



Press Release

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GENERAL ASSEMBLY IS TOLD SOLUTION TO QUESTION OF PALESTINE REMAINS CRUCIAL TO OVERALL MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT

Israeli Withdrawal from Occupied Lands Said to be Essential; Appeals Made for End to All Violence, Resumption of Negotiations

After concluding its debate on the question of Palestine, the General Assembly this morning turned to its agenda item on the situation in the Middle East.

The representative of Egypt introduced two draft resolutions — one on Jerusalem, the other on the Syrian Golan.

As the debate began, the representative from Kuwait told the Assembly that Israeli's occupation of Palestine and the Syrian Golan was the prime source of tension in the Middle East. He said a just and permanent peace required consideration of all the demands of the Palestinian people. That meant full Israeli withdrawal and the immediate implementation of Israeli and Palestinian bilateral accords, to ensure the Palestinians regained their political rights, including Jerusalem as their capital.

The representative from Saudi Arabia said that a Middle East settlement required a solution to the Palestinian problem, with implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions. He appealed to all States concerned to end the bloodshed in the region and oblige Israel to comply with international law.

The representative from Norway urged the Palestinian authority to end attacks on Israel and bring justice to all known terrorists. It should renew its commitment to the ceasefire announced on 26 September. The destiny of Israel and Palestine was inseparable. The parties must recognize that the path to peace would be painful, but the time had come for final negotiations to be resumed.

Speaking on the question of Palestine, the representative of the United Arab Emirates said the recent uprising and other violent protests were natural reactions of the Palestinians to daily suffering from terrorism, extremism and collective punishment. The real intention of the Israel Government was to change the demographic, historical and religious character of the Palestinian territories.

Introducing the draft resolutions, the representative of Egypt said the question of Palestine was the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Israel must withdraw and remove its settlements from the occupied territories, and arrive at a settlement on Palestine.

Also speaking on the situation in the Middle East were the representatives of India, Belarus and Syria.

Others speaking as the Assembly concluded its debate on the question of Palestine were the representatives of China, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Yemen, Nigeria, Cyprus, and Ukraine.

Announcements

The Assembly was informed that action on the four draft resolutions on the question of Palestine ([L.19](#), [L.20](#), [L.21](#) and [L.22](#)) would be taken at the morning meeting on Monday, 3 December 2001.

The Assembly was also informed that the Second and Fifth Committees would be unable to conclude their work by 11 December 2001. The Assembly decided to postpone the current session's date of recess from 11 December 2001 to 21 December 2001.

The President drew attention to document A/INF/56/3/Addendum 2, which covered the Assembly work programme from 3 through 14 December 2001.

The Assembly meets again this afternoon at 3:00 p.m. to continue its consideration of the Middle East.

Background

The General Assembly met this morning to conclude consideration of its agenda item on the Question of Palestine (for background information see [Press Release 9984](#) of 29 November) and to take up the agenda item on the situation in the Middle East.

The Assembly had before it a report by the Secretary-General on the Situation in the Middle East (document [A/56/480](#)), which concerns Assembly resolutions [55/50](#) and [55/51](#).

[Assembly resolution 55/50 deals with the transfer by some States of their diplomatic missions to Jerusalem in violation of [Security Council resolution 478 \(1980\)](#), and calls on those States to abide by relevant United Nations resolutions. Assembly resolution 55/51 deals with Israeli policies in the Syrian territory occupied by Syria since 1967 and demands that Israel withdraw from the Syrian Golan, in implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions.]

The Secretary-General was asked to solicit information from Member States on steps they had taken to implement those resolutions. His report summarises the responses of Israel and four other countries.

Belarus said it firmly supported the relevant Council resolutions and condemned the continued occupation of the Syrian Golan. Denmark noted that the resolutions have not given it occasion to report. Japan said it refused to recognize Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem, and states that it has never established an embassy in Jerusalem. With respect to the Golan, it demanded that Israel withdraw from all territories it occupied in 1967 as early as possible. Portugal said it did not have a diplomatic mission in Jerusalem and that its position on the Golan Heights has remained unchanged.

