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General Assembly Concludes Debates on Question of Palestine, Situation

in Middle East, Deferring Action on Resolutions until Wednesday

Delegates Press for Peace Process Revival, End to Occupation, Settlements; Israel Says Ready to Discuss Peace 'Anywhere, Anytime and without Preconditions'

As the General Assembly today wrapped up its annual debate on the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East, several delegations urged the international community to end six decades of "collective failure" to answer the Palestinian question through a peaceful settlement.

Among key points stressed throughout the debates, sometimes by delegates who took the floor twice, was the urgent need for a revival of the peace process, which ensured that the parties complied strictly with their previous commitments, including the Quartet's Road Map. Many expressed support for the Arab Peace Initiative, which called for Israel's withdrawal to pre-1967 borders, as well as recognition of Israel, and of the State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital. Several also called for an end to Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and an easing of restrictions in Gaza.

Speaking once during the two days of debate, the representative of Israel said it was ready to discuss peace anywhere, anytime and without preconditions. It wanted to hear the Palestinian Authority say the same. Israel would choose the path of peace over any course of conflict, the delegate said, pointing to the recently announced policy of settlement restraint as an example of, among other things, Israel's desire to restart peace talks with the Palestinians.

The Assembly stood at a critical juncture, she said. "It can indulge in the hatred of yesterday. It can mourn the rejection of resolution 181. It can even promote and applaud unilateral, futile affirmations", she said. "It can turn a blind eye to terrorists and their sponsors and justify their repugnant tactics and deadly consequences." Or it could recognize that the only way towards peace was through bilateral negotiations. (By resolution 181 of 1947, the Assembly had conferred international legitimacy on the creation of two States for two peoples.)

She urged the international community to confront "the most dangerous threat to peace in the region: Iran". She said that country continued to export violence, hatred and terrorism to the region and beyond. Iran funded, trained and supported global terrorism, including Hamas' and Hizbullah's relentless attacks against Israelis. Iran had to be stopped, she warned.

Earlier in the debate, Iran's delegate had said that any actions to appease the Israeli regime or divert the international community's attention from the root causes of the issue of Palestine, including the politically motivated manoeuvres in the Security Council during its debate on Gaza, was equivalent to the defence of State terrorism and injustice.

Attaining a peaceful and just settlement of the question of Palestine was imperative for a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East and beyond. Aggression, State terrorism, intimidation and occupation, the creation of new illegal settlements, and construction of the separation wall would not achieve that goal, he stressed.

Reiterating Iran's proposal for a durable solution to the Palestinian problem, he said that everyone with a legitimate stake in the Territory of Palestine – including Muslims, Christians and Jews – should choose their own system of government through a general referendum. All Palestinians living in exile could also take part in the referendum.

From outside the region, Pakistan's representative said that prospects for the final peace treaty envisioned from Oslo in 1993 to Annapolis in 2007 were not encouraging. Nor had the serious deterioration of living conditions in the Occupied Territory been reversed. Rather, Israeli impunity and defiance of the international community was inflicting a "mortal blow" on both fronts. The closure of Gaza's borders was strangling the local economy, public services and human security, while the illegal separation wall's construction replicated the situation in the West Bank.

"We all have a feeling that something must be done – and done quickly", to ensure that the General Assembly resolution of 62 years ago was being implemented, said Guinea-Bissau's speaker. Today, things were stagnating – even growing more complicated, and he asked Israel to cast "a more serene gaze" at what was happening around itself; to listen to the global community. The separation wall was unacceptable – not just because the International Court of Justice had delivered an advisory opinion on it, but because it was creating a terrible injustice by separating neighbours, stopping youngsters from attending school and believers from attending mosques. It was a laceration to the soul of Palestinians.

Egypt's representative introduced two draft resolutions related to the situation in the Middle East, explaining that the two documents were meant to demonstrate the international community's rejection of Israel's continuing occupation and illegal practices in the occupied Arab territories, as well as the grave deterioration in the peace process (documents A/64/L.24 and L.25).

He said the resolution was related to an Israeli settlement's fierce assault in East Jerusalem, in an attempt to alter the geographic and demographic features of the area and essentially to annex it in order to consolidate an illegal occupation. The draft on the Syrian Golan expressed the continued determination of the international community to end Israel's illegal occupation of the area and to achieve its full withdrawal from the Golan Heights to the 4 June 1967 borders. That included the rescinding of illegally imposed Israeli laws and settlements.

Also speaking today on the situation in Palestine were the representatives of Bahrain, Sri Lanka, India, Morocco, Malaysia, Jordan, Bangladesh, Zambia, Oman, Venezuela, Costa Rica, Sudan, China, Tunisia, Canada and the Maldives.

The representative of Lebanon spoke in exercise of the right of reply.

Addressing the Assembly on the situation in the Middle East were Syria, Cuba, Kuwait, Switzerland, Japan, Norway, Turkey, Australia, Nicaragua, Guinea-Bissau and India.

The representative of Syria also spoke in a right of reply.

The Assembly will reconvene at 10 a.m. on Wednesday, 2 December, to take action on the resolutions on the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East.

Background

The General Assembly met today to continue its debate on the question of Palestine and begin consideration of the situation in the Middle East. (For information on the question of Palestine, please see press release [GA/10894](#)).

For its discussion on the Middle East, the Assembly had before it the Secretary-General's report on The situation in the Middle East (document A/64/343), which contains replies from Member States in response to the Secretary-General's note verbale of 30 April 2009. The note concerns the implementation of the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolution 63/30, entitled "Jerusalem", and 63/31, entitled "The Syrian Golan".

In its resolution 63/30, the Assembly stressed that a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of the city of Jerusalem should take into account the legitimate concerns of both the Palestinian and Israeli sides. It should include internationally guaranteed provisions to ensure the freedom of religion and of conscience of its inhabitants, as well as permanent, free and unhindered access to the holy places by people of all religions and nationalities.

In resolution 63/31, which dealt with Israeli policies in the Syrian territory occupied by Israel since 1967, the Assembly demanded once more that Israel withdraw from all the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967, in implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions.

On 30 April 2009, the Secretary-General addressed notes verbales to Member State representatives, asking for details of any steps their Governments had taken, or envisioned taking, concerning the implementation of the resolutions' provisions. As of 31 August 2009, nine replies had been received from the following countries: Colombia, Cuba, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Jordan, Mexico, Nicaragua, Qatar, the Sudan and Syria.

Also before the Assembly on the item were two draft resolutions, the first of which, on Jerusalem (document A/64/L.24), would have the Assembly express its grave concern about any action taken by anybody – Governmental or non-governmental – in violation of resolutions 181 (II) (1947), 36/120 (1981), 56/31 (2001) and 478 (1980). The Assembly would also express grave concern at Israel's continuation of illegal settlement activities, including the so-called E-1 plan, construction of the wall around East Jerusalem and restricted access to and residence in East Jerusalem.

