians in order to create a suitable environment for resumed peace talks. In that regard, he called for forcing Israel to withdraw from all Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 and to end other illegal settlement building, including creation of the separation wall. He called upon the international community to support the Palestinian people economically and politically to ensure elections were held in January as scheduled, institutions were re-established and humanitarian and social conditions were improved. Further, he reaffirmed the fundamental principles of the Palestinian cause, as stipulated in General Assembly resolutions and consistent with the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative.

FAYSSAL MEKDAK (Syria) stressed the importance of the United Nations, and its Member States, assuming its responsibilities regarding resolution of the question of Palestine. The international community must remain seized of the question until such time as all matters related thereto had been dealt with. Recalling that General Assembly resolution 273 (1949) had made the acceptance of Israel as a Member State by the United Nations conditional upon respect for the Charter, he noted that resolutions related to the right of return for Palestinian refugees had not been implemented. Instead, the ongoing Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands continued to deprive Palestinians of their rights, and had led to endless, bloody conflict.

For more than 56 years, three generations of Palestinians had continued to suffer injustice, he stressed. Israel continued to commit war crimes, practice State terrorism and violate the human rights of the Palestinian people. Israel had attacked and isolated the Palestinian people; it had attacked them with bombs and targeted their leadership for assassination. The closure of checkpoints had had devastating effects upon the Palestinian economy, and the encircling and closure of villages had prevented Palestinians from leaving their homes to seek medical help or purchase medicine, and had even prevented children from returning to their homes.

Moreover, Israel continued to expand the territory under its control through construction of the separation wall, he noted, and settlement activity had been accompanied by acts of terrorism and violence perpetrated by Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians. Israel continued to flout the ICJ's advisory opinion on the wall's construction, and to take recourse to many other manoeuvres aimed at ignoring the international community's will. That situation would not lead to lasting and overall peace.

Syria, he stressed, remained committed to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, on Palestinian land, with Al-Quds as its capital, as well as to the return of the Syrian Golan and the liberation of the remaining occupied Lebanese territories. It was time for the international community to oppose the actions of Israel, and enable the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights.

ABDALLAH BAALI (Algeria) said it was clear that year after year the international community was faced with the same pattern of systematic violence and abuse perpetrated by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories. In deliberate violation of its obligations under international law, including the Geneva Conventions, Israel had continued with its construction of a separation barrier, building illegal settlements, raising houses and confiscating land, all seriously hindering the possibilities of an independent Palestinian State. In addition, Israel's actions throttled what was left of Palestinian lives and livelihoods, and suffocated what remained of the Palestinian Authority. Algeria expressed its support for the heroic struggle of the Palestinian people in the face of so many years of brutal and oppressive policies, he declared.

The international community must act without delay, and redouble its efforts to create a favourable environment for the full implementation of the Road Map, he continued. It must become further involved to achieve a just and lasting solution based on relevant Security Council resolutions. Any delay would allow Israel to, among other things, build new settlements and continue its oppressive policies. In addition, implementation of Israel's withdrawal plan must be undertaken in consultation with relevant representatives within the Palestinian Authority, particularly regarding modalities and timetable. That withdrawal must also be accompanied by the dismantling of all outpost settlements and the cessation of all settlement activities. The Assembly must respond to the aspirations of the Palestinian people to establish their own State, he said, adding that the hopes and dreams of the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat were more alive than ever.

IBRAHIM ASSAF (Lebanon) recalled that the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people had been determined to include the right to self-determination, the right to political independence and the right to return for Palestinian refugees. Israel continued to deny the Palestinians those inalienable rights; it continued the colonization and occupation of Palestinian territory. Moreover, Israel continued to contradict the first article of the United Nations Charter — the right of peoples to self-determination. The State continued to refuse to submit to relevant Security Council resolutions, including 478 (1980) concerning the status of Jerusalem.

Regarding the continued construction of the separation wall, he noted that 90 per cent of the wall was being built within Palestinian territory. The International Court of Justice had found the wall's construction to be contrary to international law, and had called upon Israel to cease construction and to deconstruct the wall. However, Israel continued to refuse to comply with that finding. In conclusion, he stressed that only through showing respect for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people would the question of Palestine be resolved. Israel was called upon to choose the path of peace and to return to the negotiating table in order to bring about a lasting solution, in accordance with relevant resolutions and the principle of "land for peace".

OMAR BASHIR MOHAMED MANIS (Sudan), expressing condolences on the recent death of Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, said his delegation believed that the Palestinian people would draw on their unity and strength of purpose to overcome the loss of the symbol of their struggle. Still, the Palestinian tragedy — worsening security, deepening poverty, and suffocating curfews — should compel the international community to join that struggle to overcome the dangerous designs and arrogance of Israel, and to find a just and lasting settlement of the issue. That was particularly true if the Security Council and its decisions were to remain credible and legitimate. All States concerned about peace and international legality should call upon Israel to respect international law and stand by its commitments. He added that his delegation supported the draft texts that were being considered by the Assembly on the item.

AMR ABOUL ATTA (Egypt) said a settlement to the question of Palestine could not come at the expense of the Palestinians' right to an independent State and the right of return of Palestinian refugees. The international community could not forget Israel's serious violations of the Road Map during the review period, including military incursions resulting in huge losses of life and property, the construction of new settlements and continued construction of the separation wall. A peaceful solution was necessary to spare future generations from the cycle of violence. He called upon Israel to end its policies of siege and closure of Palestinian areas and businesses, and to take the necessary steps to alleviate Palestinian suffering, including the release of political detainees. The Road Map, which envisaged two States, must be fully implemented.

