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Sixty-third General Assembly

Third Committee
33rd & 34th Meetings (AM & PM)

STRENGTHENING RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS KEY FOR PREVENTING CONFLICT,

STABILIZING POST-CONFLICT SITUATIONS. THIRD COMMITTEE TOLD

Hears from Special Rapporteur on Racism, Chair of Mercenaries Working Group; Religious Defamation, Progress towards Durban Review Conference among Issues

Shoring up respect for human rights was key to preventing conflict and stabilizing post-conflict situations, especially where racial and ethnic differences were being manipulated for political ends, the Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) was told today, as it discussed the elimination of racial discrimination and the rights of peoples to self-determination.

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Also today, Craig Mokhiber, Deputy Director, New York Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, introduced several reports of the Secretary-General on the subject of racial discrimination and right to self-determination. Fatimata-Binta Victoire Dah, Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, presented an oral report of that Committee's seventieth, seventy-first, seventy-second and seventy-third sessions.

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Background

The Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural) met today to discuss the elimination of racism and racial discrimination, including the comprehensive implementation of and follow-up to the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. It was also expected to take up the rights of peoples to self-determination.

Introductory statements were to be delivered by: the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance; the Chairperson of the Working group on the use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination; and the Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

On the subject of racial discrimination, the Committee had before it the text of four resolutions adopted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union at its 118th Assembly in April (Cape Town, South Africa), transmitted in a letter dated 8 July 2008 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Italy to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General (document A/63/123). The first text has the Inter-Parliamentary Union urging national parliaments to pass laws requiring terror suspects to be delivered to judicial authorities immediately upon arrest, so that they are not taken anywhere else for interrogation or further detention. The second text is on the role of Parliaments and the Inter-Parliamentary Union in ensuring a halt to the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation in occupied Palestine, in ending the blockade in Gaza and in accelerating the creation of a Palestinian State.

A third resolution – on migrant workers, people trafficking, xenophobia and human rights – emphasizes the need to protect victim's rights. The final resolution relates to Parliamentary oversight of State policies on foreign aid, in light of Parliament's role in shaping decisions on their respective country's budget allocation.

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On the topic of self-determination, the Committee had before it a report of the Secretary-General on the right of peoples to self-determination (document A/63/254 ), which outlines the proceedings of two United Nations human rights bodies in 2007, namely the Human Rights Council and the Human Rights Committee. Palestine was a prominent subject of discussion at the Council. The Human Rights Committee discussed issues involving Chile and the Sudan.

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Introduction of Reports

CRAIG MOKHIBER, Deputy Director, New York Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights...

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He also introduced the Secretary-General's report on the right of peoples to self-determination (document A/63/254 ).

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Statements

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CLAUDIA PÉREZ (Cuba)...

The right to self-determination was one of the most essential human rights and, as such, her delegation called for the immediate withdrawal of Israeli forces from all occupied territories, as well as the full respect of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to their sovereignty...

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Resumption of Statements

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YAN JIARONG (China)...

... As for the right to national self-determination, she said it was the "sacred political right" of the people of a country to fight foreign aggression, occupation and interference, and to safeguard national sovereignty, independence and the people's dignity. To that end, China supported the Palestinian people in their struggle to realize their right to self-determination, and called on the international community and all the parties concerned to work actively towards the early realization of lasting peace and stability in the Middle East.

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WAEL M. ATTIYA (Egypt) said international pledges to support and respect the right to self-determination as an inalienable right had not yet been implemented. People under foreign occupation had the right to resist occupation and to be free. Democracy and occupation could not coexist, and he drew attention to the situation in the Middle East, where Israel continued to claim that it was the only democracy, while continuing to deprive the Palestinian people from exercising their inalienable right to self-determination....

Despite the tangible positive developments in the activities of the Human Rights Council, the Council's success in performing its role in addressing the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories was still not ensured, he said. Success would require a solid determination to ensure Israel's full adherence to its international obligations and its full cooperation with the Special Rapporteur on the issue. The protracted nature of Israel's occupation in the Palestinian territories multiplied the negative effects suffered by Palestinians, and it was necessary now to "invigorate" the role of the United Nations in dealing with the human rights of the Palestinian people, along with other Arab peoples suffering under occupation. As the end of the second International Decade for the Elimination of Colonialism approached in 2010, it was incumbent upon the United Nations to reaffirm its commitment to implement the 1960 Declaration on Granting Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, through concrete steps to liberate all peoples from each and every form of foreign control.

SEYED HOSSEIN REZVANI (Iran)... Turning then to his prepared statement on the right of people to self-determination, he said that the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination had been obstructed for 60 years by the occupying power.

At its sixth special session in January 2008, the Human Rights Council had adopted a resolution that expressed grave concern over the repeated Israeli military attacks carried out in the occupied Palestinian territories, he said. However, despite that resolution and similar ones by other international bodies, the occupying power continued to perpetuate massive abuses of human rights and to deny the right to self-determination for the Palestinian people. The denial of the right to self-determination and the subjection of people to occupation and subjugation constituted a "grave denial" of fundamental human rights and was an impediment to the promotion of world peace and security. In closing, he emphasized the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and said that any non-cooperation by the occupying power should be met with concrete measures in response.

Mr. EL-SHAKSHUKI (Libya)...

He then turned to the issue of illegal settlements, which were established in violation of the principles of the United Nations Charter and Declaration of Human Rights, and which he said was a new form of racism, crime against humanity and a serious threat to international security. His country supported the right of self-determination and the right of people to their natural resources. People under occupation were, likewise, entitled to those rights. He expressed concern over the situation of the people living in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, who were subject to discrimination. Israel persisted in building the separation wall, despite numerous resolutions against it. The Palestinian people had the right to establish their own state and to enjoy their rights....

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RAJEEV SHUKLA ([India](#))...

Turning to the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, he said that India had consistently maintained unwavering support and solidarity for the goal of the Palestinian people to attain their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination. Indeed, India was with the “overwhelming majority” of countries who had affirmed their commitment to a negotiated two-State solution, accepted by the two principals. In that context, he welcomed all efforts to push the ongoing dialogue forward and to the achievement of the objectives set out in the Annapolis Conference. However, the United Nations and other international forums should not be used to “selectively redefine” some of the core principles of the United Nations Charter, in order to satisfy domestic political rhetoric. The right to self-determination should be seen in a historical perspective and should be applicable to peoples of non-self-governing colonies and trust territories.

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