

UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL MEETING ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

The role of youth and women in the peaceful resolution of the question of Palestine

UNESCO Headquarters, Paris
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Executive summary

The theme of the Meeting revolved around the growing role of women and youth in finding a peaceful resolution of the question of Palestine, especially in the light of the Arab Spring in the Middle East and the significant role of the social media in mobilizing these increasingly important groups in the Palestinian society as well as the global civil society.

Participants reviewed international support for on-the-ground initiatives of youth and women, and how international stakeholders can harness their energy and resourcefulness, empower them through education, training and economic opportunities, and involve them more in the political process. They also looked at the

impact of social media networks on building an open Palestinian society, while considering how Governments, United Nations entities and international civil society organizations could better coordinate efforts with Palestinian and Israeli youth and women's organizations.

Participants stressed that the harsh socioeconomic impact of the Israeli occupation on Palestinian youth and women left them marginalized and disenfranchised, and that they were mostly excluded from the political process. The subsequent challenges and home-grown and global efforts to improve their lot included finding ways to offer women additional training that would help them to develop their leadership capacities and find jobs in a very tight, male-dominated labour market. For young people, challenges included finding ways to include them in the political process without their being used as tools for furthering the agendas of political factions, and uniting their diverse voices across the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

While all agreed that information technology played a big role in Palestinian social cohesion and State-building, provided an important platform for the political education of the Palestinian youth and had given them access to a variety of ideas, trends and practices, some also pointed out the shortcomings of social media resulting from an information overflow, and the inability to control or regulate the content posted on the Internet. Participating on Facebook and clicking on a "like" icon also made young people complacent and unwilling to take to the streets as they thought this fulfilled their role as activists and was sufficient for their political participation.

Others argued that it was important to develop strategies to bolster education, and pointed to the need to hold Israel to account for human rights abuses in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. They emphasized that it was important to change the Israeli mindset towards the Palestinians, dismantle Israeli settlements, apply rights-based diplomacy to end the conflict, and better coordinate civil society and United Nations efforts on the ground. Participants also thought that the United Nations role in the Quartet, which was largely controlled by the United States, and its failure to implement its own resolutions, had delegitimized the United Nations in the eyes of the Arab world and within the global civil society.

The Meeting concluded that youth and women should enhance their use of social media tools as a platform for political participation, a network to unite diverse groups' struggles and rally against the occupation. Palestinians should take full advantage of the information technology that was becoming an utmost weapon of war.

I. Introduction

1. The United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine was held at the Headquarters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Paris on 30 and 31 May 2012, under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People ("the Committee") and in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolutions 66/14 and 66/15 of 30 November 2011. The theme of the Meeting was "The role of youth and women in the peaceful resolution of the question of Palestine".
2. The Committee was represented at the Meeting by a delegation comprising Abdou Salam Diallo (Senegal), Chair of the Committee; Zahir Tanin (Afghanistan), Vice-Chair; Christopher Grima (Malta), Rapporteur; Othman Jerandi (Tunisia); and Maria de los Angeles Flores Prida, Permanent Delegate of Cuba to UNESCO. The Meeting consisted of an opening session, three plenary sessions and a closing session.
3. The themes of the plenary sessions were: "The situation of youth and women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem", "Empowerment of women and youth: a core prerequisite in building the Palestinian society for an independent State of Palestine", and "The role of the international community, in particular the United Nations and civil society".
4. At the Meeting, presentations were made by 21 experts, including Palestinian and Israeli experts. Representatives of 59 Governments, Palestine, 5 intergovernmental organizations, 4 United Nations bodies, 26 civil society organizations, 7 media outlets, and special guests and members of the public attended the Meeting.
5. The summary of the Chair of the Committee on the outcomes of the Meeting (see annex I to the present report) was published shortly after the Meeting concluded its work, and is accessible at the website of the Division for Palestinian Rights, of the United Nations Secretariat, at www.un.org/depts/dpa/qpal/calendar.htm.