Further by the text, the Assembly would reiterate its determination that any actions taken by Israel to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration on Jerusalem were illegal and therefore null and void. It would call on Israel to immediately cease all such illegal measures and stress that a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Jerusalem should take into account the legitimate concerns of both Palestinians and Israelis and should include internationally guaranteed provisions to ensure freedom of religion of its inhabitants. Finally, it would request the Secretary-General to report back to it at its sixty-fifth session on the implementation of the resolution.

By a draft resolution on The Syrian Golan (document A/64/L.25), the Assembly, expressing grave concern at the halt of the peace process on the Syrian track, would declare that Israel had failed to comply with Security Council resolution 497 (1981) and that the Israeli decision of 14 December 1981 to impose its laws on the occupied Syrian Golan was null and void. It would reaffirm its determination that all relevant provisions annexed to the Hague Convention of 1907 and Geneva Convention relative to the protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War continue to apply.

Further, the Assembly would determine that continued occupation of the Syrian Golan was a stumbling block in the way of achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region. It would call on Israel to resume talks on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks and demand its withdrawal from all the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967. Finally, it would call on all parties concerned to exert efforts to ensure the resumption of the peace process by implementing Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and request the Secretary-General to report to it at its sixty-fifth session.

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Statements on Palestine

ABDULLAH HUSSAIN HAROON (Pakistan) said that the international community was entering the seventh decade of its collective failure to answer the Palestinian question through a peaceful settlement, yet a breakthrough was, regrettably, still not in sight. Prospects for the final peace treaty envisioned from Oslo in 1993 to Annapolis in 2007 were not encouraging. Nor had the serious deterioration of living conditions in the Occupied Territory been reversed. Rather, Israeli impunity and defiance of the international community was inflicting a "mortal blow" on both fronts. The closure of Gaza's borders was strangling the local economy, public services and human security, while the illegal separation wall's construction replicated the situation in the West Bank. Israel's settlement activity also compounded the conflict, while illegal excavation around Muslim and Christian holy sites widened its dimensions.

He said that the "incessant culture of impunity" by Israel vitiated trust and confidence, which could not be built up in the face of actions that involved, among other things, the use of force, human rights violations, discrimination, checkpoints and permits, and the blockade of entire populations. Israel should seriously reconsider its violent actions and harsh measures, not only for the besieged Palestinian people and the peace process, but for its own security. But despite little reason for optimism for a sustainable peace process in the near future, Pakistan hoped the parties would undertake immediate and credible confidence-building measures aimed at improving the climate for negotiations.

It was also imperative for the international community to revive the peace process, he said. Re-engagement should follow four parameters: the Security Council should take the lead; the Middle East Quartet should utilize the full potential of its 24 September 2009 statement in support of the peace process through a transparent and objective engagement; the humanitarian plight of the Palestinians must be urgently addressed, Palestinian institutions rebuilt, and further cohesion among the Palestinian people supported; and the root cause of the Arab-Israeli conflict – the Israeli occupation of Arab territories – must be addressed. Among other things, the latter required Israel's complete withdrawal from the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and all other occupied Arab territories. Also, all settlement activities must cease and parallel progress on the Syria-Israel and Lebanon-Israel tracks should be made.

JAMAL FARES ALROWAIEI ([Bahrain](#)) thanked the Department of Public Information for organizing activities on the question of Palestine. Recalling a letter sent from the King of Bahrain to the Secretary-General on the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, he said it called on the international community to bear its responsibility towards Palestinians and to help them to realize their inalienable rights, notably that of statehood. The letter also called for a just and comprehensive peace, in line with the Annapolis agreement, and stressed the need for the international community to take a firm stand of solidarity with Palestinians in realizing their rights, particularly through political and financial support. The International Day had come at a time when Palestinians were suffering the most. The Goldstone Report had exposed the persecution of Palestinians at the hands of the Israeli Forces, which reaffirmed the need for international community to afford them protection.

He said that the letter also expressed Bahrain's firm position, first, in standing with Palestinians against an historic injustice, evident by Israel's wanton aggressions. His Government also sought an international peaceful settlement based on international frameworks. The grave situation of Palestinians was reflected in Israel's blockade in the Gaza Strip, construction of the separation wall and violations of both international law and international humanitarian law. Israel had deliberately destroyed infrastructure, killed men, women and children, and used banned weapons – all on the international community's watch. Only a political process would allow Palestinians to enjoy their inalienable rights within internationally recognized borders, living side-by-side in peace. Bahrain had always called for that. The time had come for Israel to significantly change its policies and for the global community to help Palestinians establish a State within internationally recognized borders.

ESHAGH AL HABIB ([Iran](#)) said that despite the International Court of Justices' advisory opinion and strong condemnation from the international community, illegal settlements were expanding much faster and more Palestinian houses were being demolished. The Israeli regime persisted in its aggressive and expansionist policies towards Lebanon and the occupied Syrian Golan. That illegitimate regime continued to violate international law, international humanitarian and human rights law, and the United Nations Charter. Those crimes were among the grossest violations of United Nations resolutions, especially Security Council resolutions, and must be dealt with urgently. In that regard, Iran welcomed the Assembly resolution, adopted on 5 November, which should be followed up seriously by relevant United Nations organs, particularly the Council.

Unfortunately, he said, the Security Council had not arrived at the anticipated conclusion on the Goldstone Report. Any actions to appease the Israeli regime or divert the international community's attention from the root causes of the issue of Palestine, including the politically-motivated manoeuvres in the Council during its debate on Gaza, was equivalent to the defence of State terrorism and injustice. Attaining a peaceful and just settlement of the question of Palestine was imperative for a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East and beyond. Aggression, State terrorism, intimidation and occupation, the creation of new illegal settlements, and construction of the separation wall would not achieve that goal. A lasting peace in Palestine and the region would be possible only by establishing justice and ending discrimination and the occupation of Palestine and other Arab occupied territories.

In commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity, the international community should act collectively in support of the cause of Palestine, he urged. The reconstruction of Gaza was urgent, and the international community had a responsibility to offer multifaceted support to the Palestinians there. Iran had provided financial assistance. It reiterated its proposal for a durable solution to the Palestine problem, based on which everyone with a legitimate stake in the Territory of Palestine, including Muslims, Christians and Jews, should choose their own system of government in a general referendum. All Palestinians who had been exiled should also take part in the referendum. That was the only just, comprehensive and democratic solution to the Middle East problem.

PALITHA T.B. KOHONA ([Sri Lanka](#)) said his country had consistently extended its support to the Palestinian people in pursuit of their inalienable rights, particularly to statehood. Quoting the Sri Lankan President, he said his Government was deeply concerned at the widespread suffering of Palestinians and at the grave situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. While welcoming new efforts to reinvigorate the peace process, there was disappointment that no tangible results had been achieved towards a two-State solution or realization of Palestinians' inalienable rights.

He said that, indeed, Palestinians had suffered for too long, and denial of their fundamental right to statehood, due to continued Israeli occupation, had seriously affected the socio-economic well-being of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. It was imperative to fully implement resolutions of the Security Council and the Assembly to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the Middle East and Palestinian question. For peace to be viable, Israel must withdraw from all Palestinian Territories to the 1967 borders and end its economic blockade of the Gaza Strip. The illegal expansion of settlements and construction of the separation wall only increased animosities between the two parties. The Palestinian Authority must continue to implement its security plan and strive to improve law and order.

