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Committee on the Inalienable Rights
of the Palestinian People
294th Meeting (AM)

PALESTINIAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE CONSIDERS A PROPOSAL ON POSSIBLE CREATION

OF MECHANISM TO CHANNEL INTERNATIONAL RELIEF AID

Chairman Reports on Recent Cairo Seminar on Assistance to Palestinians

Meeting formally for the first time since the Quartet agreed in principle two weeks ago to the possible creation of a temporary international assistance mechanism to relieve the suffering of the Palestinian people, the Palestinian Rights Committee considered today the purpose and scope of such a mechanism, pending further elaboration at a meeting of the European Commission in Brussels on Wednesday.

Addressing the body, known formally as the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer for Palestine to the United Nations, noted that Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas had raised the extreme need for such an instrument in a letter to the Quartet principals ahead of their 9 May meeting. Such a mechanism would be useful on two tracks: on the humanitarian side, it would help alleviate suffering; and politically, it could prevent the Palestinian Authority from collapsing. The aim was not to establish a mechanism to deal only with the humanitarian side of the problem, as that would be a needless duplication of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Reporting for that Agency, Andrew Whitley, Director of its New York Liaison Office, said UNRWA had recently seen a fivefold, or 500 per cent, increase in the number of new applicants for emergency assistance in the Gaza camps. While the Agency had been asked by some, including United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, to take on an expanded role, its first priority was the refugee population still relying on Governments for such services as health and education, for which UNRWA would require significant additional funding. Careful not to be used for political ends, UNRWA was anxious to put its resources at the disposal of Governments wishing to assist the Palestinian people.

As for the proposed new mechanism, he said its goal might be the direct delivery of assistance to the Palestinian people, the maintenance of essential services and the provision of equipment and supplies, as well as financial transfers to individuals, or the payment of salaries. Major questions remained, however, about the scope of such a mechanism, who would manage it and to whom it would report. At least it was encouraging, however, that some form of assistance was being considered multilaterally.

In other business, Committee Chairman Paul Badji (Senegal) said the United Nations Secretariat's Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) had begun an in-depth evaluation of the work of the Division for Palestinian Rights and other Divisions of the Department of Political Affairs. At its forty-fourth session in June 2004, the Committee for Programme and Coordination had requested the OIOS to undertake an in-depth evaluation of political affairs, a request that had subsequently been endorsed by the General Assembly in resolution 57/282.

He said Phase I of that evaluation, focusing on prevention, control and resolution of conflicts, had been completed with an evaluation of the work of the regional divisions of the Department. Phase II would include the remaining political affairs subprogrammes, including that on the Question of Palestine. The objective was to assess the Division's efficiency, effectiveness and impact. One of the evaluation methods was a survey of all members of the Committee, which would be sent to the Permanent Missions of Committee members around mid-June. The OIOS also planned to conduct interviews with members of the Committee's Bureau. Members and observers were encouraged to cooperate fully with the Secretariat in that exercise and to share their observations concerning the Division's work in the forthcoming survey and in the interviews.

Mr. Badji also reported on the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, held in Cairo on 26 and 27 April, under the general theme "International efforts at alleviating the Palestinian economic and humanitarian crisis".

Dysane Dorani, Chief of the Palestine, Decolonization and Human Rights Section of the Department of Public Information, briefed the Committee on the upcoming International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East, scheduled for 8 and 9 June in Moscow under the theme "New Challenges in the Middle East Peace Process and Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue".

Also today, the Committee approved the provisional programme for the United Nations International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, to be held on 27 and 28 June, and Consultations with Civil Society Organizations, set for 29 June at the United Nations Office in Vienna.

Lastly, Mr. Mansour informed Committee members that he had sent a detailed letter to the Secretary-General about the damages associated with the illegal construction of the separation wall in anticipation of his announcement of the creation of the unit to undertake that exercise.

Several speakers joined the Committee Chairman in congratulating the Government and people of Yemen on that country's National Day.

The Committee also heard statements by the representatives of Syria and Egypt, as well as by the observer for the League of Arab States.

Background

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People met this morning to: review developments in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem; hear a report on the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, held in Cairo, Egypt, on 26 and 27 April; and hear plans for the upcoming United Nations International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, in Vienna, Austria, next month.

