



General Assembly

GA/10789

Department of Public Information • News and Media Division • New York

Sixty-third General Assembly
Plenary
57th Meeting (PM)

PALESTINIAN FOREIGN MINISTER SAYS GLOBAL COMMUNITY MUST UPHOLD ITS LEGAL, MORAL

POLITICAL, DUTY TO PROMOTE PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT OF ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

As General Assembly Begins Annual Consideration of 'Question of Palestine', Assembly President Calls on All Parties to Help End 'Self-Perpetuating Tragedy'

With many speakers expressing alarm at the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, sustained Israeli aggression and flagging peace negotiations, the General Assembly today began its annual debate on the question of Palestine – more than 60 years after its own adoption of a 1947 resolution calling for the creation of a Jewish and Arab State in Palestine.

The daily hardships endured by the Palestinian people, as Israel tightened its blockade of Gaza, expanded the dividing wall and launched other hostile acts, were part of a wide-ranging debate that encompassed the report of the Assembly's Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. It also included the introduction of four draft resolutions meant to ease the Palestinian people's suffering, raise awareness about the situation, including through the work of the United Nations, and push the peace process forward.

Today's debate also marked the Assembly's direct contribution to the United Nations observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which recognized 29 November 1947, when the Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), also known as the "Partition Resolution". It called for the creation of two independent States within the land of Palestine — a Jewish State and an Arab State.

General Assembly President Miguel D'Escoto Brockmann of Nicaragua compared Israeli policies in the Occupied Palestinian Territory to "the apartheid of an earlier era" and said it was important that the United Nations used that term. "We must not be afraid to call something what it is," he said, adding that, after all, it was the United Nations that had passed the International Convention against the crime of apartheid.

He said the United Nations had taken the lead from civil society 20 years ago, in agreeing that sanctions were necessary to pressure South Africa to end its violations. Perhaps it should consider following the lead of a new generation of civil society groups, which were calling for a non-violent campaign of boycotts, divestment and sanctions to pressure Israel to end its violations of international law. Further, the global community should spare no effort in assisting Israelis and Palestinians to reach a two-State solution, as enmity between them was a "self-perpetuating tragedy".

Riad Al-Malki, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Palestinian National Authority, said the Palestinian people had returned to the Assembly this year to renew their appeal to the international community to intensify its efforts for a peace process aimed at achieving a peaceful settlement on the question of Palestine. That would include a just solution for the Palestinian refugees on the basis of Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948, he said. There had been little progress in the peace process since its resumption a year ago at Annapolis.

Meanwhile, the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, had continued to deteriorate because of Israel's ongoing illegal policies and practices. He said that Israel's continued siege of the Gaza Strip, for example, had transformed the area into "an open-air prison" and was an inhumane form of collective punishment tantamount to a war crime. The impact on the Palestinian economy and society had been disastrous.

Reaffirming the Palestinian peoples' commitment to the peace process, he urged all concerned parties, including the diplomatic Quartet – which comprises the United Nations, European Union, Russian Federation and United States – to seize the opportunities created by the Arab Peace Initiative and the Annapolis Conference, and move negotiations forward. The international community needed to redouble its efforts to uphold its legal, political and moral responsibilities to promote a peaceful settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict after 60 years, he said.


Speaking on behalf of the European Union, the representative of France said the European Union fully supported the ongoing negotiation process and stressed that all parties needed to end all acts of violence and terrorism so the peace process could reach a successful conclusion. The European Union strongly condemned the Palestinian militia's rocket attacks on Israel. And while recognizing Israel's right to self-defence, the European Union called on Israel to exercise the utmost restraint. In that vein, he strongly condemned the acts of violence and brutality committed against Palestinian civilians by Israeli settlers in the West Bank.

Md. Touhid Hossain, Secretary of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh, also welcomed all the recent regional and international efforts to achieve peace, and the agreement to begin final status negotiations to resolve all core issues. That meant borders, refugees, settlements and Jerusalem. Those issues, he stressed, had to be resolved on the basis of previous agreements that would entail the complete Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem.

The representative of Senegal, who chairs the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, introduced four draft resolutions on: the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People; the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat; Special Information Programme on the Question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information; and peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine. Those texts outlined positions, mandates and programmes that were very important to the Palestinian people. He urged the Assembly to adopt the resolutions and support their important goals.

In other business, the Assembly adopted a resolution on the commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, by which it decided that the commemorative event would include an awards ceremony for the United Nations Prize in the field of human rights, and two consecutive informal, interactive panel discussions.

Also addressing the General Assembly today were the representatives of Cuba (on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement), India, Viet Nam, Egypt, Syria, Tunisia and Saudi Arabia.

The representative of Malta, as Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, introduced the report on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (document A/63/35 ).