Reiterating support for Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, he urged Palestinian groups to act quickly to reunite within the legitimate Authority's framework. "Unity among Palestinian peoples is their strength," he said, commending Egypt for promoting dialogue in that regard. Serious efforts must be made for the early resumption of negotiations, with the goal of reaching a final agreement that would enable Israelis and Palestinians to live side-by-side securely within recognized boundaries. It was important that both parties abide by their previous agreements and take steps to build confidence. In closing, he expressed appreciation for the vital work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) under difficult conditions.

GABRIELASHALEV ([Israel](#)) said the Assembly's adoption in 1947 of resolution 181 at Lake Success conferred international legitimacy on the creation of two States for two peoples. The Jewish population in then-British Mandate Palestine accepted that historic resolution. Yet the Arab side within the mandated territory, and across the region, instantly rejected resolution 181 and launched a war of annihilation against Israel. Today, the Arabs' historic mistake of rejecting resolution 181 had been measured in lives lost in war, parents who buried children, and pain that had touched both Israelis and Arabs.

She said that Israel would not let the pain turn into hate or diminish its desire for peace. History showed that peace could be achieved in the Middle East, such as the historic peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan. "How can it be, then, that the debate in these halls embraces a one-sided narrative that promotes and maintains an obsessive and condemnatory focus on Israel?" she asked. "Peace will require a new direction. It will require truthfulness and courage."

Israel would choose the path of peace over any course of conflict, she said. Several days ago, her Government announced a policy of settlement restraint, which included the suspension of new permits and new construction in the West Bank, for 10 months. That step reflected three facts: Israel wanted to re-enter negotiations with the Palestinians; it was taking painful and effective steps towards peace; and it was serious about its intention to pursue peace.

She stressed that Israel wanted to reach an historic peace agreement and would discuss peace at any time, anywhere and without preconditions. Israel wanted to hear the Palestinian Authority say the same. Israel now witnessed the efforts to use the Security Council and Assembly to promote unilateral declarations. Like the rejection of resolution 181, that could turn into another historic mistake, creating a situation that destroyed hope for bilateral negotiations.

The international community must confront the most dangerous threat to peace in the region: Iran, she said. Iran continued to export violence, hatred, and terrorism to the region and beyond. Iran funded, trained and supported global terrorism, including Hamas' and Hizbullah's relentless attacks against Israeli men, women and children. Iran had to be stopped.

Standing at a critical juncture, the Assembly could choose between two paths, she said. "It can indulge in the hatred of yesterday. It can mourn the rejection of resolution 181. It can even promote and applaud unilateral, futile affirmations. It can turn a blind eye to terrorists and their sponsors and justify their repugnant tactics and deadly consequences," she said. Or it could recognize that the only way towards peace was through bilateral negotiations. It could celebrate 29 November as a joint day of peace for two States, living side-by-side. "For us, Mr. President, there is no other way," she concluded.

MANJEEV SINGH PURI ([India](#)) said India had a strong tradition of supporting the Palestinian cause. In the Assembly and in the Human Rights Council, it had voted in favour of the resolution on the United Nations Fact Finding Mission in the Gaza Conflict. The conflict in West Asia was political and it could not be resolved by force. He favoured a negotiated solution wherein a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine could live within secure, recognized borders, in peace with Israel, as endorsed by the Quartet's Road Map and Council resolutions 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003). He supported the Arab Peace Initiative, which called for Israel's withdrawal to pre-1967 borders and the recognition of Israel and the recognition of the State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital. He also called for an end to Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and easing restrictions within Palestine on the movement of goods and services.

He said that India had always stood by the Palestinians' pursuit of their legitimate goals and socio-economic development, and it had given development support to Palestine. In New Delhi, the Palestinian Chancery building had been built as a gift from the Indian Government and an enduring symbol of solidarity. India gave \$1 million in response to UNRWA's flash appeal, following the recent conflict in Gaza, and it had increased its contributions to UNRWA during the Agency's sixtieth anniversary. India had also given \$10 million to the Palestinian Authority after the March 2009 International Conference to Support the Palestinian Economy for the Reconstruction of Gaza, held in Sharm El-Sheikh. It had also participated in various donor conferences and it had expeditiously implemented its pledges. The situation in Palestine was of grave concern, and stakeholders must come together and create an environment for the earliest possible resumption of dialogue.

ISMAIL CHEKKORI ([Morocco](#)) said that the courageous Palestinian people had suffered and had bravely endured hardship and injustice for more than six decades. Their efforts to secure their rights were supported by many elements in the international community, including by ensuring that the question of Palestine remained at the forefront of attention. The United Nations public information effort played an important role in that regard.

Meanwhile, he said, Israel continued its atrocities. The level of its cruelty and that of its army had been laid out in the recent Goldstone Report. Another report by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) had shown the alarming environmental and economic impact that had resulted from Israel's policy of collective punishment and its illegal settlements policy. The continued building of the separation wall, regardless of the advisory opinion handed down by the International Court of Justice, was another demonstration of Israel's intent, which was to alter the demographic character of the region and of East Jerusalem.

All those actions were flagrant violations of resolutions adopted by the international community, and his King had called on the international community and on the Vatican to intervene in the deteriorating situation that grew ever more alarming, he said. Israel's recent permit for the building of 600 new units of settlements was alarming, particularly in view of recent attacks by settlers on places of worship. Israel must ensure respect for places of worship. Tolerance must reign in the region. His country would host a meeting from 11 to 13 December, at which Al-Quds would be affirmed as an Arab cultural centre. However, only a firm and lasting peace would bring stability. All efforts towards a durable solution were welcome by his country, as a member of the implementing committee for the Arab Initiative based on the Quartet Road Map, towards a comprehensive peace in which two States existed side-by-side and both Syria and Lebanon had sovereignty throughout their lands.

HAMIDON ALI ([Malaysia](#)) said that Assembly resolution 181 adopted 62 years ago had called for the creation of two States and yet only one had yet been created. The root cause of that situation was the illegal occupation of Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrian territories by Israel, which had been compounded over the decades by Israel's actions and intransigence. Its atrocities in Gaza contravened the Geneva Conventions. It lacked political commitment to follow through the successive peace processes. It continued to build and expand illegal settlements. It forced evictions of Palestinian people, demolished their homes and confiscated their lands. Finally, it imposed measures that constituted collective punishment, which was strictly forbidden by international humanitarian law.

He said that recent attacks by Israeli settlers at Islamic holy sites were manifestations of impunity by the Israeli regime in the Occupied Territories. The increasing incidents of violence by illegal settlers was alarming, particularly in view of the little action by authorities to stop their occurrence. Such dehumanization of the Palestinian people was not only illegal and immoral, but counterproductive to the aim of achieving genuine and lasting peace. Israel must stop trying to cloud the international community's eyes by listing all the actions it had taken to lessen the suffering of the Palestinians. Israel must recognize itself for what it was: the source of conflict in the Middle East.

