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Committee on the Inalienable Rights
of the Palestinian People
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SECRETARY-GENERAL PLEDGES TO 'SPARE NO EFFORT' IN HELPING MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

PARTIES REACH BETTER FUTURE, AS PALESTINIAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE OPENS SESSION

Status Quo Unsustainable, He Says as Chairman Outlines Latest Developments

On the heels of his visit to the Middle East, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today that he would "spare no effort" in helping Israelis and Palestinians arrive at a new and better future, as he opened the 2012 session of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

"The status quo is unsustainable," he stressed. "All efforts must be made towards a positive change." The parties should do their utmost to resolve all permanent status issues, end the conflict and establish an independent, viable Palestinian State, living side by side in peace with a secure Israel, in line with relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid framework, previous agreements, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

He said that during his trip to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, he had encouraged the parties to "re-engage in earnest" towards resuming permanent status negotiations. Concrete steps were required to restore trust, he said, emphasizing that Israel's ongoing settlement activity — a major obstacle that prejudiced final status issues and contravened both international law and the Road Map — must cease. He said he was also troubled by increased settler violence.

For its part, the Palestinian Authority should find ways to de-escalate the situation by combating incitement, he continued, condemning rocket fire from the Gaza Strip and urging militants to stop their attacks against Israeli civilians. "It is time to realize the legitimate rights and aspirations of the people of Palestine and the people of Israel," he said, pledging to continue to do everything in his power to help the parties achieve that goal and encouraging the Committee to do the same.

Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of Palestine, said the Secretary-General's meetings with the Palestinian leadership had been "very serious, very productive", and had contributed significantly to advancing the cause of peace. He expressed appreciation for the Secretary-General's affirmation that settlements were illegal and their construction must be stop, that unilateral actions were unacceptable, that Jerusalem was a final status issue and that the occupation must end to allow for an independent State of Palestine.

There was a need for the Secretary-General to continue his visits, which would allow him to witness efforts to build the city of Rawabi, and others meant to obstruct peace through the building of settlements and "the Wall", he said. He said he also appreciated the Secretary-General's efforts to advance the Palestinian application for full United Nations membership, adding: "We believe that date is not very far away from today."

Abdou Salam Diallo (Senegal), Committee Chairperson, provided an update on developments since the Committee's last meeting on 15 December 2011.

Among the highlights were Iceland's formal recognition of the Palestinian State at a ceremony in Reykjavik on that date; the first direct talks in 15 months between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators, in Amman, Jordan, on 3 January; and Thailand's announcement on 17 January that it had officially recognized the State of Palestine and had started the process of establishing and formalizing diplomatic relations.

In other business, the Committee approved a request by Ecuador to upgrade its status in the Committee from that of observer to full member, a decision that would be forwarded to the President of the General Assembly for action.

Ecuador's representative said his country had applied for full membership in order to guarantee the rights of Palestinians in their unswerving quest for

sovereign statehood and recognition in the international community. Ecuador had voted for Palestinian membership of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), defying pressure from many States to do otherwise. "We must not forget the Palestinians' legitimate right to create their State on an equal footing to any other member of the global community," he said.

The Committee also took note of the Chairperson's report on the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, of which he said: "We made the point that the occupation comes with a heavy price tag."

On that note, Mr. Mansour cited two papers that estimated annual losses to the Palestinian economy ranging from \$7 billion to \$9 billion. It would be "extremely important" to circulate those to the 193 United Nations Member States, he said, adding that, were it not for the occupation, "we would not be a failed State. [...] We do deserve to become a full member of the United Nations."

The Committee also adopted its programme of work for 2012, which outlined priority issues for the year, including the need to raise awareness of the question of Palestine and to promote support for Palestinian rights. Planned activities included the United Nations International Meeting on the Palestinian Political Prisoners, to be held on 3-4 April, he said.