II. Opening session

6. The Meeting opened with a statement by United Nations Secretary-General **Ban Ki-moon**, delivered by means of video. The Secretary-General welcomed the Meeting's theme and said that women and young people largely drove the events of the Arab Spring. They rose up against human rights abuses and oppression, spoke out for equality and justice, dignity and decent work and they tapped the power of social networks for social good. He acknowledged the potential of young people to make history and transform their societies for the better.
7. However, the Secretary-General pointed out that Palestinian women and youth continued to face exclusion, unemployment and poverty. He said that the occupation made access to education, jobs and health care more difficult, and added that internal divisions only made the problem worse. He emphasized that Palestinian women and youth had a right to fulfil their aspirations without barriers and without discrimination, and to have their voices heard in decision-making. He said that the United Nations worked day in and day out to promote economic and political empowerment throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and that women and youth had much to contribute to secure a lasting Israeli-Palestinian peace.
8. He deplored the fact that a two-State solution was long overdue, and stressed that the status quo was unacceptable and unsustainable. He encouraged Palestinian and Israeli youth to build a future of peace and urged greater involvement of women in the peace process. In conclusion, he said that the United Nations would continue to support Palestinian women and youth and would not just make speeches about them. He called on the international community to listen to them and work with them. The Secretary-General reiterated that this was what the Meeting was about and that the participants had his full support.
9. **Abdou Salam Diallo**, Chair of the Committee, said that youths accounted for 64 per cent of the Palestinian population and women comprised half. It was paradoxical that while they suffered the most under the occupation – from violence, unemployment, lack of opportunities, social pressures and exclusion – their potential to help achieve peace and create a sovereign Palestinian State remained largely untapped. He stressed that participants had gathered at the Meeting in Paris to discuss the best way to make use of this tremendous capital for achieving peace and create a two-State solution, while it was still possible.
10. The Chair invited young people to share questions and ideas on Twitter and to spread the word through social media during the Meeting to initiate a global conversation, generate ideas and identify pitfalls. He pointed out that through social media, youths had shown their readiness to become agents of change. He called on them to use the Internet to further create pathways for peace, and reminded them to refrain from spreading messages of hate. The Chair said that the Committee had responded to the potential of social media by bringing together youth movement organizers and bloggers, broadcasting live on the Internet and communicating through Facebook and Twitter.

11. He said that the Meeting would also address ways of empowering women and young people, capacity-building and training, education for peace, the learning of practical skills, entrepreneurship, participation in decision-making, the creation of an open Palestinian society and social media. Referring to the twelfth anniversary of the adoption of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, the Chair said that it was the responsibility of the Committee, on this occasion, to highlight the situation of women and their leading role in society. He reminded the participants that the winds of change sweeping the region had resulted, in March of 2011, in the Palestinian factions coming together to lay the groundwork for a longed-for reconciliation, and that the role of youth and women had to be taken into account in this regard. He concluded his statement by calling on the region's women and young people to become more involved and to do so in a more visible way, refusing to become bystanders to history.
12. **Getachew Engida**, Deputy Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, speaking on behalf of the Director-General of UNESCO, said that the Meeting came at a watershed moment, seven months after Palestine had become the 195th member of UNESCO. The organization was deeply committed to a just and lasting peace in the region, and was working to create conditions for genuine dialogue, based upon respect for shared values and equal dignity for all. He explained that the UNESCO Office in Ramallah was highly active in educational and cultural activities, based on the organization's long-lasting commitment to strengthen Palestinian institutions. The Deputy Director-General stressed that building the defences of peace must start with women, and it must begin in the minds of girls and boys. Experience had shown that women's empowerment was a breakthrough strategy for sustainable development, and UNESCO was working towards that goal in Palestine.
13. Mr. Engida said that UNESCO was collaborating on research to better understand women's place in the Palestinian society and had introduced capacity-building measures in several ministries. Since 2006, UNESCO had supported gender equality: the Palestinian Women's Research and Documentation Centre to promote women's empowerment and capacity-building for post-conflict reconstruction and governance. He noted that all of this work was guided by the conviction that women's participation was vital to development, and that recognition of women's rights was a powerful signal of a wider commitment to the values of equality, justice, freedom and human dignity.
14. He stressed that education was the foundation for the building of more peaceful and prosperous societies and must be at the heart of all rehabilitation and development efforts in Palestine. He thought that no country better illustrated the importance of the right to education than Palestine and noted that the UNESCO Office in Ramallah had developed an integrated response to protect education for schools in Gaza at high risk of attack. He argued that the Arab Spring had shown the implications of underestimating young people's needs and aspirations.
15. **Rabiha Diab**, Minister for Women's Affairs of the Palestinian Authority, speaking on behalf of the Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority, as well as delivering the keynote address to the Meeting, said that Palestinian women had played a major part in building State institutions and had demonstrated their resilience by standing up to the occupier for over 60 years alongside men and through women's groups and movements. But after the signing of the 1993 Oslo peace accord, just 3 of the 300 Palestinian negotiators deciding on such important issues as health and water had been women, she said. The alarming situation at that time had prompted Palestinian women to advocate their equal representation in every step of the peace and development process. Women devised principles, which the authorities had taken on board. Article 9 of the Palestinian Basic Law, which functions as a temporary constitution for the Palestinian Authority, provides that all Palestinians are equal under the law and judiciary, without discrimination because of race, sex, colour, religion, political views or disability.
16. Ms. Diab explained that violence against women was one of the major factors which prevented women from contributing effectively to the development of society and building of the State. In 2010, 56 per cent of divorced women in the Palestinian Territories had been subjected to psychological violence by their previous husbands (49 per cent in the West Bank and 76 per cent in the Gaza Strip). Those subjected to physical violence represented 23 per cent (17 per cent and 34 per cent in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, respectively). She pointed out that women in the Gaza Strip were subjected to more violence by their husbands than were women in the West Bank, and that there were many reasons for the difference, including the siege, war and the famine which was imposed by the occupation on the population of the Gaza Strip.
17. Women also were poorly represented in some sectors of the labour market, she said. The proportion of women in the workforce was 14.7 per cent, which was an improvement on 2001, when it was 10 per cent. Of the women in the workforce, 27 per cent were unemployed, while a further 20 per cent of working women, including women in agriculture, worked for no remuneration. She noted that the public sector was the most welcoming to women, where they represented 37 per cent of employees. She emphasized that in order to prosper, young women needed a peace that guaranteed their rights. She appealed to the international community to help improve the economic status of Palestinian women by empowering and training them and providing them with material support, with the aim of advancing their status in the labour market. She argued that this would have a major impact on the advancement of women at all levels.
18. On a more positive note, she noted that notwithstanding all that the Palestinians had gone through, indicators showed that Palestinian women had a high educational level. Illiteracy rates among women had fallen from 16 per cent in 2000 to 7.8 per cent in 2011. Furthermore, she noted that, relatively speaking, women played an effective part in political life. Fully one third of the recently formed Government was comprised of women, including six women ministers. Women had since entered into areas previously unimaginable, representing heads of the State Security and Police divisions. Those female leaders promoted a positive image of women, which encouraged the Palestinian Authority to include other women in national decision-making and to integrate a gender focus into all ministries, she said. The strategy of the Palestinian Authority to fight violence against women, the signing by President Abbas of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the creation of a law that allowed women to run for president were a testament to the commitment of the Government to women's empowerment. Indeed, Palestinian women were ready, alongside men, to set up national institutions for their future State.
19. **Stéphane Frédéric Hessel**, Honorary Ambassador of France, in a keynote address to the Meeting agreed that UNESCO acceptance of Palestine as a member State was a major step forward, which had been long overdue. He said that Ms. Diab's statement, which conveyed the Palestinians' feeling of oppression, had brought home the point that Palestinians were still in an unacceptable predicament, subjected to continuing occupation, with their society fragmented. He noted that the Israeli propaganda had prevented many in the world from truly understanding the plight of the Palestinians. But, he said, all was not lost; the battle must continue.
20. He argued that the United Nations principle "We the peoples" must be applied to Palestine. But the Israeli public, which also was kept in the dark about the reality of Palestine and the suffering of the Palestinians, found that difficult to understand. That further exacerbated the unconscionable delay in advancing the peace process. Mr. Hessel said that successive Governments in Israel had never taken seriously the need to move towards peace. But, he insisted, one day they would have to acknowledge that they had gone down the wrong path. It was in the Israeli public's best interest to understand that the policies of their Government were criminal and that the Israelis and the Palestinians must be able to stand on equal footing to build a prosperous Middle East.
21. Mr. Hessel drew attention to the Russell Tribunal on Palestine, which was launched in 2009 by human rights activists and lawyers, based on international law as a legal frame of reference. He explained that the Tribunal had scrutinized the actions of Israel, the European Union, the United States and major industrial companies that violated international resolutions and court rulings concerning the rights of the Palestinian people.
22. He found it revealing that many Palestinian children, when asked what people most inspired them, would first cite Israeli women lawyers that defended the rights of the Palestinians in Israeli jails. That fact, he thought, enabled one to think of a possible future civic rearrangement among the citizens of Israel and Palestine that would allow them to live together peacefully.
23. Statements were also made by the representatives of Egypt, Senegal, Turkey, Sri Lanka, the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation, the League of Arab