It was "manifestly clear" that peace in the Middle East would be achieved only when the international community was able to make Israel recognize its wrongdoing and hold it accountable for its policies of deliberate destruction, he said. Israel must improve the situation on the ground by lifting the Gaza blockade, addressing humanitarian needs, fostering economic activities and improving the atmosphere for negotiations. The international effort must refocus on the inalienable right of returning the Palestinian people to their own State. The Security Council must take the necessary measures to end the immoral culture of impunity by the Israeli regime.

MOHAMMED F. AL-ALLAF ([Jordan](#)) said the Middle East was in a highly sensitive stage, characterized by accelerated unilateral actions and an absence of political will to prevent violence and achieve a permanent, just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question. The parties concerned should return to the negotiating table and address all matters, including borders, Jerusalem, refugees and security. For its part, Jordan was continuing efforts on all levels to mobilize international support for resumed negotiations and the achievement of a peace agreement that guaranteed the establishment of a contiguous Palestinian State on Occupied Palestinian Territory of 1967 with East Jerusalem as its capital, and based on principles in the Arab Peace Initiative.

Turning to the situation in Gaza, he said it had reached the level of humanitarian catastrophe. The blockade had turned the area into a huge prison, and he urged unrestricted entry of humanitarian relief supplies. Patients should be allowed medical attention and civilians should have free and unrestricted movement. The international community should help, not as an act of charity, but because such measures affected Palestinian rights. Jordan had continued to urge the international community to provide assistance aimed at improving living conditions.

He said that peace required Israel to immediately stop all measures that contradicted international human rights law and humanitarian law, specifically the Fourth Geneva Convention. Revitalizing the economy could not happen without lifting the closure and checkpoints. The pace and volume of Israeli unilateral measures had increased in East Jerusalem, especially in and around sacred Muslim places. All such practices were illegal and seriously violated Israel's commitments as occupying Power. They also impeded efforts to launch peace negotiations with a view to finding a two-State solution. States must adopt a firm position in pushing Israel to halt its actions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Protecting Jerusalem would always be a responsibility for Jordan, he said, as the city was important to tens of millions of Muslims and Christians around the

world. Israel sought to obliterate the city's Islamic features and influence its legal status, which could undermine efforts to create a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Israel must abide by the Israeli-Jordanian peace agreement vis-à-vis Jerusalem. A partial halt to settlement activities was insufficient – and the fact that East Jerusalem was not covered was unacceptable, and contradicted international consensus, which acknowledged that Jerusalem was a principle item in the list of final status items.

Finally, he said the expulsion of Palestinians and demolition of their homes in the West Bank and East Jerusalem violated the Fourth Geneva Convention. Settlements deprived Palestinians of their right to use their land and water resources and he urged a complete cessation of all such activities, including the so-called natural growth of existing settlements. "Settlements and peace are opposites which cannot meet," he said. A just and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question was essential for regional stability. Peace could be achieved through a two-State solution, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

A.K. ABDUL MOMEN (Bangladesh), aligning himself with the statement by the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of Islamic Conference, said that Bangladesh had always viewed the Palestinian issue with serious concern. Its Government maintained unwavering support for the Palestinian people's just and legitimate struggle for self-determination and statehood, believing Palestine's occupation to be the root cause of the region's instability. Palestinian people had been under illegal occupation for four decades in what appeared to be a collective failure on the part of the international community to help them realize their right to self-determination and to a sovereign State. It was also unfortunate that Israel, with its experience of past sufferings, committed systematic violations against Palestinian people, who were being denied the right to live on their own land, or if displaced, to return home. The establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, was the only sustainable solution to that long-lasting conflict.

He condemned the illegal expansion of Israeli settlements "by grabbing Palestinian lands", which, along with the continued construction of the separation wall, threatened to derail peace negotiations. The Occupied Territories were being fragmented into smaller parts because of the wall, which would affect the viability of a sovereign and independent Palestinian State. Also, the Bangladesh Government was deeply concerned at violations discussed in the Goldstone Report. Implementation of its recommendations would help put an end to impunity. He also drew attention to Israel's obligations under relevant provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention, by which it could not legally or morally absolve itself of its responsibilities to guarantee the basic rights of people under its occupation. The Assembly and Security Council had reconfirmed Israel's obligation through various resolutions. Sincere implementation of those texts was the only way to resolve the Palestinian crisis. As for a lasting solution, it was very important to address the key issue: illegal Israeli occupation of Arab territories. That required Israel's complete and unconditional withdrawal from the Occupied Territories, including East Jerusalem and other Arab lands.

MUYAMBO SIPANGULE (Zambia) said that the United Nations played a central role in trying to resolve the Palestinian and Israeli conflict and the promotion of peace in the Middle East, and would continue to do so. Sixty years ago, the Organization rightly adopted the principle of a two-State solution that would allow the two peoples to live side-by-side in peace and security, but unfortunately that solution had been sidelined.

He said that Zambia, which maintained full diplomatic relations with the State of Israel, as well as with the Palestinian Authority, still supported the two-State solution and had urged both parties, in bilateral talks, to negotiate the core issues in good faith, including Jerusalem, settlements, refugees, borders, security and water. The goal was still two States for two peoples, living side-by-side, in peace and security.

ALFREDO LOPES CABRAL (Guinea Bissau), recalling the observance yesterday of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, said participants had been moved by the need to express their solidarity with a justice-loving and suffering people. Speakers had taken the floor to express known and undeniable facts. The Committee for the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was working tirelessly to ensure that no one would forget the situation of Palestinians. There had been no feeling yesterday that anyone was exhibiting hostility against Israel. He had no interest in participating in a trial against that country; rather he wished only to express solidarity with Palestinians. "We all have a feeling that something must be done – and done quickly," to ensure that the General Assembly resolution of 62 years ago was being implemented.

He said that it was up to the international community to ensure compliance with the principles that guided international relations. Today, things were stagnating – even growing more complicated, and he asked Israel to cast "a more serene gaze" at what was happening around itself, to listen to the global community. The separation wall was unacceptable – not just because the International Court of Justice had delivered an advisory opinion on it, but because it was creating a terrible injustice by separating neighbours, stopping youngsters from attending school and believers from attending mosques. It was a laceration to the soul of Palestinians.

In addition, it was high time that Palestinians reconciled among themselves and reunified. "We need to quiet the differences," he said. Those Palestinians in Gaza were human beings and the international community must respond to the violence that had befallen them. "We all wish to work for peace," he said, and determination was needed to bring support to Palestinians. As long as Palestinians' inalienable rights remained unsatisfied, Guinea-Bissau would speak out against actions that contravened the United Nations Charter.

MOHAMMED AQEEL BA-OMAR (Oman) said that today's meeting was of particular importance since the situation in the region was deteriorating daily. Perhaps something concrete could result from this discussion. More than 60 years of expulsions and cruelty had not broken the will of the Palestinian people to secure their rights. Now, however, in addition to the cruel humanitarian situation and the illegal actions of Israel tolerated by the Palestinian people, they also had to suffer the desecration of their spiritual and holy places.

Sixty-two years ago today, resolution 181 had called for the establishment of two States, he recalled. Yet, 4.5 million Palestinians still suffered as refugees. The international community must now take a firm stance against Israel's impunity and make a firm, unequivocal demand that Israel stop its policies and implement the relevant resolutions adopted over the years.