The General Assembly will reconvene on 25 November, at 10 am, to continue its consideration of the question of Palestine and begin its consideration of the situation in the Middle East.

Background

The General Assembly met today to consider the question of Palestine. It also planned to consider the promotion and protection of human rights.

Before the Assembly was the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (document A/63/35), which noted that the 5 October 2007 to 6 October 2008 reporting period was characterized by resumed Israeli-Palestinian political talks, intensified international engagement on the issue and a deteriorating situation on the ground. In a situational overview, it stated that on 27 November 2007, representatives of more than 50 Governments and international organizations met in Annapolis, Maryland, which led to resumed "permanent status" negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), with the goal of reaching a two-State solution.

At the same time, the report says the Israeli army continued its military operations in Palestinian population centres, and the Gaza Strip remained sealed for the greater part of the year, with Israel allowing the most basic supplies to pass through checkpoints. The response by armed Palestinian groups included rocket and mortar fire, and a suicide attack in Israel. While a Gaza ceasefire was agreed, and has been largely observed, it has not led to significantly improved living conditions in that area. Israel, in violation of international law, continued to expand Israeli settlements, including in and around East Jerusalem.

For its part, the Committee sought to support momentum created at Annapolis, and repeatedly warned that without visible improvement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, negotiations were doomed to fail, the report stated. It cautioned that the continued policy of "fait accompli" on the ground was a grave threat to a peaceful, negotiated solution to the conflict. Further, it remained concerned at internal Palestinian divisions blocking reunification of the West Bank and Gaza under the Palestinian Authority, and supported all Arab efforts to restore Palestinian national unity.

Among actions taken by the Committee during the reporting period, the report notes a special meeting held at Headquarters, on 20 June 2008, to mark 60 years of dispossession of Palestine refugees and, with the Division for Palestinian Rights, various international awareness-raising meetings, notably in Amman, Jordan.

Among its conclusions, the Committee stresses the need for the complete cessation of all violence, including military attacks, destruction and acts of terror. On the "Road Map" obligations, the Committee called on Israel to end its military operations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and stop other measures that undermined Palestinian institutions. It also called on Palestinians to unite in support of President Mahmoud Abbas and all democratically elected Palestinian institutions, and to resolve their differences by peaceful means. It was paramount that various Palestinian factions put national interests ahead of partisan concerns, as unity was essential for achieving a viable solution on the question of Palestine.

Also before the Assembly was the Secretary-General's report on a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine (document A/63/368-S/2008/612). In response to the Secretary-General's review of resolution 62/83, the Security Council has, among others, presented monthly accounts of the situation, a note verbale of the parties concerned, and observations of the Secretary-General on the current state of affairs and international efforts to move the peace process forward.

The monthly reviews of events follow the development of actions taken, noting the process of bilateral negotiations between Israel and the PLO at the 2007 Annapolis Conference, the involvement of the international community including the Quartet and members of the League of Arab States, and the escalation of violence in Gaza and southern Israel.

The Secretary-General, in his note to the Governments of Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as the PLO, sought their

positions and any steps taken by them to implement resolution 62/83. As of 31 August 2008, replies from Israel and the PLO have been received. In its note, Israel reiterated its position on the resolution and reviewed its position on recent events, stating that "the resolution cannot substitute for direct Israeli-Palestinian dialogue." In its note, Palestine, noting minimal progress since the adoption of the resolution, has reaffirmed its commitment to the peace process and urges all concerned parties in the international community to continue the forward movement towards successful negotiations.

The Secretary-General continued his report by noting that, with the Annapolis Conference and regular bilateral negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, there has been new hope for progress. The report goes on to say he commends the significant strides made by Prime Minister Salam Fayyad to imposing law and order in Jenin and Nablus. However, the progress towards two States living side by side in peace and security has been impeded upon with the situation on the ground.

The Secretary-General actively condemns all acts of violence and human rights violations in the region and has repeatedly called for all parties concerned to cease all such activities. The report stresses that the Palestinian Authority remains the sole legitimate authority and that Gaza and the West Bank comprise one single Palestinian territory, and praises the courage and dedication of the United Nations personnel serving in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

The report concludes with the Secretary-General's acknowledgement of the important steps towards a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, and he calls for the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to "undertake every effort to achieve the goal of the Annapolis process." The report states his reaffirmation of the United Nations' commitment to work towards the creation of an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace with a secure Israel.

The Assembly is also set to consider several draft resolutions, including a text on the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (document A/63/L.32), by which it would request that the Committee continue all its efforts to promote the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right of self-determination, the support of the Middle East Peace Process, and the mobilization of international support for, and assistance to, the Palestinians.

The text would also authorize the Committee to, "in light of the developments", make adjustments to its approved programmes when necessary and appropriate, to continue to extend assistance to Palestinian and other civil society organizations, and to involve additional civil society organizations in its work, in order to mobilize international solidarity and support for the Palestinian people towards the goal of achieving a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine.