He warned that any developments in the region, notably Israel's proposed withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, must be coordinated with the Road Map. He called for creating a corridor between the West Bank and Gaza to facilitate the free movement of Palestinians between the two areas and for international observers to monitor the situation after Israel's withdrawal. Egypt supported creation of a political and security scheme to bring parties back to the negotiating table. The peace process would either lead to a real settlement or would fall into a slump with future generations paying the price, he said, stressing the need to ensure a successful outcome, including creation of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

MWELWA MUSAMBACHIME (*Zambia*) said the passing of Yasser Arafat had robbed the international community of a distinguished figure and partner in the Middle East peace process. The greatest honour the world could give Mr. Arafat would be to realize his dream of a peaceful Middle East region, with Israel and Palestine living in harmony. He reiterated his support for the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. In addition, he hoped that the recent diplomatic initiatives by the United States and United Kingdom for a peaceful settlement to the Middle East crisis would further strengthen the Quartet's Road Map.

Existing initiatives should be continued, he said, stressing that now was not the time to start afresh. He welcomed the ICJ's advisory opinion and the subsequent position of the General Assembly. He expressed concern over the continued construction of the wall in the occupied West Bank and areas near East Jerusalem, saying it served to undermine international efforts to resolve the conflict. The Road Map was the best solution to creating two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side, based on 1967 borders. He hoped a settlement would be reached soon.

RASTAM MOHD ISA (*Malaysia*) said he wished to reaffirm the unequivocal support of his country for the people and leadership of Palestine, and for the establishment of an independent State of Palestine. On this International Day of Solidarity, he wished to reiterate his condolences to the people of Palestine on the loss of President Yasser Arafat and express regret that there had been no significant progress to find a political solution to the conflict. Instead, the harsh and inhumane policies and practices that had been adopted by the occupying Power had greatly contributed to further deterioration of the economic, social and humanitarian condition in the occupied Palestinian territories.

There had been too many deaths, injuries, destruction and indescribable suffering as a result of Israel's excessive, indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force, which remained contrary to that country's obligations under international law, international human rights law and international humanitarian law. The international community must prevail upon Israel to respect its obligations. The United Nations had a duty to end the atrocities and abhorrent policies and practices employed by Israel against the Palestinian population.

The construction of the separation wall had introduced a new dimension to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he added, and could seriously endanger the prospects for peace in the region. It threatened the territorial integrity of a future Palestinian State. All States, including Israel, must respect the ICJ's conclusion that construction of the wall ran contrary to international law. Moreover, the Quartet must play a more active and vigorous role in resuscitating and salvaging the Road Map to put the peace process back on track. Israel must demonstrate its commitment to a peaceful solution, rather than a military one. And the Palestinian Authority, with assistance from the international community, must continue efforts to reform relevant institutions and improve its security apparatus.

The question of Palestine remained high on the agenda of both the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), he added. As the Chair of the Movement, and of the Tenth OIC Summit, Malaysia had discussed the question of Palestine in several forums, including bilaterally with Quartet members at the open hearings of the ICJ and at the Special Ministerial Meeting of the OIC on the situation in the Middle East. The international community had a collective role to play in finding a solution to the Palestinian question, he concluded. The General Assembly remained the last bastion of hope for the Palestinian people and must uphold the rule of law and the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

SAEED AL-JOMAE (*Saudi Arabia*) said the reports of the Secretary-General before the Assembly had clearly revealed the brutal practices and aims of the Israeli occupation in the Palestinian territories. Tragically, the Palestinian people lived under Apartheid-like conditions, suffering almost unimaginable horrors, their homes wrecked and their livelihoods destroyed. Those who resisted the occupation were hampered from securing livelihoods or were branded terrorists by Israeli authorities.

The only hope was the implementation of international laws and the insistence that the relevant resolutions of the Security Council were abided by. Members of the international community, and particularly the diplomatic Quartet, must intervene to ensure the aims of the Road Map peace plan. He added that Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip must be a complete and total withdrawal, and must include similar steps in the West Bank and be in line with the principles set out in the Road Map. Saudi Arabia stood by its position and would call on Israel to abide by international law and to ensure an independent Palestine with Al-Quds as its capital.

ABDULLAH M. ALSAIDI (*Yemen*) said that while he appreciated the efforts of the Secretariat to prepare the reports before the Assembly, nothing was needed to inform the international community of the Palestinians' tragic plight. That was recorded daily by the international media and international organizations. Israel had succeeded in exploiting the "9/11" attacks on the United States in order to divert international attention away from expansionist policies in the occupied territories. Israel continued its illegal, inhumane practices of assassinating Palestinian leaders and activists; destroying Palestinian homes, particularly in refugee camps; destroying Palestinian infrastructure; isolating Palestinian communities from each other; and continuing construction of the separation wall.

Israel's continued pursuit to annex the West Bank and Gaza were proof of its contradictions and lack of commitment to the Road Map. Lands acquired by force were disputed areas. Palestinian action to fight back had been labelled terrorism. Any criticism of Israeli expansionist policy had been called anti-Semitism. Israeli policies attempted to erode all efforts to bring about peace. There was no light at the end of the tunnel. Israel's insistence to maintain forces in the West Bank clearly showed Israel's expansionist intentions. Numerous United Nations resolutions calling for the creation of an independent Palestinian State had not produced successful results. Greater pressure on Israel, including sanctions, was needed to force Israel to comply. Israel had become a State that was above the law. The law should not be selectively applied.

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