As for the Security Council, he said that the recommendations contained in the Goldstone Report should be adopted and included as part of the Council's report. The Council should also take into account the fact that Israel's violations of international law and its occupations of other Arab lands was a demonstration of its intent to change the region's demographics. The solution was for all parties concerned and for all partners in the peace process to make every effort to implement the Road Map. Furthermore, concrete support should be rendered for the Arab proposal by holding a peace conference. Participants should include the parties involved, plus members of the Quartet and of the Council.

JORGE VALERO (Venezuela) said his country joined the clamour demanding the end of the Israeli presence in the Occupied Territories as a basic prerequisite to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East and the creation of a sovereign Palestinian State. On 27 November, the Presidents of Venezuela and the Palestinian National Authority met in Caracas to strengthen their historical ties. They signed a framework cooperation agreement that included the development of social, economic, educational, agricultural, scientific and cultural programmes. They also signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the topic of university education.

He said that the Goldstone Report concluded that Israel's long blockade of Gaza had deprived people of their basic means of sustenance, jobs, water, shelter, the right to movement and a court of justice. As the occupying Power in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Gaza, Israel had obligations under the Geneva Convention to protect the population. Instead, Israel systematically exterminated it. Venezuela could not forget the 600 checkpoints in the West Bank that prevented the Palestinian people's free movement and development, the construction of the wall on Palestinian territory, or the attack on civilians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Venezuela could never place the genocidal Government of Israel at the same level of the Palestinian forces, he said, recalling that that his Government had suspended diplomatic relations with Israel after its brutal invasion of Gaza. It was not ready to resume relations until the inhuman harassment of the Palestinian

people ceased. The Israeli authorities had to be brought to the International Criminal Court; it was time for them to be held accountable under international law. The Security Council should not evade its responsibility in that matter.

JAIRO HERNÁNDEZ (Costa Rica), recalling that his country had voted in favour of the resolution approving the 1947 partition plan, expressed concern at current demonstrations of violence, as they were not conducive to dialogue. The situation in Gaza was cause for ongoing concern. Costa Rica understood Israel's legitimate security concerns and called on Palestinian authorities to control extremist elements involved in terrorism. At the same time, Israel must lift restrictions on access to goods and humanitarian aid, which Gazans needed.

He said that new obstacles had emerged, which had moved the parties further from the core issues – including Israel's building of new settlements, demolition of Palestinian houses and eviction of Palestinians in East Jerusalem. Settlement expansion had only added to the distrust between the parties and endangered efforts to find solutions. He also called on Palestinians to redouble efforts to achieve national reconciliation and to advance the peace process. Although President Mahmoud Abbas had put forward guidelines to improve conditions, Palestinian unity had been weakened by radical sectors.

Costa Rica was concerned at the cancellation of elections planned for January, he said. The international community had to count on legitimate leadership, the absence of which would only weaken the peace process – and the commitment to it. The commitment to a two-State solution must not be marginalized and the global community must provide the context for resuming talks. The Security Council and the Assembly had a huge responsibility in that regard.

A sustainable solution to the conflict in the Middle East must be based on international law, and fulfilment of Council and Assembly resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative, he said. The key issues included Jerusalem, borders, refugees, settlements and security. The Costa Rican President had delivered that message on his visit to Israel and Palestine. While he was aware of Costa Rica's limited influence in a place where major Powers had failed time and again, he wished to deliver a message from a friend that had an interest only in achieving peace. More than ever, "we need bold measures to build trust."

KHALID ALI (Sudan) said that Israel defied the global community and deprived the Palestinian people of their rights as it violated international human rights and humanitarian laws. Israel pursued inhumane and illegal operations. That was clear to all and outlined in many reports, including the special report of the United Nations Fact Finding Mission in the Gaza Conflict. Those reports showed that the blockades should have been lifted during that invasion, in order to let supplies into Gaza and let the wounded go to hospitals. The Israeli aggression in Gaza had led to the deaths and injury of thousands of people, including women and children. It had also destroyed homes, schools, universities, places of worship and a United Nations building.

He said that the Palestinians were suffering from racial injustice, as Israel defied the opinion of the International Court of Justice. The Palestinians suffered from aggression at Israeli checkpoints. The Palestinians did not enjoy their human rights, such as to food, water and work. The Israelis continued to expand their settlements and chase away the Palestinians, making the areas more Jewish. Israel was defying the international community and not adhering to United Nations resolutions. The Syrian population was also suffering. He asked Israel to withdraw from the Syrian Golan and Lebanese areas and he called on it to abide by the international resolutions.

YESUI ZHANG (China) said that the current debate was particularly important because the situation in the Occupied Territories was deteriorating and the actions taking place in the field were alarming. Israel's military cruelty and its disproportionate use of force were inexcusable. The severe humanitarian situation was of particular concern. All parties in Gaza must begin to immediately implement the Council resolutions relevant to the situation. Israel must immediately ease its hold to allow relief of the humanitarian situation and it must cease construction of settlements and the separation wall, which were not only illegal, but were exacerbating the situation. Violations of international humanitarian law were completely unacceptable.

He said that political negotiation was the only way out of the situation; the use of force presented no exit. Israel must stop all actions that ran counter to fostering peace and must pursue the two-State solution. The international community should consider other issues in the region that were an important part of the situation and its resolution, such as Lebanon. His country had always supported the earliest settlement of the situation. It had also actively supported the peace process in the Middle East, including through economic assistance.

GHAZI JOMAA (Tunisia) said that observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People had come at a time when the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory was deteriorating, owing to Israel's blockade, confiscation of Palestinian property and land, violation of Muslim holy places and excessive settlement policies. Reaffirming his Government's steady support for Palestinians to establish an independent State on their own territory, he said the Tunisian President had always underscored the importance of the Palestinian cause. His message on the International Day had been a call to enable Palestinians to restore their legitimate rights and compel Israel to completely halt its settlement activities, among other things. The President had emphasized the need for continued support to end Palestinian suffering and to realize the peoples' aspirations for sovereignty and independence.

Noting that the Security Council briefing on the Middle East had included information that had created deep concern, he cautioned that the deadlocked peace process was a warning of the deteriorated humanitarian situation. States had a collective responsibility to avoid the repetition of crises, such as Israel's aggression in the Gaza Strip. In that context, he called on relevant parties, specifically the Quartet, to help end Palestinian suffering; on Israel to end its aggressive policies against Palestinians; and on the global community to strengthen its support for negotiations. In closing, he expressed appreciation to various international bodies for their continued efforts, especially UNRWA and the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

JOHN MCNEE (Canada) said he supported Israel's right to live within secure borders and the establishment of a sovereign, independent Palestinian State as part of a negotiated settlement. Israel's announcement of a 10-month suspension of private construction of settlements in the West Bank was a starting point, which he hoped would lead to resumed negotiations. While the situation had remained largely calm since the Gaza conflict, there had been sporadic rocket attacks on Israel from southern Lebanon and Gaza, which Canada strongly condemned. "Spoiler elements" should not be given the chance to derail a peaceful future. For the peace process to succeed, parties must make efforts towards meeting all their Road Map obligations.