Statements

PAUL BADJI ([Senegal](#)), Committee Chairman, noted that the Quartet principals had met at New York Headquarters on 9 May to discuss the deteriorating situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, ways to address the current impasse in negotiations, as well as the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people. In a statement issued that day, the Quartet had underscored its continued commitment to the principles of partnership and negotiation, leading to a two-State solution, as embodied in the Road Map.

He said that, in addressing the urgent need to assist the Palestinian people, the Quartet had expressed its willingness to endorse a temporary international mechanism, limited in scope and duration, which would operate with full transparency and accountability and ensure direct delivery of assistance to the Palestinian people. The Quartet had also welcomed the European Union offer to develop and propose such a mechanism. It had met earlier that day with the Foreign Ministers of Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Hopefully, the steps being undertaken by the Quartet, its regional partners and international donors would provide for the urgent needs of the Palestinians and would help both sides move closer to resuming peace talks.

RIYAD MANSOUR, observer for [Palestine](#), reviewing developments in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, recalled a letter sent by President Abbas to the Quartet principals ahead of their 9 May meeting, which indicated his readiness to engage immediately in final status negotiations with the Israeli side and reiterated his opposition to any unilateral Israeli action to determine any final border. On the economic front, he had raised the extreme need to adopt a mechanism to allow economic assistance to reach the Palestinian people. On the humanitarian side, such a mechanism should help alleviate the suffering and, politically, it should protect the investment in the Palestinian Authority. That required, among other things, finding appropriate ways to pay the salaries of the Authority's employees.

President Abbas appreciated the Quartet's principled and clear defence of the Palestinian people and the Palestinian side, he said. The President was still very actively engaging the European Commission and countries in trying to reach agreement on the formation of such a mechanism. To be clear, he was not seeking one that would deal only with the humanitarian side of the problem, as that would be, more or less, similar to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and another one was not needed. Rather, a mechanism was needed that would have a dual responsibility of protecting the Palestinian Authority and preventing it from collapsing.

Regarding the situation on the ground, he noted a continuation of hostilities by the Israeli occupying authorities. Last week's escalation had led to the killing of Palestinians in Kabatia in the Jenin District of the West Bank, which had been like a war zone. In addition, the bombardment, especially in the northern part of Gaza, was continuing unabated. Another escalation had led to the killing of five Palestinians, including a mother and child. The Israelis were accompanying their economic boycott of the Palestinians and their attempts to isolate the Palestinian Authority with those military attacks.

He said that efforts to destabilize the Authority were aimed at paving the way for the illegal plans of the Israeli Government, which the Prime Minister was expected to articulate during his visit to Washington. That was all part of that leader's quest to gain support for his unilateral actions and move away from negotiations with the Palestinian side. Hopefully, upon his return to the region, the international community, as well as elements within Israeli society and the Government, would compel him to return to negotiations and to find a peaceful solution to the conflict based on the two-State solution.

YAHYA MAHMASANI, observer for the [League of Arab States](#), drew attention to a policy of starving the Palestinian people and the Palestinian Authority of the means they needed and called urgently on the Quartet and all international organizations to expedite arrival at a mechanism to deliver assistance and money to the Palestinians.

Turning to the peace process, he said the Palestinian side had declared frankly its readiness to proceed with negotiations, but the Israeli Prime Minister had declared yesterday that he was not willing to undertake negotiations. That declaration came on the eve of his visit to Washington. Hopefully, the Prime Minister would reconsider after that visit and the parties with influence would bring pressure to bear on the Israeli side. The Prime Minister's programme would lead to grave repercussions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory with its intended unilateral imposition of Israel's borders. Should such a step be implemented, it would have grave effects on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides, and would not bring peace.

MILAD ATIEH ([Syria](#)) said the Palestinian people had suffered for many decades under occupation and were still the targets of arbitrary Israeli practices, such as the expansion of settlements and the building of the separation wall, all of which created economic difficulties that they could not overcome on their own. Those difficulties were also due to Israel's refusal to negotiate on the future Palestinian State. Unilateral measures would complicate the negotiations on future status and would not bring lasting peace.

In light of the economic difficulties that the Palestinian people must suffer as a result of Israel's activities, and the interruption of assistance, a solution must be found, he stressed, drawing attention in that context to Egypt's efforts in organizing the Seminar in April. While taking note of the conclusions of the Quartet meeting regarding the creation of a mechanism for assistance to the Palestinian people, it was necessary to create a standing organ to carry out that task as a temporary mechanism might only meet short-term needs. There was a United Nations agency handling assistance to the Palestinian people, and similar permanent machinery was needed so that the Palestinians could receive the necessary economic assistance.