States and Gabon.

24. The representative of **Egypt**, speaking on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, stated the Movement's full support for the admission of Palestine to UNESCO and expressed the hope that the Meeting would promote women's empowerment. He said that Palestinian women had set an example for women in other Arab countries and called for sweeping changes that would liberate the Palestinian people from oppressive Israeli policies.

25. The representative of **Senegal** expressed concern over the lengthy Israeli occupation's impact on the Palestinian society, particularly on women and youth. He reaffirmed the full support of Senegal for the Palestinian struggle and called on the Palestinians to not give in to hopelessness. Through their commitment to social matters, Palestinian women and youth fully supported the Palestinian society as a whole. If they could voice their views, they could play a catalytic role for a better future.

26. The representative of **Turkey** pointed to his country's assistance programme for Palestinian youth and women through the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency and the Turkish Red Crescent. He explained that it was building nurseries, primary schools, schools for disabled children and hospitals, as well as providing them and women's organizations with equipment. He said that in 2011 and 2012, Turkey had issued 120 scholarships to Palestinian students, and that the number was increasing annually. The assistance programme was also contributing to Palestinian State-building by supporting education programmes for doctors, police officers and others.

27. The representative of **Sri Lanka** called on all those in the Palestinian struggle, in particular youth organizations, to declare a moratorium on the targeting and killing of Israeli civilians, as the murder of Palestinian civilians did not justify the killing of Israeli children. He implored the Palestinians to heed the lessons learned in liberation struggles in Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique.