He said that, while the Palestinian Authority had made progress, more had to be done. Canada's assistance focused on the security and justice sectors. Israel should also address its obligations regarding settlements, access and movement. Canada recognized the United Nations important role in the peace process, but was concerned at the number of resolutions that singled out Israel, as well as the disproportionate focus on the Middle East. United Nations efforts should complement those aimed at a comprehensive settlement. Urging parties to restart negotiations, he said Canada was ready to assist if requested. It was the parties' duty, with the support of the international community, to resume talks, so that Israeli and Palestinian children could enjoy a future of peace and prosperity.

ABDUL GHAFOOR MOHAMED (Maldives) reiterated his Government's unwavering commitment to realizing the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. The Maldives had welcomed the Goldstone Report and voted in support of the resolution on the Fact-Finding Mission. Indeed, the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter and norms of international law must be upheld by all States. He voiced concern at the aggravated hardship of Palestinian women and children as distinct vulnerable social groups and, thus, urged the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the Occupied Territories to include a gender perspective in his work.

He said that the Maldives was particularly disheartened by the deadlock in the peace negotiations, and he reiterated the need for an immediate freeze on all illegal settlement activities in the Occupied Territories. A return to the peace process in pursuit of a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli dispute was the best solution for realizing Palestinians' rights. While welcoming renewed efforts to revitalize dialogue between Palestine and Israel, more must be done to help Palestinians, who had been denied their rights to self-determination and freedom for six decades.

Right of Reply

Speaking in exercise of the right of reply, Lebanon's representative reminded the Assembly that what had prompted the creation of Hizbullah had been Israel's occupation of parts of his country.

Introduction of Draft Resolutions on Middle East

MAGED ABDELAZIZ (Egypt) introduced two draft resolutions related to the situation in the Middle East, one on Jerusalem (document A/64/L.24) and the other on the Syrian Golan (document A/64/L.25). He said the two resolutions were aimed at expressing the international community's rejection of Israel's continuing occupation and illegal practices in the occupied Arab territories. They were also aimed at addressing the grave deterioration in the peace process.

The resolution on Jerusalem, he continued, was related to an Israeli settlement's fierce assault in East Jerusalem, in an attempt to alter the geographic and demographic features of the area and essentially to annex it in order to consolidate an illegal occupation. The draft on the Syrian Golan expressed the continued determination of the international community to end Israel's illegal occupation of the area and to achieve its full withdrawal from the Golan Heights to the 4 June 1967 borders. That included the rescinding of illegally imposed Israeli laws and settlements.

The further aim of the two texts was to reaffirm Israel's commitments to stop settlement activity and end its illegal practices in East Jerusalem and illegal blockade of Gaza, he said. They also affirmed Israel's obligation to accept the resumption of negotiations, in accordance with clear terms of reference and within a definite time frame. Certainly, the goal of achieving a comprehensive peace was connected to the extent of Israel's seriousness in its commitment to do so through concrete actions. That would include the complete cessation of all settlement activities and of construction of the separation wall. Israel would also have to stop deepening divisions between the West Bank and Gaza Strip and would have to promote the start of fruitful negotiations for a settlement of final status issues. Israel's unilateral declaration to stop building activities in the West Bank for 10 months was not enough. What was needed was an end to occupation in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, and the establishment of a Palestinian State. Resumed talks on the Syrian track were also needed for the achievement of comprehensive peace in the region.

He said that the sponsors of the two resolutions believed the time had come to take a comprehensive approach to dealing with the Middle East conflict. The region's people wanted peace, stability and coexistence. That called for the political will and the serious commitment on the part of Israel to fully withdraw from all the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, based on the principle of land for peace and international law, in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map. The terms of reference were stated in the Madrid principles and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly.

Statements on Situation in Middle East

BASHAR JA'AFARI (Syria) said the Security Council had dealt with different aspects of the situation since 1947, while each session of the General Assembly had repeated a request for Israel to end occupation of Arab territories and emphasized that any measures to impose Israeli laws or administration in Jerusalem and occupied Syrian Golan were illegal. The Assembly's position was in line with that of the Council, which had unanimously adopted resolutions 478 (1980) on Jerusalem and 497 (1981) on the Syrian Golan. Both texts rejected Israel's unilateral decision to annex those areas. The Middle East was the tensest region in the world, and a just, comprehensive peace was an immediate necessity. Israel had violated international laws and places of worship, pursued policies of collective punishment, and constructed settlements and a separation wall.

Israel's aggression had been seen in the character of occupied Jerusalem, he said, noting that settlements had targeted its Arab and Christian character. He renewed Syria's call for an immediate end to such practices, in fulfilment of the international community's will to bring peace to the region. Israeli barbarity had also been seen in Gaza, with Israel's use of human shields and internationally banned weapons. The Goldstone Report had gathered evidence of "genocide". Perhaps, the most prominent sign of Israel's attitude had been seen in October, when the Israeli Prime Minister had said he would seek a review of all international humanitarian laws, just after the Assembly had endorsed the Goldstone Report. By adopting resolution 10/64, the General Assembly had approved the Report's recommendations, which he urged be implemented. He called on the international community, particularly the Security Council, to lift the unjust blockade on Gaza.

He said that, since occupation of the Syrian Arab Golan, Israel had used various methods to change the character of the area, notably by expelling people from their lands and bringing in settlers. Israel even had imposed home detention on a two-year-old child, on the pretext that he was born outside the occupied Syrian Golan. Peace had never been the goal of Israel; the goal had always been its own security. Israel should express its readiness for peace. A just and comprehensive peace could be realized on the basis of the terms of reference. To achieve that, there had to be an Israeli partner. With that, he advocated the establishment of independent Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as its capital.

RODOLFO BENITEZ VERSION (Cuba) said that Israel's disproportionate use of force against the Palestinian people was a violation of international and humanitarian law. Its policy in Gaza constituted a form of collective punishment that violated the rights of the people and hampered improvement of the economic situation. Israel's continued violation of international law through its illegal construction of the separation wall was not only a violation of people's rights, but was creating an ecological disaster that was causing physical, economic and social hardship for the people. Continued settlement expansion and the imposition of measures to alter the demographics of the area were further violations of international laws.

Those actions must stop, he said. Israel must also stop trying to impose its unilaterally determined solutions to problems in the region. It was also time to establish the independent State of Palestine.

KHALAF MM. BU DHHAIR (Kuwait) said that this debate was very important in the context of international peace and security. There was no peace, even after six decades, and the region continued to suffer from a deteriorating political situation. Israel continued its immoral practices and unceasingly pursued its illegal settlement policy in the occupied territories. It grabbed land, built settlements and expanded them, using the pretext of natural growth.

He said that Israeli initiatives were an obstacle to peace negotiations. Israel's recent policy on settlements excluded Jerusalem and was a flagrant manoeuvre to placate the Quartet by saying it was making concessions, though they did not meet the needs of the Palestinian people. Israel continued to build the "racist" wall, which ran counter to international decisions. It closed crossing points in Gaza and did not respect international law. He reiterated support for Assembly resolution 64/10 and the Secretary-General's report, which showed that Israel did not respect international law.