Israel noted, in its reply to the Secretary-General, that it had voted against the resolutions, viewing them as unbalanced documents that undermined fundamental agreements reached between the parties. It stated that lasting peace in the region would be possible only through direct bilateral negotiations.

The Assembly also had a report of the Secretary-General on the Question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East (document [A/56/642-S/2001/1100](#)), submitted in pursuance of the General Assembly's Middle East-related [resolution 55/55](#) of 1 December last year. The report contains, among other things, the views of the Security Council, the Government of Israel, the Palestinian Liberation Organization, and observations by the Secretary-General.

In a note verbale to the Secretary-General dated 26 September, 2001, the representative of Israel wrote that his country voted against resolution 55/55, on the grounds that the resolution was not only unbalanced, but was also seen by Israel as undue interference in matters which the parties had agreed to resolve within the context of direct bilateral negotiations. The current violence in the region, the Israeli note adds, was a result of a Palestinian decision to abandon peace negotiations and pursue their goals through violence and terrorism. The one-sided approach reflected in the resolution, which sought to dictate the outcome of the negotiating process, effectively rewarded violence at a time when the Palestinian side should be compelled to renounce all acts of violence and terrorism and return to the path of peaceful dialogue.

In a note verbale of 17 October the Permanent Observer of Palestine said the resolution should serve as an acceptable basis for all parties to address and resolve important issues. The situation on the ground since 28 September 2000 had continued to deteriorate because of the refusal of the Israeli side to implement the Sharm el-Sheikh understandings and its failure to adhere to prior agreements reached between the two sides. He said the dramatic decline of the situation on the ground had been characterized by an excessive and indiscriminate use of force by the Israeli occupying forces against Palestinian civilians, including children. The Permanent Observer further wrote that the Israeli Government never wholeheartedly endorsed or accepted the recommendations contained in the [Mitchell Report](#), especially that which called for a cessation of all Israeli settlement activity.

The Secretary-General, in his observations contained in the report, states that it is a matter of grave concern that the present Israeli-Palestinian crisis has entered its second year with an escalation of violence, while the peace process remains stalled despite many international efforts to revive it. He states that he has maintained close and regular contacts with the parties and other leaders in the region and the international community to find a way forward.

The Secretary-General observes that since the outbreak of the current Palestinian intifada at the end of September 2000, more than 900 people have been killed and many thousands injured, the vast majority of them Palestinians. He has repeatedly expressed concern that Israel's response to the violence has included a disproportionate use of military force, condemned the practice of so-called "targeted assassinations" and also strongly condemned acts of violence or terror from whatever quarter, especially indiscriminate suicide bombing attacks against Israelis by Palestinian groups. The tragic developments have greatly increased mutual distrust, hardened the positions of the two sides and strengthened extremist elements.

The Secretary-General says the report of the Sharm el-Sheikh Fact-Finding Committee, known as the Mitchell report, whose recommendations he fully endorsed, provided a viable basis for a return to the negotiating table. The report was accepted by both parties and widely acknowledged as a good basis to break the impasse. As a follow-up to the report, the parties reached agreement upon a ceasefire on 31 June. It was encouraging that Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and President Yasser Arafat met on 26 September. There were also significant statements by Member States, including the United States, envisioning the creation of a Palestinian State provided that Israel's right to exist was respected. Unfortunately, progress was sharply disrupted when Israeli cabinet minister Rehavam Zeevi was assassinated on 17 October by gunmen of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

The Secretary-General says he continues to believe that only a package solution based on the Mitchell report, including security and economic aspects but also a political component, can halt the cycle of violence and create the right atmosphere for the resumption of sustainable peace talks. There is no alternative to a return to the negotiating table and to a peaceful settlement. However, the mutual distrust between the parties has reached such a level that without constant third-party involvement they may not be able to break out of the current impasse.

According to the Secretary-General's observations, the confrontation has had a devastating impact on the humanitarian and economic situation in the occupied Palestinian territory. He calls upon the international donor community to provide adequate funding to United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

The Secretary-General states that achieving a final and peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, the core issue of the Arab-Israeli conflict, is imperative for the attainment of a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East. He hoped that there will also be movement on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks so that peace, security and stability may be achieved for all peoples in the region on the basis of Security Council resolutions [242 \(1967\)](#) and [338 \(1973\)](#). The United Nations will continue to support the resumption of the peace process and to respond in a coherent and integrated way to the economic, social, humanitarian and other needs of the population in the West Bank and Gaza.