Mr. BADJI ([Senegal](#)), Committee Chairman, reported on the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, held in Cairo on 26 and 27 April, under the general theme "International efforts at alleviating the Palestinian economic and humanitarian crisis". Despite the difficult circumstances under which it had been organized, the Seminar had been successfully convened with a very good turnout of participants, including representatives of 55 Governments, Palestine, four intergovernmental organizations, 16 United Nations bodies, and eight civil society organizations. In addition, 31 representatives of regional and local media outlets had participated.

During the plenary sessions, he said, presentations had been made by 13 experts, including four Palestinians and two Israelis, as well as seven representatives

of United Nations agencies, programmes and departments involved in programmes of assistance to the Palestinian people. In two separate sessions, the panellists had assessed the main characteristics of the economic and humanitarian crisis faced by the Palestinians, the facts on the ground compounding that crisis, and the modalities for rehabilitating and stabilizing the Palestinian economy. They had also discussed programmes of assistance by the United Nations system, the need for intensified donor assistance, and the coordination of international assistance.

He said that during the two days of deliberations, participants had reaffirmed the crucial need to expand and accelerate assistance to the Palestinian people as a matter of great urgency. The donor community should not be driven by political considerations in its response to their urgent humanitarian needs. It had been noted that the situation in the Gaza Strip was particularly dire because of the severe restrictions on the movement of Palestinians, as well as repeated and prolonged closures of border crossings by the occupying Power. It had also been noted that there was a need for the immediate and full implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access signed between Israel and the Palestinian Authority on 15 November 2005, which would provide a comprehensive framework for the improved delivery of humanitarian aid.

Seminar participants had expressed their great concern, he said, that if the current fiscal crisis was left unaddressed, the Palestinian institutions, which had been established as a result of the peace process as the foundation of a future Palestinian State, would simply collapse. The Seminar had warned against abandoning those institutions, which would mean a catastrophic setback for the goal of establishing a viable Palestinian State and achieving a comprehensive peace in the near future. The participants had called on Israel to resume, without further delay, the transfer of taxes collected on behalf of the Palestinian Authority in accordance with international agreements. They had also called on the donor community to prove their commitment to the Palestinian people by using alternative ways of channelling funds that were acceptable to all sides.

The participants had been reminded about the serious effects that the occupation posed to the daily life of the Palestinians, and that economic development under occupation was virtually impossible, he said. They had warned against Israel's plan unilaterally to draw permanent borders incorporating large parts of the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which would be a grave threat to the economic and humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and which would also preclude the possibility of ever achieving a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians. They had urged the international community to step in before it was too late to prevent such unilateral actions and to press for the implementation of the established and recognized frameworks for the settlement of conflict, including the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Quartet's Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative adopted at the Beirut Arab League Summit in 2002.

He said the participants had reviewed the important and indispensable role played by United Nations system entities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory in providing basic humanitarian needs and other assistance to the Palestinian people, including UNRWA. The seminar had noted that the multitude of tasks and projects run by the different field offices required a high level of coordination and periodic evaluation, and that the capacities of those entities were limited. They were not a substitute for the established Palestinian institutions.

The Committee then took note of the report of the Seminar.

TAREK ADEL (Egypt) said it had been an honour for his country to organize the Seminar at a time when the Palestinian people were suffering from economic hardships. During the Seminar, participants had endeavoured to craft proposals and take decisions that would bring the international community together to resolve the unjust and painful situation. It was important to highlight the Palestinian tragedy, not only regarding the living conditions in the Occupied Territories, but also with regard to the future of the Palestinian people and their right to create an independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital. Egypt would continue to support the Palestinian people.

ANDREW WHITLEY, Director of the UNRWA New York Liaison Office, cautioned that the information from the field was partial, anecdotal and incomplete, adding, however, that it pointed clearly towards a "serious and steadily worsening situation that was particularly grave in Gaza, which was less self-reliant than the West Bank. Recent statistical data from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics had reported that, in the first quarter of 2006, gross domestic product (GDP) had declined by 7 per cent compared to the last quarter of 2005. Some data, however, had suggested some improvements in 2005, and the number of building licenses issued had continued to rise. So, at least some sectors of the population were able to manage, but that was certainly not the case for the vast majority. The salaries of Palestinian Authority employees had not been paid for months, and unemployment overall was likely to reach 72 per cent in the near term.