The draft resolution on the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat (document A/63/L.33) would have the Assembly request the Secretary-General to continue to provide the Division with the necessary resources and, in consultation with the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to ensure its continuation of its programmes of work – among other things, monitoring development relevant to the question of Palestine; organization of international meetings and conferences; liaison and cooperation with civil society; further development and expansion of the documents collection of the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine; and conduct of the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority.

By a text on the Special Information Programme on the Question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information (document A/63/L.34), the Assembly would consider the special programme "very useful" in awareness raising on the question, and request the Department, in full cooperation with the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to continue it for the 2009-2010 biennium. In that context, the Assembly would also request the Department to disseminate information on all United Nations activities relating to the question and the peace process; continue to issue and update publications on the various aspects of the question, especially on efforts to achieve a peaceful settlement; and expand its collection of audio-visual material.

Also in that context, the Assembly would request the Department to organize and promote fact-finding news missions for journalists to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem and Israel. It would also organize seminars for journalists aimed at sensitizing public opinion on the question of Palestine, and enhancing understanding between Palestinians and Israelis; and continue to provide assistance to Palestinians in the field of media development. Finally by the text, the Assembly would encourage the Department to develop ways for the media and civil society to engage in positive discussion on the means for promoting regional peace and mutual understanding.

The draft text on the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine (document A/63/L.35) would have the Assembly reaffirm the illegality of Israeli actions intended at changing the status of Jerusalem, including measures such as the so-called E-1 plan [which aims to connect Jerusalem to the West Bank settlement of Ma'ale Adumim]. It would also reaffirm the illegality of other unilateral measures, that are contrary to international law, which endeavour to alter the character, status and demographic composition of the city and the territory as a whole, among them the construction by Israel of a wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in and around East Jerusalem.

Further by the text, the Assembly expresses deep concern about the continuing Israeli policy of closures and severe restrictions on the movement of persons and goods, medical and humanitarian personnel and goods, the continued establishment of checkpoints, and the imposition of a permit regime through the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, among other things, which engenders a dire humanitarian crisis, and impacts socioeconomic recovery, development and contiguity of the Palestinian Territory.

The Assembly would welcome the reconvening of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians, under the chairmanship of Norway, at United Nations Headquarters on 22 September 2008, and the importance of follow-up and fulfilment of pledges made at the Paris Donors' Conference of 17 December 2007, convened to support and enable the recovery and development of a prosperous and viable Palestinian State, and also to alleviate the socioeconomic and humanitarian crisis faced by the Palestinian people.

The Assembly would welcome the convening of the Bethlehem Conference on Private Sector Investment from 21 to 23 May 2008, aimed at promoting an environment for Palestinian private sector growth and development, and would commend the Palestinian Authority for all its efforts made to rebuild, reform and strengthen its damaged institutions and infrastructure. The Assembly also would welcome the convening of the Berlin Conference in Support of Palestinian Civil Security and the Rule of Law, held on 24 June 2008, and would call for a speedy implementation of its outcome decisions.

The draft resolution also states that the Assembly would commend the progress made in Jenin, and would call on all parties involved to continue to promote security and the building of confidence for both Palestinians and Israelis, and would encourage such progress extend to other major population centres.

Stressing the urgent need for sustained and active international involvement, including that of the Quartet, the Assembly would urge international support for both parties in advancing and accelerating the peace process negotiations towards the establishment of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace settlement based on United Nations resolutions, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative. In this regard, the Assembly would reaffirm its full support

for the Middle East Peace Process begun in Madrid, the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative, and the efforts of the international conference convened in Annapolis, and it would call upon both parties to exert all efforts necessary to halt the deterioration of the situation and to reverse all measures taken on the ground since 28 September 2000.

For its consideration of the promotion and protection of human rights, the Assembly had before it a draft resolution on the commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (document A/63/L.31), by which it would decide that the commemorative event would include an award ceremony for the United Nations Prize in the field of human rights, and two consecutive informal interactive panel discussions. It would also have the Presidents of the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, the Secretary-General and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights address the plenary event.

Further by the text, the Assembly would also invite intergovernmental organizations and entities with observer status, among others, to be represented, and requested the Assembly President to draw up, no later than 30 November, a list of two representatives of pertinent non-governmental organizations for each of the interactive panels. It further requested the Assembly President to hold open consultations with Member States and observers to prepare a brief declaration reaffirming the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to be adopted at the commemorative plenary meeting.

Action on Draft Resolution on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights

The General Assembly began its session today by adopting the resolution on the commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (document A/63/L.31).