Draft Resolutions

The Assembly also had before it two draft resolutions.

A draft on Jerusalem (document [A/56/L.23](#)) would have the Assembly determine that the decision of Israel to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration on the Holy City of Jerusalem was illegal and therefore null and void with no validity whatsoever. It would deplore the transfer by some States of their diplomatic missions to Jerusalem in violation of Security Council resolution 478 (1980) and their refusal to comply with the provisions of that resolution. The Assembly would call once more upon those States to abide by the provisions of the relevant United Nations resolutions and request that the Secretary-General report back to it at its fifty-seventh session on the implementation of the present resolution.

The draft resolution is sponsored by Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Comoros, Cuba, Djibouti, Egypt, Guinea, Indonesia, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, and Palestine.

The second draft before the Assembly was on the Syrian Golan (document [A/56/L.24](#)). By its terms, the Assembly would declare that Israel had failed so far to comply with [Security Council resolution 497 \(1981\)](#) and that the Israeli decision of 14 December 1981 to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration on the occupied Syrian Golan was null and void and had no validity whatsoever, and call upon Israel to rescind it. The Assembly would also call upon Israel to resume talks on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks and to respect the commitments and undertakings reached during the previous talks.

The Assembly would demand once more that Israel withdraw from all the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967, in implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions, and call upon all parties concerned, the co-sponsors of the peace process and the entire community to exert all the necessary efforts to ensure the resumption of the peace process and its success by implementing Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). The Assembly would also request that the Secretary-General report to its fifty-seventh session on the implementation of the present resolution.

The resolution is sponsored by Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Comoros, Cuba, Djibouti, Egypt, Guinea, Indonesia, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Yemen, and Palestine.

Question of Palestine: Statements

SHEN GUOFANG (China) said his country had taken note of the positive efforts the parties concerned had made towards the de-escalation of the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis, and the resumption of peace talks between the two sides since September last year. Regrettably, however, the violence between Palestinians and Israelis had not yet stopped, and the Middle East situation had further deteriorated. It was therefore necessary for the international community and parties concerned to draw profound lessons from it.

It had been demonstrated over and over that conflict and confrontation in the Middle East would serve only to deepen mutual hatred and complicate issues, while dialogue and negotiation were the only right way to peace. The Security Council should play an important role in the promotion of the solution to the issue of the Middle East. The priority now was to take resolute action to put the violence to an end, ease the tension as soon as possible and fulfil the promise to protect civilians in armed conflict. He strongly appealed to the two sides to earnestly implement their existing agreements, respond actively to mediation efforts and to return to the negotiation table at an early date.

He said that without the restoration of the legitimate national rights of the Palestinians, including their right to independent Statehood, it would be impossible to arrive at a fair, just and lasting solution to the issue of the Middle East. Relevant United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace stood as the basis for the Middle East peace talks. The faithful implementation of existing agreements and understandings between the two sides constituted a precondition for their mutual trust. He said China had all along supported the just cause of the Palestinian people in restoring their legitimate national rights.

HAMZAH THAYEB ([Indonesia](#)) said that in the aftermath of the horrific terrorist attacks on 11 September, unequivocal condemnation had been voiced at the violence and terror inflicted on innocent civilians. The onslaught of violence against people in the occupied Palestinian territories under foreign occupation should be seen in that light. Violence begat violence and served no purpose. It did not provide security, which could only prevail if there was a stable peace and the yearning for freedom of a people was realized. A just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine was urgent.

For peace to endure, he said, it must be achieved within the framework of international legality and on certain principles: Israel must withdraw from the occupied territory; respect for all States to live in peace must be ensured; and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people must be recognized.