28. The representative of the **Organization of the Islamic Cooperation** (OIC) read out the statement of OIC Secretary-General Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, stressing the need to work towards a just and comprehensive solution of the Palestinian question through relevant United Nations and European Union resolutions and international mechanisms and pledging OIC solidarity with the Palestinian people.

29. The representative of the **League of Arab States** said that the Arab Peace Initiative adopted in Beirut was still on the table, but it could disappear owing to current Israeli policies on the ground. He emphasized that it was vital to mobilize regional and international forces to put an end to that dangerous drift, noting that bold strategic decisions must be made to prevent the status quo from determining the contour of a future peace.

30. The representative of **Gabon**, who spoke on behalf of the Group of 77 developing countries and China, said that issues such as settlement-building and Palestinian political prisoners had been overlooked in the opening session of the Meeting. She noted that international meetings had shown their mettle, but also their limit. She argued that it was necessary to explore new avenues to bring about the two-State solution and called for support to the Israeli lawyers representing Palestinian political prisoners.

III. Plenary sessions

A. Plenary I

The situation of youth and women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem

31. The speakers in plenary I addressed the following sub-themes: "The impact of the occupation on youth and women: socio-economic and health conditions; access to education and employment; situation of refugees"; "Political engagement and community initiatives: the role of youth and women's organizations"; and "Participation in the resistance to the occupation: challenges and opportunities".

32. **Siham Rashid**, Project Manager at the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) in Ramallah, focused on Jerusalem, which, she said, represented a microcosm of the overall situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. She shed light on the series of laws of the Government of Israel to expel the Palestinians from Jerusalem. For example, the Jerusalem Master Plan 2030 was a mandatory guide for all zoning and planning in the city, which aimed at maintaining a population ratio of 70 per cent Jews and 30 per cent Arabs through strict control of Palestinian construction permits and zoning laws. In addition, Israel's Basic Law of 1980, which unilaterally declared Jerusalem, "eternal and indivisible, as the capital of Israel", aimed at revoking the residency of the Palestinians living in East Jerusalem. Ms. Rashid noted that since 1967, over 14,000 Jerusalem residency cards had been revoked, and since 2000, over 120,000 applications for family unification had been denied, leading to forced family separation and fragmentation.

33. She argued that discriminatory policies affected the social, economic and political rights of the 360,000 Palestinians who lived in East Jerusalem, and especially impacted women and children. She pointed out a report by the Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling, which documented the psychological and emotional impact of forced evictions and housing demolitions on women: they described anxiety and distress. The women interviewed expressed particular concern about the impact on their children, who they saw as being disturbed and unsettled by the eviction and by the consequent move into overcrowded living conditions. She said that women who were often the emotional centre and the stabilizing force in the family found themselves having to cope with their own anxiety while caring for others as well. She added that if they were not able to overcome the trauma, their children would also suffer.

34. Another problem she discussed was the education system. Owing to Israel's education policy in East Jerusalem, an estimated 9,000 Palestinian children did not attend school, while half dropped out, according to the Palestinian Education Department. Because of a shortage of classrooms, children often studied in overcrowded, makeshift rooms in facilities not built for educational purposes. Women and girls were also sexually and psychologically harassed at checkpoints, she said. The separation Wall and its accompanying restrictions threatened the right to health, education, decent work and an adequate standard of living, particularly for expectant mothers, female students and workers.

35. Ms. Rashid concluded by calling on Israel to fully implement its obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women to protect women living in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Moreover, the international community had a collective responsibility to ensure that the voices of women and girls from Jerusalem were heard, valued and properly considered. Their vision was crucial to improve their future and a prerequisite to all efforts to achieve a just, lasting peace as set forth in Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security.

36. **Matthias Burchard**, Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) Representative Offices to the European Union and Geneva in Brussels, discussed UNRWA strategies to improve the lot of Palestinian refugee women and youth registered with the Agency. He said that in 2007, UNRWA adopted a gender policy, which emphasized gender equality as a strategy to advance development, peace and security for the Palestine refugees. In addition, the UNRWA Medium Term Strategy 2010-2015 promoted gender equality in all of its services. As an example of this new approach, he cited the Agency's health programme, which gives priority to reproductive health care and family planning concerns and includes men in its services. Also, its microfinance programme strove to give women the same access to loans as men. He noted that in 2011, the UNRWA Microfinance Department

had granted almost 40 per cent of loans to women in Gaza, Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic and the West Bank. This represented a significant increase -- by 27 per cent -- from 2010. He added that in the West Bank, UNRWA was introducing new professions and training opportunities for women. Examples included photography, accounting, banking and financial management courses as well as courses in food processing as a response to identified market needs, especially in the Jordan valley area.

37. Discussing the Agency's work to reduce the unemployment rate among youth, which was particularly high among young women in Gaza, he said that UNRWA had launched the Young Women Leaders Programme in 2011, which gave female graduates the requisite skills in information technology, project planning, management and English to compete in the labour market. Furthermore, the UNRWA Engaging Youth Conference, held in Brussels in March, had gathered for the first time global leaders such as the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Palestinian refugee youths to discuss the needs, hopes and aspirations of youth in a changing Middle East.