Statement by the General Assembly President on "the Question of Palestine"

General Assembly President MIGUEL D'ESCOTO BROCKMANN of Nicaragua said it was with a "heavy heart" that the United Nations had today observed the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. He joined the Secretary-General, and others, in expressing concern for the terrible situation in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. He urged the international community to raise its voice against the collective punishment of the people of Gaza, and demanded an end to that massive abuse of human rights.

Noting that this morning in the Committee on the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People he had spoken about how Israeli policies in the occupied Palestinian territories appeared similar to the apartheid of an earlier era, he said it was important that the United Nations used that term. "We must not be afraid to call something what it is," he said, adding that it was the United Nations, after all, that had passed the International Convention against the crime of apartheid.

Recalling that, twenty years ago, the United Nations had taken the lead from civil society in agreeing that sanctions were required to pressure South Africa to end its violations, he said, perhaps, it should today consider following a similar lead of a new generation of civil society calling for a non-violent campaign of boycotts, divestment and sanctions to pressure Israel to end its violations.

While patience was a virtue in which he believed, there was nothing virtuous about being patient with the suffering of others, calling for an end to Palestinians' suffering. He had never hesitated to condemn the crimes of the Holocaust, however, their suffering did not give anyone the right to abuse others, especially those with such deep relations with the Jewish people.

He reminded Israelis that, even with protection of the United States, no amount of arm twisting would change Assembly resolution 181 of 1947, calling for the creation of two States. The fact there was no Palestinian State to celebrate today made a mockery of the United Nations, and he called on those at the decision-making level "in our host country" to end the policy that only retarded justice in the Middle East. The global community should spare no effort in assisting Israelis and Palestinians to reach a two-State solution, as enmity between them was a "self-perpetuating tragedy". In closing, he urged finding new ways to enable both peoples in reasserting their historic bonds of brotherhood and sisterhood.

Introduction of Draft Resolutions

Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, PAUL BADJI (Senegal), speaking on the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, noted that, one year ago, the global community had welcomed the holding of the international conference at Annapolis, Maryland, which had led to the resumed political process between Israel and the Palestinians, and an unprecedented level of political, economic and financial support for the Palestinian Authority.

Outlining various activities, he said the Division for Palestinian Rights, under the auspices of the Committee, had organized three major international meetings: the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People in Amman, Jordan; the United Nations International Conference on Palestinian Refugees, in Paris, France; and the United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine, in Malta.

After listening to Palestinian and Israeli assessments, the Committee had concluded there was a widening gap between bilateral negotiations, international efforts and the deteriorating situation on the ground. Continued settlement activity, the blockade of Gaza and daily incursions of the Israeli army into Palestinian population centres threatened to upset fragile negotiations. At the current stage, the Committee could only encourage the parties to continue the political process. The situation on the ground must change dramatically.

Continuing illegal occupation of the Palestinian Territory remained the root cause of the conflict, he said, emphasizing the urgent need for a negotiated solution that would ensure the exercise by Palestinians of their inalienable rights and guarantee security for the State of Israel, based on international law. The Committee remained concerned at the internal Palestinian divisions blocking reunification of the West Bank and Gaza under the Palestinian Authority.

Urging the United Nations to maintain its permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine until it was effectively resolved, he said the Committee also called on the Security Council to act decisively in implementing its resolutions.

He then introduced four draft resolutions respectively on: Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (document A/63/L.32 📄), Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat (document A/63/L.33 📄), Special Information Programme on the Question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information (document A/63/L.34 📄) and peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine (document A/63/L.35 📄). Those drafts outline positions, mandates and programmes that were of special importance. He urged the Assembly to vote in favour of the resolutions and support their important goals.

Presenting the Committee's annual report, SAVIOUR BORG ([Malta](#)), Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, highlighted the main points covered by its chapters, among them: the outlining of the Committee's objectives and its general perspectives on the events which have taken place in the course of the year; a summary of the General Assembly mandates of the Committee, the Division of Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information; as well as a review of the situation relating to the question of Palestine, and the relevant political developments as monitored by the Committee during the year in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.

He noted the report's last chapter, which contained conclusions and recommendations, pointing out that, encouraged by the outcome of the Annapolis Conference and Paris Donors' Conference, the Committee stressed the need for a complete cessation of all acts of violence, including military attacks, destruction and acts of terror. The Committee had called on Israel to end its "illegal policies and oppressive practices" in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and had expressed its view that the Israeli occupation must end without conditions; thereby allowing the Palestinian people to establish an independent State on all territories occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem. The Committee had also called on all donors to live up to their pledges, in order to ensure the continued functioning of the Palestinian Authority institutions.

The Committee called on Israel to end its military operations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and to stop any other measures that further undermine Palestinian institutions, he said, adding that the Committee had expressed its strong opposition to the illegal construction and expansion of settlements in the West Bank, as well as the unlawful construction of the wall, and found those activities incompatible with negotiations on the permanent settlement. Also, the Committee had strongly condemned the killing of innocent civilians by either side, and denounced rocket attacks on Israel. It had called for a cessation of those activities by Palestinian armed groups.