He said that in an environment of a deepening crisis and relapsed peace process, the Sharm el-Sheikh and Taba understandings were small, but important steps to bridge the differences between the parties. The Mitchell report offered practical recommendations for a return to peace negotiations. It was self-evident that international efforts were central to ending the conflict. As the United States had put it, we must “work toward the day when two States, Israel and Palestine, live peacefully together”. Also significant was that country’s announced intention to contribute actively to a third party mechanism for a ceasefire, implement the Mitchell and Tenet plans, and work with the international community to rebuild the Palestinian economy. The international community should seize the opportunity.

JOHN DE SARAM ([Sri Lanka](#)) said that last year there were glimmers of hope that developments in the peace process might, possibly, in the not too distant future, lead to tangible improvements in the lives of the Palestinians. There were, however, the tragic occurrences of the closing days of September 2000 in East Jerusalem, and the ensuing engulfing violence that still continued. It was unquestionable that there was a yearning for peace. Yet, for peace to be achieved, there had to be, of course, a return to the peace process.

Until such time as the peace process was satisfactorily concluded, contemporary human rights standards and obligations and the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention must surely be fully recognized and fully honoured, he said. Yet, the report before the General Assembly told of a severity of control that had settled on the occupied territories. The cycle of violence and counter-violence continued and there were daily hostile confrontations between Israeli forces and the Palestinians. The Israeli authorities had enforced their systems of civilian and military regulation with extraordinary intensity.

The manner of occupation had been catastrophic on the occupied territories as a whole, with consequences that included: disruption of trade and employment and ensuing general poverty; disruption in the provision of health services; disruption in schools and in the lives of the children; disruption in the provision of public services; disruption in the education and lives of children, with parents distraught and depressed; and inadequacy of public revenues. An all-pervasive cloud of frustration, desperation, and hopelessness appeared to have enveloped the occupied territories. He concluded by saying that the direct and indirect consequences of a general occupation of peoples and territories for such a long time were traumatic in the most profound ways — across the entire spectrum of human relationships — affecting so unhappily the occupied and the occupiers, as well.

OTHMAN JERANDI ([Tunisia](#)) said this year’s consideration of the item coincided with an obstacle on the path of peace, a matter of great concern. The intifada of September 2000 had reached its second year without any détente. The situation had deteriorated because of the escalation caused by the Israel authorities in the occupied territories. Israel had forged ahead with its policy of aggression, using extreme military force and committing targeted assassinations -- a policy of liquidation. Israel had also launched raids in the areas of the Palestine Authority and had extended settlements. Those practices, continued as an organized policy, ran counter to international law, international humanitarian law and the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Israel was challenging the repeated appeals of the United Nations and other organizations, which called for respect for, among others, Security Council resolution 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). The repeated closures and economic blockades had inflicted heavy losses on the Palestinian economy and had led to a human tragedy among the Palestinian population. He condemned the constant Israeli army attacks against civilians. He reiterated his country’s full solidarity with the Palestinian people and full support for their legitimate struggle to attain their inalienable rights, including the right to an independent State with holy Jerusalem as its capital. He called for the urgent protection of the Palestinian civilians by the international community.

He said his country had always upheld peace and political settlement and he urged the international community and sponsors of the peace process to exert efforts to bring Israel to recognize the legitimate rights of the Palestinian, to implement the relevant Security Council resolutions and to adhere to the principle of land for peace. He also called for an end to the occupation of the Syrian Golan. He welcomed statements by President Bush and Secretary of State Powell of the United States and hoped their positions would be translated into practical initiatives towards an end to violence and a normalization of the situation.

ABDUL MANNAN ([Bangladesh](#)) said the Palestinians had been under the illegal occupation of Israel for three decades, and their fundamental rights to a sovereign State had remained unrealized. The 1991 Madrid Peace Conference and successive agreements from Oslo to Sharm el-Sheikh had generated hope and optimism in the region, but that had been overtaken by hostility and confrontation. The Palestinian intifada that followed the highly provocative visit of then opposition leader Ariel Sharon to Haram ai-Sharif had resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Palestinian civilians. Tens of thousands were wounded and permanently disabled, including a large number of women and children.