More than 40 years after the Israeli occupation, the overall situation in the Occupied Territories was dangerous and the humanitarian and economic situation was deteriorating, he said, expressing his country's ongoing support for the struggle of the Palestinian people. He called for the enforcement of the many United Nations resolutions and for Israel's withdrawal from the territories to the borders of 1967. As a hand was extended to the new American policy in the Middle East, Israel responded with more procrastination. The current Israeli Government had taken a step back from the negotiating process. The international community had to express its despair about achieving a new agreement. He called on the Quartet and the United States to give new impetus to the peace process.

NORIHIRO OKUDA (Japan), noting that relations with the Middle East had always been a matter of the highest priority for his country, said that Japan and the Arab League had decided to launch the Japan-Arab Economic Forum, the first meeting of which would be held in Tokyo next week. His Government would continue efforts to strengthen its multi-layered relations with Arab States, going beyond the area of economy to embrace the full spectrum of fields, including politics, culture and science, and technology. Indeed, Japan was willing to boost cooperation in those areas, notably by establishing an Egypt-Japan University of

Science and Technology. With such initiatives, Japan hoped to deepen its relations with the Arab League.

He said that realizing peace in the Middle East based on the two-State solution was essential for regional and global prosperity. Japan supported President Abbas' quest for peaceful coexistence with Israel and called on both sides to fulfil obligations reached under previous agreements, especially the Road Map. While calling on Israel to freeze its settlement activities, including "natural growth" in the West Bank, he acknowledged Israel's decision to freeze those activities for 10 months. Japan supported the Arab Peace Initiative and continued to call on Israel to engage with it, in cooperation with Arab States. To create a viable Palestinian State, it was vital to stabilize the security situation, improve economic conditions and build judicial, legislative and administrative structures. In that context, he appreciated the Programme of the Thirteenth Government as a blueprint for nation-building.

On the Gaza Strip, Japan was deeply concerned at the humanitarian conditions, which had not improved in the 10 months since the Security Council's adoption of resolution 1860. Urging Israel to ensure the smooth access of people and goods to the area, Japan encouraged the global community to enhance assistance to people there. At the same time, he called on Hamas to renounce its armed struggle against Israel and reaffirm its support for Egypt's efforts towards reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas. Finally, the normalization of relations between Syria and Lebanon was important to ensuring regional stability, and he welcomed the establishment of full diplomatic relations between those countries. He hoped that all parties would enhance efforts to realize a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, including through the Syrian and Lebanese tracks.

PETER MAURER ([Switzerland](#)) expressed his country's deep concern over the economic and humanitarian situation in Gaza, where more than a million inhabitants were still living in precarious conditions, as winter approached. He called on Israel to end the blockade there and to allow regular humanitarian access to the area. The cessation of rocket attacks against the Israeli civilian population should also be sustained.

Regarding the peace process, he said that strict compliance with the Road Map was the only means of achieving a two-State solution. He called on the parties to resume peace talks on the basis of a defined framework and precise timetable. A total stop to settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, as well as intra-Palestinian reconciliation, would create conditions for the resumption of talks. The decision by Israel to "put a brake" on new settlements was a gesture in that direction.

At the same time, Switzerland strongly regretted the destruction of houses and the expulsion of their inhabitants and the restrictions on movements of people and goods, which violated international law, he said. Regarding the Goldstone Report, Switzerland felt it was essential to implement the document's recommendations. It would hold consultations in the near future on the possibility of calling a conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, in accordance with Assembly resolution 64/10.

HILDE SOLBAKKEN ([Norway](#)), recalling the Assistant Secretary-General's remarks in the 24 November Security Council meeting, said that political efforts towards a negotiated two-State solution had reached a "deep and worrying impasse". President Abbas' decision not to seek re-election was a wake-up call, which reflected a situation on the Palestinian side in which confidence in a process with meaningful negotiations taking place had eroded. An abrupt change in leadership could seriously undermine the stability of the Palestinian Authority.

She said that the first challenge was to avoid a political vacuum in the Palestinian Territory, and the global community should strengthen efforts to re-engage President Abbas politically and send a message to Palestinians that a relaunch of negotiations was the only way forward. To restore Palestinians' confidence in the political process, the situation on the ground had to improve, including through implementation of Road Map obligations in terms of settlement activity and security. However, that was not enough. There was an urgent need for a common understanding of the terms of reference, which must be based on all earlier commitments and a clear timeline for resolving final status issues.

Turning to Norway's role as Chair of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, she said it was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain donors' motivation to contribute to ensure that the Palestinian Authority could sustain institution-building. Without a political horizon and a credible political process, it was hard for donors to justify high levels of contributions. Prime Minister Salam Fayyad's two-year plan for the establishment of a Palestinian State, presented on 22 September, had received unanimous support from donors. The plan was even more important as a platform for political development on the Palestinian side. That was not the time to let Palestinian institutions falter from a lack of funding.

ERTUĞRUL APAKAN ([Turkey](#)), aligning himself with the European Union, said all the challenges in the Middle East, while different, stemmed from the fact there was no functioning peace process. That issue had to be addressed immediately and the peace process reactivated on all its tracks. Obstacles had to be removed, the most prominent of which was Israel's continued settlement activities in the Occupied Territories, particularly East Jerusalem. Its evictions and demolitions of Palestinian homes were illegal. He called on that country to meet its Road Map commitments and to stop all settlement activities, completely and permanently.

He said that the status of Jerusalem was a core issue and any unilateral act directed at the nature of the city could have broad ramifications. He, thus, emphasized the importance of preserving its status, as well as its cultural and religious fabric, and urged Israel to refrain from any provocative action. The framework for peace, embodied in Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, Arab Peace Initiative and Road Map, should also be upheld.

There was a general convergence around a comprehensive peace based on two States living side-by-side, with agreed 1967 borders, Jerusalem as the capital for both States and a just settlement for refugees, he said. Reaffirmation of that broad result should help in working to reach it. The Syrian and Lebanese tracks also required attention. For resumption of the Syrian-Israeli track, both parties should show the necessary will to make progress. The wounds opened by Israel's operation in Gaza earlier this year were far from being healed. The full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) and opening of the crossings was a must for ending the unbearable situation for Gaza's 1.5 million Palestinians. He urged supporting Palestinian State-building, saying that Prime Minister Fayyad's two-year plan to prepare for Palestinian statehood was encouraging. Turkey would continue to make every effort to achieve a comprehensive and permanent peace in the Middle East. "We have to work harder", he stressed.

GARY QUINLAN ([Australia](#)) said the violence in the Gaza a year ago was a demonstration of how volatile the situation was at a time when it should have been long resolved. It was also an indication of how far off a resolution was. Negotiations towards peace must be revived and both sides must make substantive concessions. Negotiations could go forward by identifying a number of basic principles. For example, Israel had a right to exist and the Palestinians had a right to their own State. A two-State solution was the only possibility. Agreement could also be reached on some basic issues. One was that no party would take any unilateral action in anticipation of a solution, while the durable peace negotiations continued towards a mutually agreed solution.