Continuing, he stressed the Committee's call on the Palestinian leadership – the leaders of all factions and all Palestinians – to unite in support of President Abbas, his Government and all democratically elected Palestinian institutions, and to resolve their political differences by peaceful means. It had also called for a comprehensive national dialogue supported by confidence-building measures to start a process of repairing national unity and the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank under the Palestinian Authority.

He went on to highlight the Committee's recommendation to request the continuation of the Special Information Programme on the Question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information, with the necessary flexibility, as warranted by developments relevant to the question of Palestine. Finally, reiterating its desire of making a contribution to the achievement of comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Palestinian issue, the Committee called on all States to join it in that endeavour, and to extend their cooperation and support to the Committee. It initiated the Assembly to again recognize the importance of its role and to reconfirm its mandate.

Statements

RIAD AL-MALKI, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Palestinian National Authority, said the international community had gathered this morning to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The day reassured the Palestinian people of the continuing international commitment, including that of the United Nations, to uphold their permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine until it was resolved in accordance with international law and United Nations resolutions. The Palestinian people, under the leadership of the PLO, were committed to the two-State solution, as a means of creating an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The Palestinian people had returned to the Assembly this year to renew their appeal to the international community to intensify efforts to support a peace process that would achieve a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, including a just solution for the Palestinian refugees on the basis of Assembly resolution 194 (III), he said.

There was no doubt that the question of Palestine was at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and rectifying the injustices of the Palestinian people would promote peace and stability in the Middle East. Regrettably, the international community had not made significant strides towards its goals since the Assembly last met to consider the question of Palestine. There had been little progress in the peace process since its resumption a year ago, and the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, had continued to deteriorate because of Israel's ongoing illegal policies and practices, he said.

Under the aegis of a peace process, Israel had committed countless violations of international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, many amounting to war crimes. In a collective punishment of the Palestinian people, Israel had continued to impose restrictions on the movement of persons and goods to and from the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, which had been virtually cut off from the rest of the Territory. Israel's continued siege of the Gaza Strip had transformed the area into "an open-air prison" and was an inhumane form of collective punishment tantamount to a war crime, he said. The impact on the Palestinian economy and society had been disastrous.

Israel continued its massive colonization campaign in the Territory, breaching the Fourth Geneva Convention and Additional Protocol I, in violation of United Nations resolutions, in total disrespect of the 9 July 2004 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice and disrespecting its peace process commitments, he said. The campaign had involved the continued illegal confiscation of Palestinian land, construction and expansion of settlements and settlement "outposts", the construction of the Wall, and the creation of a bypass road system.

In addition to the immediate humanitarian consequences, Israel's unlawful colonization campaign seriously threatened future peace prospects. Its campaign was the core obstruction to the political and physical efforts to achieve the two-State solution of Palestine and Israel, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map. All of Israel's illegal actions must be firmly rejected and condemned, he said. It was the collective duty of the international community, including the Security Council, to uphold the law and implement the relevant resolutions, and act concertedly to compel Israel to abide by its legal obligations.

Only a just settlement, including a just solution of the refugee issue, could bring an end to the conflict and bring peace and security. The Palestinian people and their leadership remained committed to the peace process. They urged all concerned parties, including the diplomatic Quartet, to seize the opportunities created by the Arab Peace Initiative and the Annapolis Conference to move negotiations forward. The international community needed to redouble its efforts to uphold its legal, political and moral responsibilities to promote a peaceful settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict after 60 years, he said.

MD TOUHID HOSSAIN, Foreign Secretary of [Bangladesh](#), said his country was deeply concerned over the continued suffering of the Palestinian people and the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the occupied territories. Israel had continued to violate international humanitarian law by committing systematic human rights violations against the Palestinian people. The blockade in the Gaza Strip was another example of the Israeli violation of international humanitarian law.

With the unabated construction of the wall, which ignored the International Court of Justice's Advisory Opinion, the territories were being fragmented into

smaller parts, which seriously impacted the viability of a Palestinian State. Bangladesh reiterated its call for immediate dismantling of the wall, he said.

Israel was a signatory to the relevant provision of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and the Assembly and the Security Council, through resolutions adopted over the years, had reconfirmed Israel's obligation to ensure the basic human rights of the Palestinian people, he said. Bangladesh believed that full implementation of the relevant resolutions could only resolve the Palestinian crisis. Bangladesh was ready to play a supportive role in the collective endeavour to achieve a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. But unless the two parties joined the process with genuine political willingness, the process would raise optimism and then lead to another letdown.