He said Israel had continued to pursue a policy of collective punishment by imposing closures, blockades and restriction of movement on the people of the occupied territories. Those actions had the ostensible purpose of demoralizing the Palestinian people. Restrictions on the movement of people and goods within the Palestinian and Arab occupied territories had a devastating effect on the already fragile Palestinian economy. The

Israeli policy of confiscation of land to expand illegal settlements in occupied Palestinian land had been a major source of threat to the peace process.

Over the past year, Israel had resorted to targeted assassinations of political activists and leaders, killing at least 50 Palestinians. Those extra-judicial killings were a clear violation of international law and civility. The present situation in the Middle East made it incumbent upon the international community to put the peace process back on track. He commended the Palestinian leadership for accepting the Mitchell report, but regretted that Israel had continued to impose conditions on those recommendations.

MICHEL KAFANDO (Burkina Faso) said the elements that must serve as a basis for a just and long-lasting solution to the question of Palestine included: the return of Israel to the former status quo of 1967; the guarantee for all States in the region to live in peace; and the recognition of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, particularly their right to self-determination. The United Nations and regional organizations had undertaken much work, but he wondered how much had really been achieved.

In order for there to be a final settlement of the dispute, the bloody and deadly clashes must end, he continued. The signs of despair and frustration could be seen in the many suicide attacks, which reflected the deterioration of the peace process. He added that resolution 52/52, based on the principle of land for peace, had remained a dead letter.

He said it was certain that the question of Palestine would not be resolved by arms, but by negotiations alone. It was, therefore, vital that discussions between the two parties not be put on the back-burner. He also stressed the need for the United Nations to play a key role in those discussions. History was full of examples demonstrating that when the international community mobilized, it could achieve amazing things, such as the end of colonialism, the end of Nazism, and the end of apartheid. The question of Palestine deserved such international attention.

ABDUL-DAYEM MUBAREZ (Yemen) said the question of Palestine was a touchstone for actions by the United Nations and the international community -- a standard by which progress was measured. The policy of force and occupation continued to rampage throughout the world, even though big changes had occurred. The cold war had ended, as had colonialism, but Palestinian lands were still occupied and the Palestinian people oppressed. The question was still unanswered, but only because Israel was conducting a campaign of disinformation.

There was no reason that Israel could not exist side by side with a State of Palestine, except that it was holding onto the past, motivated by frantic expansionism, he continued. It had accepted the Mitchell recommendations with grace. It seemed that Israeli leaders believed that repetition would make a situation true. Why else would the Palestinian demonstrations against injustice be interpreted as violence?

He noted the recent positive position adopted by the United States to establish a Palestinian State, side by side with Israel, which would be within safe and established boundaries. A timetable should be established, so that Israel could not carry out any extortionist maneuvers. Tel Aviv wanted to impose a fait accompli on the Palestinian people, so as to alter the balance of power in the region. The question was part of other issues in the region. The Palestinian people must be allowed to determine their own fate, as others had done once freed of the colonial yoke. The Palestinian refugees should not be the focus; the Palestinian people as a whole must be given their rights.

S.A. ADEKANYE (Nigeria) said that despite the gloom pervading the Secretary-General's report, there was a glimmer of hope for peace and stability in the situation. There were the recommendations of the Mitchell report, whose full implementation should generate confidence and trust. The fact that the report had been accepted by both parties and enjoyed the widespread support of the international community strengthened his confidence. He enjoined the parties concerned to exert every effort towards the implementation of the report as well as the Tenet plan.

He said there was now also widespread support for the creation of the State of Palestine side by side with Israel. The legitimate desire of Palestinians to national independence and Statehood, and the equally legitimate claim of Israel to recognition and security were not mutually exclusive. He welcomed the statement of President Bush of the United States to the General Assembly affirming his country's support for the State of Palestine. He called for building upon the momentum generated by that development to resolve, once and for all, the question of Palestine.

Meanwhile, the international community must address the humanitarian, social and economic consequences of the current situation in the region. He urged the international community, the Bretton Woods institutions in particular, to double their efforts and assistance in rebuilding the economy and infrastructures of the Palestinian Authority.