38. Mr. Burchard explained that at the conference in Brussels, UNRWA had pledged itself to the "10 Youth Commitments" in education, health, vocational training, microfinance, skills, rights and participation, partnerships and communication. He emphasized that youth accounted for 30 per cent of the registered Palestine refugee population and was growing at an unprecedented rate. There was no doubt that UNRWA must engage with youth as they were the future human capital, the source of productivity and a potential positive force for change in their respective societies.

39. **Nour Odeh**, a freelance journalist and media consultant from Ramallah, began her presentation by pointing out that any and all of the rights the Palestinian women and youth had been achieving were limited by an artificial ceiling that the reality of the Israeli occupation imposed on Palestinian development efforts. Yet, she said, Palestinian women and youth played an important role as activists and were key contributors to Palestinian development, especially in the areas of human and social rights. She argued that the determined spirit of the Palestinian youth compelled the Palestinian political parties in March 2011 to heed the calls for national unity and begin a process of reconciliation. She noted that 42 per cent of the Palestinians living in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, were less than 15 years of age and 77.4 per cent under were 30 (as of December 2010). She said that with such a young population, the Palestinian society was in constant motion and in a state of perpetual discussion. This, she argued, expanded the possibility of social change.

40. Ms. Odeh noted that because Internet services were accessible and largely affordable, Internet usage rates were encouraging, and the opportunity to use the Internet for activism was available. Drawing on the social media and other tools to make their voices heard, the Palestinian youth were creating new political dynamics. For example, last year, Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad had taken the unprecedented step of soliciting public input on his Facebook account on whom to appoint as ministers in his new Government. Similarly, the support of youth, through daily rallies and social media campaigns of the massive hunger strike of the Palestinian prisoners launched in January 2012, had brought world attention to their plight, helping to seal a deal that met the prisoners' demands for better living conditions. She also recalled that in order to rally support for Palestine's bid for full United Nations membership in 2011, more than 3,000 young activists had organized town-hall meetings across the West Bank and global awareness campaigns.

41. Talking about the side effects of the occupation, Ms. Odeh stressed that in 2011, unemployment among the Palestinian youth stood at 46.5 per cent in the Gaza Strip and 25.8 per cent in the West Bank. She emphasized that the Palestinian youth and women were among the most vulnerable groups affected by punitive Israeli measures, including but not limited to detention, physical assault, home demolitions and restrictions on movement. Still, women and youth were highly involved in human and social rights activism. She noted that in May 2011, thanks to women's advocacy efforts through the media, an archaic law that allowed perpetrators of so-called honour killings to go unpunished had been repealed. It was a resounding victory for those who had struggled for years to achieve justice for the victims. But she cautioned against comparing young Palestinians to other Arab youth fighting for their rights; the Palestinians were not experiencing a "Spring", but had been living in an ongoing "Spring" for the better part of the past 50 years.

42. **Akram Natsheh**, from Youth Against Settlements in Hebron, said that the group had adopted the path of non-violent popular resistance against the occupation and worked on resisting settlement activities within the city of Al-Khalil (Hebron). He explained that in Hebron, Israel had set up five settlements and hundreds of military checkpoints, effectively dividing the city in two. Youth Against Settlements had carried out hundreds of protests and campaigns to end human rights violations against Palestinians and spread awareness globally.

43. He said that the group's biggest success story was the eviction of Israeli settlers from a Palestinian house in the Tall al-Rumayda district, after a yearlong legal and rights battle. In 2012, it had organized 35 events in countries worldwide to demand that Israel open Martyr Street linking north and south Hebron, which the Israeli authorities had closed without any reasonable justification. He noted that the group also participated in action to support persons exposed to hostilities: it documented the hostilities with video cameras, turned over the recordings to organizations active in the area of human rights, published them through social media and sometimes presented them on television channels. He argued that the documentation of those events had helped to reduce them, in addition to creating awareness among the citizens about how to proceed legally when their rights were being violated.

44. Mr. Natsheh cited other youth groups' activities and issues of concern, such as the demand for the right to travel, the right to housing, especially in Area C, the return of confiscated land and property, the opening of roads, the building of houses, the support for Palestinians living in caves and the resistance to the Wall. He said that the diverse nature of issues on which the youth groups worked, and the fact that each of them worked in a different region, sometimes rendered it difficult to unite their efforts fully. He noted that on certain occasions, however, all youth movements and groups joined together in one action, for example to show solidarity with the prisoners or to commemorate the day of al-Nakba. Women, he said, were increasingly joining the popular resistance, even leading rallies and campaigns in some areas.