Bangladesh welcomed all recent regional and international efforts, the commitment for the creation of a Palestinian State and the agreement to start final status negotiations to resolve all core issues, including borders, refugees, settlements and Jerusalem. Those issues must be resolved on the basis of previous agreements and would entail the complete Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. A sustainable resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the issue of Palestine, had to be the collective objective of the international community, he said.

PHILIPPE DELACROIX (France), European Union Presidency Coordinator, speaking on behalf of the European Union and associated States, underlined the importance of the parties' negotiation process launched in Annapolis, which had allowed all major issues to be addressed without exception, in keeping with the pre-arranged commitments between the two sides. The launch of negotiations had also renewed the involvement of regional and international partners in their work towards a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The European Union was fully supportive of the ongoing negotiation process and invited parties to maintain constructive dialogue, in order to arrive at a just and sustainable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as quickly as possible, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, on the principle of land for peace, on the Arab Peace Initiative, on the Road Map and on previous agreements between the two parties, he said.

In order to consolidate the progress so far achieved, it was essential that the parties made new efforts to comply with their previous commitments, in particular those provided for under the Road Map and the Agreement on Movement and Access. In that regard, he said the European Union was deeply concerned by settlement activities in and around Jerusalem, as well as in the rest of the West Bank. Such activities, which ran contrary to international law and to Israel's commitments made pursuant to the Road Map, had to be suspended, as they undermined the credibility of the process initiated in Annapolis and affected the future viability of the Palestinian State. The European Union also called on both sides to refrain from all unilateral measures that could compromise the final settlement of negotiations.

To bring the peace process to a successful conclusion, it was essential to end all acts of violence and terrorism between the parties. The European Union thus strongly condemned the Palestinian militia's rocket attacks on Israel, he continued. Similarly, while recognizing Israel's right to self-defence, the European Union called upon Israel to exercise the utmost restraint and underlined that action should not contravene or be disproportionate to international law. In that vein, He strongly condemned the acts of violence and brutality committed against Palestinian civilians by Israeli settlers in the West Bank.

He commended Egypt for its endeavour to overcome Palestinian divisions, and to reunite Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza under the legitimate Palestinian Authority. Concerned about the violence that had recently returned to Gaza and southern Israel, the European Union urged all parties to respect the calm and expressed its hope that that calm would result in further relief for the civilian population of Gaza, including the regular opening of the crossings for both humanitarian and commercial flows, and sustained peace on Israel's southern border.

He concluded with a call for the immediate release of Corporal Gilad Shalit on the one hand; as well as the immediate release of Palestinian ministers and legislators detained by Israel, on the other.

ILEANA B. NÚÑEZ MORDOCHE (Cuba), speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, regretted the continued deterioration in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, over the past year, and noted that the current poverty rate there was 65.8 per cent overall, and 80 per cent in the Gaza Strip. She was particularly concerned at that deterioration resulting from the excessive and indiscriminate use of force by Israel against the Palestinian civilian population, as well as its many other illegal policies and practices, including the inhumane and destructive collective punishment against the Palestinian civilian population.

Those collective punishment measures constituted a grave breach of international humanitarian law, violated virtually all human rights of the Palestinians, and had devastated their socioeconomic conditions, causing a dire humanitarian crisis, she said, elaborating further on specific measures Israel had undertaken, which had caused serious damage to the Palestinian economy and society as a whole. Moreover, Israel continued to arrest and detain thousands of Palestinian civilians, imprisoning them in inhumane conditions, and continued to carry out intense military raids and incursions into Palestinian population centres, causing extensive loss of life and injury to Palestinian civilians.

The Non-Aligned Movement condemned the prolonged Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian Territory. Israel's unrelenting violations of international law over four decades had caused immense suffering to the Palestinian people and had obstructed all efforts to promote the achievement of a just and lasting peace, she said. She further criticized Israel's illegal colonial settlement policy and illegal construction of a wall in the West Bank.

She called upon the occupying Power to end settler violence, hold the perpetrators of crimes against Palestinian civilians accountable for their actions and immediately cease all illegal activity, among other things, and urged the international community to demand that Israel respect all its obligations under international law and cease all illegal and inhumane practices against the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza. Israel must comply with its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention, which was applicable to the entire Occupied Territory, including East Jerusalem, she continued, calling for the opening of all crossings and for Israel to repair all damage it had caused to infrastructure in the Gaza Strip, as well as for the international community to provide financial assistance to the Palestinians.