SOTOS ZACKHEOS (Cyprus) said the Government and people of Cyprus had repeatedly and consistently expressed sorrow and concern over the collapse of the peace process, the escalation of violence and the loss of so many lives, which continued unabatedly for the last fourteen months. He urged maximum restraint, since it had been demonstrated that any resort to violence not only failed to produce any tangible benefits, but on the contrary aggravated an already tense situation. He said Cyprus maintained its long held position on the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war, and declared its support for the right of every State in region, including Israel, to be able to live in security.

Prolonged occupation brought frustration, which could lead to acts of desperation, he said. The Palestinian people must be able to look forward to an early prospect of an end to their plight. He called for an end to the confiscations of Palestinian land, the restriction of the movement of Palestine, the deliberate destruction of their property and extra-judicial executions. Cyprus supported the non-selective, comprehensive and immediate implementation of the Mitchell Report, which he hoped would put an immediate end to the violence and create the necessary conditions for the resumption of the peace process and the final status negotiations.

Acts of terrorism must not be tolerated under any pretext. Outbursts of inflammatory rhetoric did a disservice to all sides and the parties must instead work actively towards a "win-win" situation. Only then would they manage to revive the hope of the vast majority of the peoples of the region, for the establishment of a permanent peace and realize the vision for a new Middle East.

IHOR SAGACH (Ukraine) said that in this volatile region, over the past years, the world had witnessed real progress and serious setbacks, resumption of talks and outbreaks of violence, encouraging hope and deep despair. The Israeli and Palestinian sides seemed to be too close to reaching agreement on complicated and sensitive issues at Camp David not so long ago, now, they appeared farther apart than at any time for a past

decade.

Any settlement activities by Israel on the Palestinian territories, as well as closures and economic sanctions against the Palestinians, were counterproductive, he said. There could be no excuse for the excessive use of force against the Palestinian civilians and re-occupation of the Palestine-controlled territories. The practice of extra-judicial killings and devastating raids into the Palestinian-controlled territory must cease. However, Ukraine also called upon the Palestinian side to ensure that effective control be exercised over radical elements, in order to stop the abhorrent practice of suicidal bombings and terrorist attacks, therefore reducing incitements and provocations against the Israelis.

The Palestinian people must be in a position to exercise their inalienable rights to self-determination and Statehood, and to live in peace and security. Their legitimate aspirations for justice, freedom, dignity and sovereignty were well understood and shared in Ukraine, that had regained her independence just a decade back. It was no less obvious that the final peace agreement between the Israeli and Palestinian parties must stipulate clear-cut guarantees for the State of Israel to live in security and peace, within internationally recognized borders. Israel should have mutually beneficial relations in all spheres and sound economic integration with other States in the region.

ABDULAZIZ BIN NASSER AL-SHAMSI (United Arab Emirates) said those observing the history of the Palestinian question, specifically since the 1947 Assembly resolution to divide Palestine into two States, must feel disappointed that the policy of hindrance by Israel Governments had prevented the establishment of an independent Palestine State until now. The persistence of inhuman and illegal conditions of the Palestinian people, in an era known for respecting human rights, globalization and democracy, was not acceptable.

He said the violent protests for more than thirteen months was an expression of rejection of the Palestinian people of their daily suffering from the “schemes of terrorism, extremism and collective punishment in their territories”. The Israel Government continued those practices to achieve its well-known strategic aims of expanding illegal Jewish settlements and displacing and annihilating more Palestinians and confiscating their lands.

He said the United Arab Emirates reiterated its strong condemnation of those shameful violations and called on the Security Council to work towards implementing urgent procedures to ensure protection of the Palestinian people and impel Israel to comply with the calls for a full, unconditional withdrawal from the Palestinian and Arab lands it had occupied by force. He welcomed the new position of the United States recently expressed by President Bush.

The debate on the question of Palestine was concluded. On the recommendation of the President, who said the Assembly would be unable to complete its work on the anticipated date (11 December), the Assembly then decided that the current session would continue until 21 December.