45. **Mohammed S. M. Iqtifan**, Campaign Coordinator of the Migratory Letters Campaign, Gaza, described what Palestinian youths had come to call "one big prison" and their feeling of helplessness and hopelessness. He noted that the majority of youths, especially young women, faced extremely limited employment opportunities. The Israeli operation Cast Lead had further exacerbated the effects of the continuing illegal closure and had had a devastating impact on the overall economy of the Gaza Strip, he said. As a result, over 70 per cent of the population in Gaza were considered food insecure or vulnerable to food insecurity. He argued that the large cohort of disaffected youth had the potential to become a socially and politically destabilizing force, noting that Rapid Appraisal interviews revealed that 57 per cent of youths had expressed the willingness to be active in any new intifada against the occupation, and 72 per cent of youths had said that they would participate in demonstrations against the occupation.

46. Mr. Iqtifan said that despite these hardships, young Palestinians understood their situation and expressed the hope for the future. More than half supported the two-State solution and ending the occupation through non-violent means, while 87 per cent were confident in their ability to lead the country in the future. He said that young Palestinians until now had not had a chance in practical terms to effectively participate in the political life, and 62 per cent of youths believed that their needs and priorities were not integrated in public policies and decisions.

47. Notwithstanding that predicament, the youth continued to be active and were increasingly determined. Data related to information technology during the past five years indicated a remarkable development in terms of the access to and the use of information and communications technology. The data reported in 2012 showed that the proportion of young people who use the computer reached 87.9 per cent in the Palestinian Territory (87.4 per cent in the West Bank and 88.6 per cent in the Gaza Strip), compared with 47.6 per cent in 2004. With regard to the use of the Internet, the results showed that 46.7 per cent of young people used the Internet in the Palestinian Territory in 2009 (49.2 per cent in the West Bank and 42.8 per cent in the Gaza Strip) compared with 20.3 per cent in 2004. 32.9 per cent of the youth in the Palestinian Territory in 2009 had an e-mail account (36 per cent in the West Bank and 27.9 per cent in the Gaza Strip), compared with 14.3 per cent that had an e-mail account in 2004. The results furthermore revealed that the proportion of young people who had a mobile phone amounted to 63.2 per cent in the Palestinian Territory (67 per cent in the West Bank and 57 per cent in the Gaza Strip) in 2009, compared with 34.9 per cent in 2004.

48. During the lively discussion that followed, speakers talked of the “safe passage” – a designated route inside Israel that would connect the West Bank and Gaza – an obligation that was 15 years overdue and to which Israel had committed in various agreements. Furthermore, the new border crossing from Gaza into Egypt [near Kerem Shalom Kibbutz] was not actually within Gaza but in Israel and had turned the Strip into an island, a speaker said. Israel was either trying to open one crossing and close all others or create an island under the Israeli army control, with only one highway or bridge as the passageway for imports or exports. Even now, 24 per cent of Gaza was restricted. Anything that moved in this area was “shot, killed, or destroyed”. Some speakers called on the United Nations not to force the Palestinians to accept bilateral negotiations with Israel. Jerusalem, water, security and borders were all regional, and not bilateral, issues, they said.

49. A Palestinian representative asked when the statements of the international community on the wrongdoings and violations of Israel would turn into actions. The participant urged the United Nations to assume responsibility and stand up in the face of the status quo.

50. As an international law professor, said another participant, it was very difficult to explain to students how Israel was allowed to be above the law. He hoped that the United Nations would respect fundamental international law, breached by Israel both in times of war and peace. Also, he wondered why no action had been taken against Israel by the International Criminal Court.

51. Another participant said that the Israeli occupation used all ways and means to break down the Palestinian people. The Palestinian economy lost millions of dollars owing to unemployment and poverty as a result of the occupation. A concern was expressed about the future sovereign State of Palestine in the face of depleted natural resources owing to the occupation.

B. Plenary II

Empowerment of women and youth: a core prerequisite in building the Palestinian society for an independent State of Palestine

52. The speakers in plenary II addressed the following sub-themes: “Efforts to empower women and youth: capacity-building and training; education; job and career opportunities; entrepreneurship”; “Security Council efforts to empower women: resolution 1325 (2000)”; “Participation of Palestinian youth and women’s groupings in the decision-making process – access and involvement in actions and initiatives in support of the two-State solution”; and “The role of youths in contributing to the building of an open Palestinian society: social media and networks”.

53. **Louise Haxthausen**, Programme Coordinator for Conflict and Post-Conflict Operations at UNESCO, said that the very complex environment in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, with its constant humanitarian emergencies, development and the subsequent unravelling of it, made it challenging to consolidate gains in the empowerment and participation of women and youth. She noted that there was a general feeling of uncertainty, individually and collectively. Constant fear and violence had particular repercussions for women and youth. She emphasized that education, culture and media development, the focus of her organization’s work, were “enablers” for development. They built resilience, encouraged innovative and critical thinking as essential elements to fulfil personal aspirations and the development of society, created new avenues for citizen participation and provided new skills and employment opportunities. She said that, for example, education, although not lifesaving, created a feeling of normalcy. And strong cultural ties between Gaza and the West Bank and Jerusalem were crucial for socioeconomic development and cohesion among the Palestinian people.