The Non-Aligned Countries called on the Security Council to take the actions necessary to implement its own resolutions, and compel Israel to respect international law and end its occupation and all illegitimate and illegal practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. Israel's unilateral measures in the Occupied Territory posed a serious threat to achieving a negotiated agreement on a two-State solution and, thus, threatened prospects for peace. She noted that despite the resumption of direct, bilateral negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, Israel's illegal policies had undermined the process. She called upon all concerned parties, including the Quartet, to exert the necessary efforts to promote a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

DEVENDRA DWIVEDI (India) said almost one year after the international conference at Annapolis had raised the hope that the process of dialogue would help quickly address the daily litany of violence, blockades rhetoric and privation, and, thus, bring a just, mutually acceptable and durable solution to the question of Palestine, those hopes remained unfulfilled and settlements continued to expand in the occupied territories in contravention of the Fourth Geneva Convention and the Road Map. The separation wall continued to be built, despite the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice and resolutions of the General Assembly.

He said the division of Palestinian territories endured since the event of 2007, despite efforts to unify the leadership, and, "most damagingly," the blockade of Gaza persisted. Restrictions on movement and the ongoing blockade of Gaza had serious humanitarian consequences in an already precarious situation. Restrictions on supplies of fuel and electricity in Gaza had only intensified that humanitarian challenge.

Additionally, the security situation also remained a challenge, and despite efforts to maintain a ceasefire, incidents of indiscriminate violence and retaliation continued to erupt, thus perpetuating the cycle of violence. India believed that all violence had to be eschewed if there was to be a positive atmosphere for serious dialogue. He said a sovereign, viable and independent State of Palestine, to which the international community was committed through all the relevant resolutions, could not be created under the current circumstances.

HOANG CHI TRUNG (Viet Nam) said that, in a year of mixed developments in the Middle East, he welcomed the continued engagement of Israel and Palestine in negotiations on final Status issues, and strong support at conferences held in Paris, France; Bethlehem, Israel; London, United Kingdom; and Berlin, Germany, for a viable Palestinian State. Tangible progress between Israel and relevant parties on ceasefires and prisoners' exchange, as well as steps by the Palestinian Authority to enhance national unity and promote foreign investment, also deserved recognition.

Such progress, however, could not conceal that more than six decades after the passage of General Assembly resolution 181 (1947) on the "Partition Plan", Middle East peace remained elusive, he said. The world still witnessed the continued denial and violation of Palestinians' inalienable rights, including that to self-determination. Viet Nam shared concern at Israel's military incursions into the West Bank, illegal settlement expansion into Palestinian Territory, and ongoing construction of the separation wall. To facilitate negotiations, he called on Israel to immediately end its restrictive measures, open border crossings and ensure unfettered access to humanitarian assistance to Palestinians in Gaza.

Turning to Lebanon, he said Viet Nam was encouraged by the convening of the second session of national dialogue, the reconciliation process initiated among Lebanese parties, and the establishment of diplomatic relations between Lebanon and Syria. He was concerned, however, at the resurgence of political assassinations and bombings in Tripoli, and urged all parties in Lebanon to fully engage in the national reconciliation process. Further, he fully supported the implementation of Security Council resolution 1707 (2006), and urged parties concerned to end targeted attacks against United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) personnel and contribute to an improved regional security environment.

Peace processes could only be nurtured with peaceful dispute settlement and diplomatic negotiations, he said, and the Middle East conflict would remain unresolved unless all parties moved "beyond the ordinary" efforts to renounce violence. In closing, he reaffirmed his country's support for a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East on the basis of relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative.

MAGED A. ABDELAZIZ (Egypt) noted that, despite the Annapolis Conference's goal of establishing a Palestinian State before the end of 2008 and the continuing negotiating process between both the Israeli and Palestinian sides, Israel's refusal to adhere to the United Nations resolutions and its unlawful practices against the Palestinian people had contributed to the worsening humanitarian situation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and the minimal progress towards achieving inalienable rights for the Palestinian people.

Furthermore, the expansion of settlements, the separating wall, attempts to reconfigure the border between the West Bank and Israel, the closures of border crossings at the Gaza Strip, and confiscation of Palestinian land, among others, was preventing "the needed supporting political environment" to achieve peace and reach an agreement on the final status core issues of the Road Map and the Annapolis understanding.

Today's General Assembly meeting, he continued, was of great importance, re-emphasizing support for the endeavours of the Palestinian people to establishing a viable and connected, and independent State of Palestine, side by side with Israel. The Secretary-General's report noted the progress made by the Palestinian Authority imposing law and order in the West Bank. Yet, he observed that Israel had not fulfilled its commitments towards ending its unlawful activities.

Noting that the closure of border crossings and obstruction of movement between Israel and the Gaza Strip had resulted in huge shortages of fuel, food and medical supplies, deepening poverty, and severe diminishing of quality of life for the residents of Gaza, he said that such activities on the part of the Israeli Government would only lead to "the horrific cycle of violence and counter violence," and he called on both sides to cease firing and respect the "calm agreement". Under the supervision of the diplomatic Quartet and the international community, both sides needed to commit to confidence-building measures so that results of the negotiations could manifest into reality on the ground.