Unanimously re-elected to the Committee's Bureau were Mr. Diallo (Senegal) as Chair, as well as Zahir Tanin (Afghanistan) and Pedro Núñez Mosquera (Cuba) as Vice-Chairs. Christopher Grima (Malta) was elected Rapporteur.

Also speaking today were representatives of Mali, South Africa, Venezuela and Nicaragua.

Background

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People met this afternoon to consider the report of the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, held in Cairo, Egypt, 6-7 February, among other matters.

Opening Remarks

BAN KI-MOON, Secretary-General of the United Nations, said he had recently returned from Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, where he had vowed to "spare no effort" in helping both sides arrive at a new and better future. He had encouraged the parties to re-engage in earnest towards resuming permanent status negotiations, and remained hopeful about the start of direct contacts facilitated by King Abdullah of Jordan, within the framework of the Quartet.

"This can pave the way for serious negotiations towards an agreement for a two-State solution," he said, adding that concrete steps were required to restore trust. Israel's continuing settlement activity was a major obstacle that prejudiced final status issues and contravened both international law and the Road Map, he said, emphasizing that it must cease. He added that he was also troubled by increasing settler violence.

For its part, the Palestinian Authority should find ways to de-escalate the situation by combating incitement and engaging in the search for a negotiated solution, he said, recalling that he had been encouraged by the development of institutions essential to the functioning of a future Palestinian State. Those must be expanded, he stressed, calling on donors to assist in that important process.

"Palestinian reconciliation and negotiations with Israel need not be mutually exclusive," he stressed, adding that the humanitarian situation in Gaza remained a United Nations priority. Gazans, particularly young ones, deserved better living conditions, he said, reiterating his call for immediate steps to lift the closure of the Gaza Strip, in line with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). The full opening of legitimate crossings for the importation of construction materials was critical, he said, adding that exports, including transfers to the West bank and Israel, should also be allowed to resume at scale. Such changes could be implemented with due consideration for Israel's security concerns.

He condemned the firing of rockets from the Gaza Strip, urging militants to stop their attacks against Israeli civilians. "The status quo is unsustainable," he stressed. "All efforts must be made towards a positive change." The parties should do their utmost to resolve all permanent status issues, end the conflict and establish an independent, viable Palestinian State, living side by side in peace with a secure Israel, in line with relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid framework, previous agreements, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative. "It is time to realize the legitimate rights and aspirations of the people of Palestine and the people of Israel," he said, pledging to continue to do everything in his power to help the parties achieve that goal and encouraging the Committee to do the same.

Statements

ABDOU SALAM DIALLO (Senegal), Chairperson, Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, spoke in his national capacity, describing the Secretary-General's presence as a demonstration of his special concern for the issues at hand. The question of Palestine had been marked by the request for United Nations membership for the Palestinians, he said, recalling that the President of Senegal had reaffirmed that request in a statement to the General Assembly, recognizing a sovereign Palestinian State based on the 1967 borders. That position was shared by the overwhelming majority of United Nations Members, he said, welcoming Palestine's admission of to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). That action had shown that problems could be resolved with good will, he added.

He urged Israel to remove obstacles to peace negotiations by ceasing its settlement activities and putting an end to its attempts to change cultural, demographic and other data, including that relating to the holy city of Jerusalem. Settlements fostered all kinds of extremism and fed both injustice and bitterness, he said, adding that they constituted a violation of "good common sense". The problem of land was at the heart of the conflict. Supporting a Palestinian State meant the international community must help resolve the conflict, he said. "We must help this area beset by war to free itself from violence" so that it could again be a land of hope, he added. "We can achieve these ideals that are essential for international peace and security."

RIYAD MANSOUR, Permanent Observer of Palestine, said that the Secretary-General's meetings with the Palestinian leadership had been "very serious, very productive", and had contributed significantly to advancing the cause of peace. He reiterated his appreciation for the Secretary-General's affirmation that settlements were illegal and their construction must be stop, that unilateral actions were unacceptable, that Jerusalem was a final status issue and that the occupation must end to allow for an independent State of Palestine.