54. Ms. Haxthausen noted that the occupation’s unseen psychosocial impact on education was tremendous, stunting the ability of educators to teach and students to learn. She explained that to protect the right to education in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, UNESCO provided preparedness training for school administrators and community leaders to shield schools from attacks and monitored grave human rights violations against children. She also said that while education, school enrolment and graduation were highly valued in Palestine, few women opted for science and technical courses, making it more difficult for them than for men to find jobs after graduation. Moreover, she said, many of the most talented and skilled women and youth left to pursue careers and lives abroad.

55. While most grade-school teachers in Palestine were women, more could and should be done, in Ms. Haxthausen’s view, to increase women’s participation in academia. UNESCO was carrying out research in that area through the Ramallah-based Palestinian Women’s Research and Documentation Centre. She noted that the agency also promoted the development of social media, which gave Palestinians whose physical movements were restricted, a vital tool for communicating with the outside world. Moreover, UNESCO encouraged women’s participation in the media and worked to eliminate the glass ceiling they faced in that field. She said that the agency partnered with media organizations to support women’s career development, and pointed out that the “Arab Spring” had shown the tremendous impact of the media on development. In 2009, UNESCO had started a citizen blogging programme in the West Bank. The subsequent demand among citizens for social media training was huge, and many of the trainees had since employed social media to raise the profile of Palestine across the Arab region.

56. **Nawaf Salam**, Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations in New York, discussed the failure of the Security Council to protect Palestinian civilians from the Israeli occupation. He said that since adopting landmark resolution 1265 (1999) on protecting civilians in armed conflict, the Council had incorporated such protection into the mandates of peacekeeping operations in strife-torn areas, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Côte d’Ivoire, Chad, Haiti and the Sudan. But owing to the lack of political will of some Council members, Palestinians remained the exception to the rule. He argued that Palestinian women and girls were particularly vulnerable to the occupation, but again, the Council had exhibited paralysis in implementing its resolution 1325 (2000). He called on all parties to armed conflict to, inter alia, fully respect international law applicable to the rights and protection of Palestinian women and girls.

57. He noted that the restrictions on movement caused by the occupation impeded women’s access to health care, forcing some to give birth at checkpoints because they could not reach a hospital. Palestinian female prisoners constantly faced torture, humiliation and horrendous living conditions, and while Israeli female prisoners lived in separate quarters supervised by women only, their Palestinian counterparts lacked such protection. He argued that similarly, Palestinian children were deprived of an elaborate protection system, and the Israeli authorities were not held to account, even though a November 2011 report of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) revealed that 84 per cent of all murders and injuries of Palestinian children were committed by the Israeli security forces. In violation of the rule of law principle of proportionality, Israeli forces detained and prosecuted, blindfolded, stripped and beat Palestinian children as young as 12 years old for throwing stones. He added that in its February 2012 report, Defence for Children International had shed light on the ways in which Israeli forces used children as human shields in Israeli military operations.

58. In conclusion, Mr. Salam said that it was high time for the few Security Council members who were hindering any progress on the question of Palestine to allow for the Council’s condemnation of such Israeli practices. Israel’s old adage that international humanitarian law did not apply to Palestine since it was not a State added insult to injury and was a manifestation of the disdain of Israel for the international community’s will and the Council’s resolutions. He insisted that the time for ending the Palestinian exception to the Council’s protection was long overdue.

59. **Sabri Saidam**, Adviser to the President of the Palestinian Authority on Telecommunications, Information Technology and Technical Education, focused on the empowering effect of the widespread use of information and communications technology in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. He noted that the Palestinians had the world’s highest rate of Facebook users per capita. Ninety per cent of the population had cell phones, while more than 30 per cent had access to the Internet. He argued that Facebook had the potential to remove heads of State from office, and Israel needed to fear that use. He said that traditional weapons used so far by Israel, notably weapons of mass destruction, were becoming obsolete, while information technology was becoming the greatest weapon of war. He pointed out that even the Prime Minister of Israel had admitted that information technology was the foremost threat against Israel. The reason for this, he opined, was that

information technology enjoyed freedom from censorship and allowed people to speak freely. He said that Palestinians were on the brink of conducting an electronic intifada, which would become a true insurrectional movement.

60. Mr. Saidam then showed a short film of a Palestinian villager in Bethlehem confronting Israeli soldiers who had stopped him and other Palestinians at a checkpoint. The film, made by Palestinian youths in the presence of foreign journalists, was a poignant example of how social media was being used to reveal the reality of the occupation. He then recounted the story of his mother, who, en route to a doctor's appointment in Jerusalem, had died after Israeli soldiers detained her at a checkpoint.

61. **Muath Abu Arqoub**, a youth activist and expert on social media, said that action against the occupation, whether through leadership in the field, the media or the resistance, was fuelled largely by youths, which comprised three quarters of the Palestinian society. Having relied on local universities as a vehicle for political participation and freedom of expression, youth were expanding their reach to the online world. He noted that some studies estimated that there were between 900,000 and 1 million Facebook users in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the highest per capita percentage of online users in the world, and that number was rising fast. Youth spent between two and four hours a day online, not just for socializing, but also for civic activism.