"The success of the peace process requires rapid effort by the international community," he said in conclusion, to hold Israel to its commitments under the Road Map and other international law regulations, including the reopening of Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem, the release of Palestinian prisoners and officials, the supplying of the Gaza Strip with fuel, the removal of restrictions on access and movement, and the immediate end of all settlement activities. The Palestinian national conciliation and integrity of Palestine's Territory as one political connected entity, as well as the restoration of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and achievement of an independent viable Palestinian State, would continue to receive Egypt's full support, he added.

BASHAR JA'AFARI (Syria) said the Assembly's meeting today coincided with passage of six decades of "al Nakba" on Palestinians, including preventing them from returning home, in blatant disregard for international law. Indeed, the Assembly was meeting to reaffirm its support for Palestinians in their struggle to achieve statehood and regain their legitimate rights, including the right to return, as outlined in Assembly resolution 194 of 1948. Despite the numerous resolutions that had been made, Palestinians were still living under the yoke of Israeli occupation.

In light of Israel's non-compliance with international will, and the continued suffering of Palestinians, it was important for the United Nations to uphold its responsibilities towards the Palestinian cause, he said. All Member States bore responsibility for the non-implementation of Assembly resolution 194.

The inability to create a Palestinian State was among the greatest failures, he continued. Recalling General Assembly resolution 273 of 1949, which had set the conditions for Israel's membership to the United Nations, he said the Assembly must not forget Israel's statements presented to the Special Political Committee at that time, and its commitment to implement resolutions. The fact that the Security Council had not taken any serious action against Israel, because of automatic favouring of Israel by some countries, sent a wrong message that Israel was above the law.

The world was witnessing the killing and displacement of Palestinians at levels unprecedented in human history, he continued, saying that Israel had desecrated places of worship, and had prevented medicine, food, water and electricity from reaching an entire population. Israel had continued its excavation activities around places of worship, including Al-Aksa Mosque, and its policy of destruction, especially of infrastructure in the Gaza Strip, the world's biggest "open-air prison". Further, it continued to assassinate key democratically elected Palestinians and limited the movement of United Nations staff.

At a time when Arab States sought to make peace, Israel had intensified its illegal settlement building and construction of its “racist” separation wall, despite the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice. Syria reaffirmed firm support for Palestinians’ rights to regain independence, and underscored the need to regain national unity through a national dialogue that would bolster the Palestinian negotiating position.

In closing, he said a just and comprehensive peace could be achieved through Israel’s implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 497 (1981). The 2008 Arab Summit in Damascus, Syria reflected Arabs’ will for a just peace.

HABIB MANSOUR ([Tunisia](#)) said today’s meeting allowed the Assembly to consider Palestinians’ deep suffering, and he reaffirmed Tunisia’s commitment to step up its efforts to end that tragedy. Reaffirming his country’s desire to see an end to Israeli practices in the occupied lands, he said that hundreds of thousands of Palestinians lived in difficulty due to Israel’s impediments to food delivery.

Indeed, Tunisia was committed to the principles of international law, he said, and had always championed the Palestinian cause. Tunisia had always demonstrated solidarity with Palestinians, particularly within the framework of an independent Palestinian State. The responsibility to find a just solution to the Palestinian question was a shared responsibility, and he reaffirmed the United Nations’ efforts to support Palestinians, particularly through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

It was vital to support Palestinians in order to achieve regional peace, he said. Reaffirming Tunisia’s commitment to join actions that would bring about the just, overall settlement to the Israeli conflict, he called for pooling international efforts to end Palestinians’ suffering. He urged the international Quartet to lay the groundwork for Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, based on international “legality”, United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

OMAR ALI SALEH AL OYAYDI ([Saudi Arabia](#)) said contemporary issues required cooperation among States to establish peace and international security. His country had participated, with other Arab States, in the 1991 peace talks in Madrid, Spain, as well as in various subsequent negotiating rounds, with a view to ending occupation of Arab lands. However, Israel had not implemented its agreements, and stability had remained a “far-fetched” possibility, notably because of Israeli confiscation of lands, demolition of homes and building of the separation wall. Palestinians were suffering attacks from armed Israeli settlers, and further, Israel continued such actions to destroy Palestinians.

Continuing, he said Palestinians had chosen peace, not surrender. They were for implementation of relevant United Nations resolutions, especially Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and an overall just and comprehensive peace, with Israel’s withdrawal to 1967 borders, the right for Palestinians to return to their homes, and compensation for those not wishing to return. He also urged Israeli withdrawal from the Syrian Golan Heights.

Arab States had committed to just peace, he said, and they were waiting for Israeli commitment on that. In closing, he said Israel must halt its settlement activities, as they would only empty negotiations of any meaning.

* * * * *

[For information media • not an official record](#)