Situation in Middle East

The Assembly then turned to the next item on its agenda: the situation in the Middle East:

Introduction of Drafts

AHMED ABOUL GHEIT (Egypt) introduced the draft resolutions -- on Jerusalem (document A/56/L.23) and the one on the Syrian Golan (document A/56/L.24). He noted that the preambular paragraphs in the text on Jerusalem set out the history of the question and that in the operative part, the Assembly stated that all Israel's actions to impose its laws on Jerusalem were null and void. The second draft affirmed the illegality of Israel's occupation of the Syrian Golan.

He said he had stated his views on the question of Palestine yesterday. That question, in turn, was the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Achieving peace in the region should not be a matter of talking peace and then blowing it apart with actions. It should be based on the principle of land for peace. Israel must abide by that principle. It must withdraw from the occupied territories, remove its settlements from those territories and arrive at a settlement of the question of Palestine. In the meantime Israel should take no measures that were in conflict with its international obligations.

He said what was called for in the draft resolution on the Syrian Golan should apply to all Israeli-held Arab lands, and the principles should govern all Arab-Israeli relations. All territories occupied by the force of arms in 1967 must be evacuated. That was the only way to achieve a just and permanent peace in the region. That was the only way to assure the right of Syria and of Lebanon to regain their lands. A comprehensive settlement was the only basis for security in the region, not security for just one nation. All nuclear weapons should be removed and the region should be made a zone of peace.

The past 13 months had severely shaken the hope for a comprehensive peace, he said. Yet peace was the only alternative for the region, the only objective. Israel should let the Arab countries know that its intentions for peace were serious.

He said Togo had joined the list of co-sponsors on the Jerusalem draft. Togo and Guinea had joined as co-sponsors of the text on the Syrian Golan.

Statements

CHOKILA IYER (India) said it was hoped that the withdrawal of Israel from Southern Lebanon last year, and the deployment of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon in the vacated areas, would be a good portent and that prospects for lasting peace and tranquillity in the region would be finally within reach. Unfortunately, the situation since then had belied the optimism of the international community. There had been occasional outbreaks of firing across the Blue Line, though she felt the presence of UNIFIL had been helpful. As a measure of India's commitment to peace in the region, a battalion had been contributed to UNIFIL, and the present force commander was Indian.

It was regrettable, since September last year, the Middle East peace process seemed to have stalled. India believed that a just, lasting and

comprehensive peace settlement could be achieved only on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, and the principle of land for peace. In India's view, the status of Jerusalem, deriving from the Madrid and Oslo processes, was one of the final status issues, and was yet to be resolved. There should be a resumption of negotiations on all tracks to "complete the circle of peace in West Asia".

Even before the developments of 11 September, the sense of frustration in the Arab world had never been so high. The requirement for peace and stability in the region had now become even more acute. The international community could not fail in its obligations. The parties concerned must reaffirm their commitment to resolve their differences peacefully and through sustained negotiations. There was no military solution to this conflict; violence must be abjured.

OLE PETER KOLBY (Norway) said that violence, terrorism and military responses had once again proved ineffective as a means of solving the Middle East conflict. The time had come to resume the peace process. The tragic and appalling events of 11 September had made progress in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict even more urgent.

He said the Mitchell recommendations were devised as a package and must be regarded as such. Any operational plan for implementation must address key security and political recommendations simultaneously. He therefore urged Israel to refrain from further military incursions into areas exclusively under Palestinian administration, to end its policy of extra-judicial killings, to show restraint, to freeze all settlement activities, to end closures and to transfer the tax remittances owed to the Palestinian Authority.

Norway urged the Palestinian people and the Palestinian Authority to do their utmost to end the attacks on Israel and Israelis and to bring justice to all known terrorists. They should, renew their commitment to the ceasefire announced on 26 September, and ensure full enforcement of Palestinian Authority orders regarding the ceasefire, and to continue full security cooperation with Israel. Implementation of the Mitchell recommendations and the Tenet understandings could be facilitated if the parties were provided with support in the form of a monitoring mechanism, in which Norway stood ready to participate, should the parties agree to such a procedure. Final negotiations must be resumed. As a friend of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples, Norway reaffirmed its readiness to assist them in reaching a peaceful solution to the Middle East conflict.

SERGEI S. LING (Belarus) said the Middle East peace process was going through one of the most difficult periods in its half century of history. The acts of violence in the region and the irreversible damage to a peaceful settlement of the conflict were alarming. All parties should realize that every fired shot or missile strike was a blow against peace.