He said UNRWA had recently seen a fivefold, or 500 per cent, increase in the number of new applicants for emergency assistance, for 20,000 families (100,000 people) in the Gaza camps. The Agency anticipated that the number could rise by 50 per cent in the near term. Closures in 2006 had created inevitable problems, both for imports of humanitarian supplies and exports of Palestinian goods. Israel had assured the Agency of the priority it gave to getting food to the needy people, but that was not always possible in practice owing to the closures imposed, the Israelis argued, because of the security situation. The health situation was in particularly bad shape. Much was riding on the temporary international mechanism under discussion.

At a meeting in Brussels on Wednesday, the European Commission, donors, United Nations officials and others would discuss an options paper on ways to get assistance to the Palestinian people, he noted. The goals might be the direct delivery of assistance, the maintenance of essential services, and the provision of equipment and supplies, as well as financial transfers to individuals, or the payment of salaries. Major questions remained, however, about the scope of the mechanism, who would manage it, and to whom it would report. But at least it was encouraging that some form of assistance was being considered multilaterally.

Noting that UNRWA had been asked by some, including the Secretary-General, to take on an expanded role, he said the first priority was to take on the refugee population that was not using its services but was relying on Government services. Those people would now revert to UNRWA health clinics, and when schools reopened in September, children eligible for UNRWA services would attend its schools instead of Government schools. Like the rest of the United Nations system, the Agency was careful not to replace the Palestinian Authority in its normal functioning, and would do its utmost not to undermine the political institutions carefully built up over the past decade or enter into a political debate not of its choosing. However, UNRWA was anxious to put its resources at the disposal of Governments that wished to assist the Palestinians.

Indicating that the UNRWA's expanded role in the Occupied Territories would require additional funding, he said the 2006 Emergency Appeal had been met by just over 50 per cent of pledges, but would need to be expanded significantly in the coming days as part of a revised cap from the United Nations system as a whole. Donors were being briefed on that situation today in Jerusalem. The UNRWA would need to build its capacity, and while prospects for significant additional funding would come from certain donors, the Agency should be careful not to divert attention from outside the Occupied Palestinian Territory, where 60 per cent of the population under its care lived in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

The Committee then approved the provisional programme for the United Nations International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, to be held on 27 and 28 June, and for Consultations with Civil Society Organizations to be held at the United Nations Office in Vienna on 29 June.

DYSANE DORANI, Chief of the Palestine, Decolonization and Human Rights Section of the Department of Public Information, briefed the Committee on the upcoming International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East, scheduled for 8 and 9 June in Moscow, under the theme "New Challenges in the Middle East Peace Process and Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue".

As part of the Department's special programme on the question of Palestine, the two-day Media Seminar would bring together people from various parts of the world, particularly from Israel and Palestine, he said. They would include current and former policymakers; members of civil society, including, for the first time, representatives of Israeli and Palestinian trade unions; media experts; international experts in law, politics and economics; eminent personalities; members of

the academic community; and parliamentarians. This year's Media Seminar would also include the participation of members of the Israeli Knesset, as well as parliamentarians from the Palestinian Legislative Council.

The Media Seminar, he continued, would involve five panel discussions focusing on: the aftermath of the Israeli and Palestinian elections; the impact of regional changes on the Middle East peace process; economic and social viability in a two-State solution; media coverage of the Middle East peace process; and civil society participation and perspectives of grass-roots-level initiatives.

Mr. MANSOUR, observer for Palestine, thanked Mr. Dorani for his report and for the Department's efforts in organizing events on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as the Government and people of the Russian Federation for agreeing to host the Media Seminar in Moscow. That effort would add to other efforts to help the peace process and to help bring justice to the Palestinian people. In addition, he thanked Mr. Whitley for his valuable report and Qatar for agreeing to host a future seminar in Doha.

Lastly, he informed the Committee that he had sent a detailed letter to the Secretary-General about the register of damages associated with the illegal construction of the separation wall in anticipation of his announcement on the establishment of the unit that would undertake that exercise.

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