Indeed, he continued, the Secretary-General's visit to Gaza was a concrete sign that the blockade must be lifted immediately to allow free movement of people and goods in and out of the enclave, in line with relevant agreements, for the revival of the Palestinian economy. He pledged to continue to cooperate with the Secretary-General and his team, and with the agencies providing services in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, especially in Gaza,

and with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

The Secretary-General's very important visit had also demonstrated the need for similar visits to take place in the future, as they would allow him to witness efforts to build the city of Rawabi and others meant to obstruct peace through the building of settlements and "the Wall". Expressing appreciation for the Secretary-General's efforts vis-à-vis the release of political prisoners, he said that was a very important issue towards resuming direct negotiations. The Palestinian leadership and people also appreciated the Secretary-General's efforts to advance their application for full United Nations membership, he said. "We believe that date is not very far away from today," he added.

Mr. DIALLO(Senegal), Committee Chair, then provided an update on developments since the Committee's last meeting on 15 December 2011, recalling that on that date, Iceland had formally recognized the Palestinian State at a ceremony in Reykjavik. On 18 December, Israel's Housing Ministry had published tenders for 1,028 homes to be built within settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. On the same day, it had released some 550 Palestinian prisoners in the second half of the swap deal, he noted, adding that the United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression had concluded a mission to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and expressed concern at Israeli treatment of Palestinian demonstrators.

He went on to recall that on 20 December, the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs had briefed the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. Two days later, in Cairo, Fatah and Hamas had reached a key agreement to admit the latter into the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). On 28 December, the Israeli authorities had approved the construction of 130 new settler homes in East Jerusalem, and on 3 January, Israeli and Palestinian negotiators had held their first direct talks in 15 months, in Amman, Jordan. At least five rounds of preparatory meetings had since been held. Other major developments included Thailand's announcement on 17 January of its official recognition of the State of Palestine, and its initiation of the process of establishing and formalizing diplomatic relations.

Presenting the Committee's [draft programme of work for 2102](#), he said that the first section summarized resolutions adopted by the General Assembly during its sixty-sixth session, which contained the mandates of the Committee, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information. Section II outlined developments on the ground and the political process, while section III outlined the priority issues for the year, which included raising international awareness of the question of Palestine, promoting support for Palestinian rights, the peaceful settlement of the Palestine question and the two-State solution. Section IV described planned activities, such as the United Nations International Meeting on the Palestinian Political Prisoners, to be held 3-4 April, he said.

Turning to the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, held in Cairo 6-7 February, he said its theme had been "The economic cost of continued Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territory; local, regional and international efforts towards mitigating it". Participants had included representatives from 52 countries, Palestine, 5 intergovernmental bodies, 12 United Nations entities, 18 civil society organizations and 31 media outlets.

Opened by the First Under-Secretary in Egypt's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Seminar had heard remarks by Maxwell Gaylard, United Nations Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, and Ali Al-Jarbawi, Palestinian Authority Minister for Planning. The plenary sessions had considered questions relating to restrictions on movement and access in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, quantifying the direct and indirect costs of the occupation and the role of international donors. "[W]ith this Seminar, we made the point that the occupation comes with a heavy price tag," he said. "It proves costly, even destructive, for the Palestinian people, negatively affecting the economy, socio-economic development and daily life of millions of Palestinians."

Mr. MANSOUR, Permanent Observer of [Palestine](#), added his impressions, calling the Seminar "extremely significant" because of the unique quality of the papers presented, especially in quantifying the damage to the Palestinian economy resulting from the occupation. One paper submitted by a Palestinian think tank had found that the Palestinian economy lost \$7 billion annually, and another, from an Israeli organization, calculated the losses as closer to \$9 billion. Those papers were very useful and it would be "extremely important" to circulate them to the 193 United Nations Member States, he said. Were it not for the occupation, "we would not be a failed State", but rather a very viable State, he said, declaring: "We do deserve to become a full member of the United Nations."

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