Long-term prospects for peace in the Middle East were dependent on implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, the application of the principle of land for peace, and negotiation on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks. Parties must show their good will in implementation of the Madrid conclusions and other agreements. The Palestinian people had the historic right to self-determination, including their right to an independent State.

The absence of further unjustified victims would be key to achieving progress in the peace process. He stressed the responsibilities of the United Nations, and especially of the Security Council. He said Belarus was convinced of the need to renew the peace process to achieve the inalienable rights of all peoples in the region.

BADER MOHAMMAD E. AL-AWDI (Kuwait) said that the Middle East was passing through a critical stage because of the developments brought about by the Israeli occupation of Palestine and the Syrian Golan. The process of rebuilding confidence was a priority in order to ensure the end of the violence and the implementation of the Mitchell recommendations, he stressed.

He said the situation in Palestine was the core of tension in the region. For peace to be just and permanent, negotiations needed to take into account all the demands of the Palestinian people. This meant full Israeli withdrawal under relevant United Nations resolutions, and immediate implementation of Israeli and Palestinian bilateral accords. Israeli actions were based on repression, he said. The barbaric practices of Israel were in clear violation of international humanitarian law. Kuwait called upon members of the Security Council to work for the creation of a United Nations monitoring force which could protect the Palestinian people, particularly the children.

He said he strongly welcomed the new approach of the United States, and its support for the establishment of a Palestinian State. The European Union and the Russian Federation should follow suit in order to reach a final solution. No just and permanent peace could be obtained unless there was a full withdrawal of Israeli forces to the borders of 1967. The Israeli government was exploiting the current international situation to its benefit, both in its relations with Syria and with Lebanon. Israeli must stop its threats against Lebanon, so that the Lebanese government could focus on its own development and reconstruction.

FAYSSAL MEKIDAD (Syria) said Israel's procrastination on peace this year showed that it was not serious about finding peace, and that it was not willing to give back the Golan and return to the borders established before 1967.

He said Israel's continued insistence on bringing in settlers had unsettled the region. Israel had destroyed urban centers, had upset the water balance and had destroyed the income-generating ability of its Arab neighbors. Further, peace was a contradiction to occupation and was not consistent with the muscle-flexing that Israel constantly practised. The land for peace principle must apply. Israel must withdraw to pre-1967 borders and it should release Lebanese prisoners from its prisons.

Israel must show its good faith to its neighbors by responding to the loud international call for actions now, or those who had been resisting Israeli occupation for many years, he continued, must be able to see that Israel was willing to abide by United Nations resolutions. Israel should seize the opportunity and stop its State terrorism. As mentioned previously, the phenomenon was unknown in the region before Israel's arrival, which had sown the seeds in the region. That was because State terrorism bred the other forms, through the injustice of actions such as ousting people from their homes and by other atrocious crimes. In Lebanon, Israel had destroyed the infrastructure.

Those who wanted to target terrorists should start with the Israeli form of terrorism because that was the worst, he said. The intifada

would continue as long as the occupation did. It was unreal to think people could stop protesting before the occupation ceased.

SAEED H. S. AL-JOMAE (Saudi Arabia) said the Assembly was once more considering the situation in the Middle East, probably for the fifty-sixth consecutive year. He had told the Assembly yesterday, when speaking about the question of Palestine, that a Middle East solution was dependent on settlement of the Palestinian problem, which required implementation of respective resolutions from international organizations, in particular from the Security Council.

He said his Government reiterated its appeal to States concerned about the peace process to put an end to the bloodshed and to oblige Israel to comply with international law and Security Council resolutions, as well as with the principle of land for peace.

He said all States of the region expect Israel had acceded to the convention against nuclear weapons. Israel's stance constituted a threat to international peace and security. He was concerned by that refusal, and rejected the policy of double standards to exempt Israel from its obligation to accede to the non-proliferation treaty. Tensions in the regions had no other cause than Israel's disrespect of international law. Israel must withdraw immediately from the Syrian Golan and from Southern Lebanon.

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