He said that other starting points for the negotiation could include already agreed conditions. To begin with, Israel must stop settlement activity and the Palestinians should come together as a unified and viable entity. The Hamas refusal to accept the Quartet Road Map and its rejection of Israel's right to exist represented a serious impediment to any kind of progress. Similarly, Israel must stop reacting to situations with disproportionate force. The arms smuggling into Gaza must also stop, and the captured Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, must be released. Furthermore, related regional issues must be addressed. The solution in Lebanon must respect principles such as State sovereignty and integrity. Talks with Syria should resume, and that country should take a constructive role in the peace process. It should also cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on nuclear issues since concerns had been expressed about undeclared nuclear materials.

Finally, he said that Palestinian State required strong institutions, to which his country was contributing. It had contributed more than \$75 million towards that goal and more than \$45 million since the Gaza conflict. The critical point was that negotiations must commence for resolving the outstanding final status issues because the absence of peace in the Middle East was a threat to everyone in the world. Frankly, he added, the failure to address the lack of peace there after

more than 60 years reflected shame on everyone.

MARIA RUBIALES DE CHAMORRO ([Nicaragua](#)), aligning herself with the statement of the Non-Aligned Movement, said the situation in the Occupied Territories had deteriorated, owing to Israel's expansionist policies, in disregard of the will of the international community and in violation of international law. Its illegal occupation of Arab territories must cease immediately, thus, bringing an end to human rights violations there. The Palestinian Rights Committee was playing an important role in helping to create a free, independent and sovereign Palestinian State, and Nicaragua had co-sponsored all the resolutions to be taken up on those subjects. The situation of Palestine lay at the heart of the deteriorating situation in the Middle East. So many years after the creation of a Jewish State, the Palestinian people were still awaiting the creation of their own independent State – a need which Nicaragua had recognized since the 1980s.

She said that the Palestinians' desire was to find peace and live with their neighbour in a free, independent and viable State, which could not be achieved under Israeli occupation. Their unbearable situation had worsened since Israel's armed aggression in December 2008 and early January 2009, which had resulted in more than 1,000 deaths and injuries among civilians. The environment had been aggravated by toxic gases from white phosphorus and other devices of war, whose effects would be felt for many more years to come. Those responsible must be tried by impartial tribunals. Despite international condemnation, Israel – with the complicity of some permanent Security Council members – continued to violate the rights of Palestinian people, including their right to life and personal safety, through the indiscriminate use of force, in contravention of humanitarian and human rights law. That included the untenable human rights situation in East Jerusalem, where Israel continued to expel Palestinians from their homes and to expand their settlements.

She said that her Government believed in the need to build confidence to promote effective negotiations. There must be a politically just solution based on United Nations resolutions, including resolutions on the right of return of refugees and those that called for Israel's withdrawal to 1967 borders. Nicaragua also felt a solidarity with Lebanon and Syria. Israel must set aside its expansionist policies and withdraw from the territories it was occupying. All the measures that Israel was currently implementing, or sought to implement, "lacked legal effect".

ALFREDO LOPES CABRAL ([Guinea-Bissau](#)) said that the Palestinian question was at the heart of the Middle East conflict. Security Council resolution 497 (1981) required Israel's immediate withdrawal from the Syrian Golan, yet today, nothing had been done to lead one to believe that the problem would be handled. Relations with neighbours could not be based on anything other than internationally recognized legal principles. Together, States must persuade Israel to take a constructive look at what must be done to safeguard present and future generations. The international community had wasted too much time – those who were suffering could wait no longer. Generations of refugees lived in camps. The UNRWA had worked for 60 years to address the fate of Palestinians.

He said that for peace to return to the Middle East, everyone must shoulder their responsibility. In the Arab world, unity must be achieved and resources had to be made available to help Palestinians rebuild. Palestinians had to reconcile. Israel's existence had to be recognized and, in that context, he expressed appreciation for the French President's efforts. In the heart of the Arab family, reconciliation could prevail, notably between Syria and Lebanon. Israel must recognize that it was in its own peoples' interest to build lasting peace in the Middle East. Regional countries must also realize it was in their interests. There had been many failures since the Oslo and Madrid conferences and creation of the Arab Peace Initiative. No encouraging results had been seen.

Israel could not be allowed to occupy territories, and the global community must encourage all parties to return to the negotiating table, he said, asking why the world should accept that children in Gaza continued to die from a lack of medications. Guinea-Bissau would take a stance in defence of the human condition. With that, he encouraged the Secretary-General to ensure that dialogue was not broken. Palestinians had to speak with one voice. Hardliners had to realize it was not the barrel of a gun that would bring peace.

MANJEEV SINGH PURI ([India](#)) remarked that he would speak twice today, and did so with a heavy heart. The topics he would speak on were interlinked and had festered on the agenda for decades. As a nation with historic and cultural ties to the Middle East, his country had an abiding interest in the early resolution of the unresolved issues that had long troubled the region. West Asia was home to nearly 5 million Indians and was an important source for India's energy needs. The Indian Government was committed to the Palestinian people and their cause, and was unwavering in its support of their struggle for their legitimate rights. Believing the conflict in West Asia to be political in nature and one that could not be resolved by force, India wished to see the creation of an environment for the earliest possible resumption of dialogue. It favoured a negotiated solution where a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine could live within secure and recognized borders, in peace with Israel. Also, supportive of the Arab Peace Initiative, it had called for an end to Israeli settlements and for restrictions in movement to be eased.

He added that India was aware that genuine peace in the region also required the resolution of other issues, such as the restoration of other Arab lands that remained under occupation. Progress in the Lebanese and Syrian tracks was also important to a comprehensive and durable peace. India was in regular touch with interlocutors at the highest level. It remained steadfast in its commitment to render assistance to the Palestinian people, including in capacity-building and reconstruction. It had also contributed to United Nations peacekeeping efforts. Given the complexity of the task at hand, all sides needed to offer and accept compromises and concessions. The international community had a collective duty to help create a favourable environment within which negotiations could move forward.

Right of Reply

The representative of [Syria](#), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that Australia had called on his country to play a role in the peace process. He had also mentioned the role of the IAEA in his country. To clarify, the speaker had missed the fact that the discussion today was on the Israeli occupation of Arab territories and ways to put an end to the continued Israeli aggression against the people of the area. He seemed to want to deflect that issue by bringing in issues that had no relevance to the item under consideration. He seemed to favour swimming against the tide, going off the track on the consensus that had been expressed for two days regarding the situation.

By calling on Syria to play a leadership role in the peace process at the same time, he said, the Australian representative was missing an important political point. He was demonstrating a total ignorance of important regional changes that had occurred as a result of Syria's wise leadership.

Two months ago, he continued, two resolutions had called for Israel to submit its nuclear facilities to the IAEA for inspection. The Israelis had rejected the two resolutions with the statement that Israel would never cooperate with them. It was of great concern that the head of the Australian delegation would ignore Israel's violations, while expressing concern about Syria. It showed a serious bias, particularly since his country's nuclear programme was of a non-proliferation nature.

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