62. He argued that the sociopolitical changes sweeping the Arab world had undoubtedly increased subscriptions to and involvement in social media, particularly among youth, as a tool for building an open Palestinian society and fostering lively debate on various issues. As an example, he cited the Quds News Network, a Palestinian youth site launched in 2011, which already had more than 240,000 subscribers and was a primary source of news for many people. Another example was a mock news agency that publishes fictional stories, launched three months prior, which was also rapidly gaining followers. He explained that the news agency gave details on the practices of the occupation and was sharply critical and contemptuous of Palestinian politicians and the Palestinian situation in general.

63. In conclusion, he said that social networking sites provided an important platform for the political education of the Palestinian youth and had given them access to a variety of ideas, trends and practices. He emphasized that they had been instrumental in increasing political involvement and interaction with events and had played a role in disseminating and upholding the culture of dialogue. He expressed the view that social network tools might also strengthen public oversight of Government performance and improve accountability, reinforced the right of access to knowledge and information, and supported the implementation of human rights principles. He also thought such sites might contribute to the empowerment of women and help to increase their participation in various aspects of life, including politics, as well as encourage social change. However, he said that the picture was not always completely positive, given the challenges and risks connected with the use of social networking sites. The huge and never-ending flood of information and the inability to control or regulate them required further studies on the status of such sites and their impact on and the risks they posed to the Palestinian youths as they tried to achieve justice and freedom for their people.

64. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of **Mauritania** asked Mr. Arqoub if the social media had brought the Palestinians into a more dynamic frame of mind and enabled them to foster ties with Israelis who were sympathetic to the Palestinian plight. The representative of **Peru** asked about the online links between South American youth of Palestinian descent and Palestinian youth.

65. **Matthias Burchard** appealed to the Committee to involve more Palestine refugees, in particular youth and women, in its future meetings, and pledged UNRWA support for that. He asked Mr. Salam to elaborate on how a law recently adopted in Lebanon to facilitate Palestine refugee work in Lebanon could be implemented. A participant asked Mr. Salam why resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security had not been implemented.

66. Several representatives of civil society organizations asked about UNESCO policies concerning Palestine, particularly now that the latter was a member of the agency. They asked how the rights of the Palestinians fit into the UNESCO mandate to protect the rights of indigenous peoples, particularly in the face of Israeli law that did not recognize the rights of Bedouins. One participant asked how the agency was protecting Palestinian heritage, which was being plundered and hijacked to promote tourism to Israel.

67. A journalist wondered if too much attention was given to short-term employment rather than to long-term development and a secure future, and how UNESCO could help change that in the sectors it worked in.

68. In response, **Louise Haxthausen** said that UNESCO had staffed the UNRWA education sector. UNESCO was working with UNRWA and the Palestinian Ministry of Education to harmonize education policies for all Palestinian children, and through its Ramallah office, the agency sought to involve refugees, in particular female refugees, in education as well as cultural activities. She said that the admission of Palestine to the organization and the fact that it was becoming a State party to UNESCO conventions gave Palestine new rights, in particular cultural rights. As a result, there definitely was room for more cooperation in the future. She explained that in the next few months, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee would consider the request of Palestine for the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem to become a World Heritage Site.

69. **Sabri Saidam** said that young Internet users had relatively limited influence on political leaders. The latter must become more receptive to bloggers. He noted that concerning online communication with the Palestinian diaspora in Latin America, the problem was that they did not speak Arabic, making it difficult for them to communicate with their Palestinian brethren.

70. With regard to the situation of refugees in Lebanon, Nawaf Salam said that there was not just a single law, but an entire attitude that had begun to change in 2005 to give Palestinian refugees greater rights in the labour market of Lebanon. Regarding the lack of implementation of resolution 1325 (2000), he said hundreds of United Nations resolutions had not been implemented owing to the lack of political will of its Member States, in particular those with the veto power in the Council.

71. **Muath Abu Arqoub** pointed to a recent accident in which Palestinian schoolchildren had been burned on a school bus during a field trip. He emphasized that several negative postings by Israeli youth on Facebook about the Palestinian children had stirred caution over the role of social media. He noted, however, the truth-revealing power of social media, stressing that virtual media coverage of the uprising in Tunisia had differed greatly from that of the traditional media.

C. Plenary III

The role of the international community, in particular the United Nations and civil society

72. The speakers in plenary III addressed the following sub-themes: "Targeted programmes by United Nations entities on the ground"; "International civil society action to end the occupation and achieve a two-State solution"; and "Cooperation and coordination between the United Nations, international civil society organizations and Palestinian youth and women organizations".

73. **Tal Harris**, Executive Director of One Voice Israel, said that the organization One Voice, with offices in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, supported full Palestinian membership in the United Nations and the two-State solution. As an Israeli, he did not share his Government's view that Palestinian statehood would threaten the security of Israel. On the contrary, he argued, statehood was a prerequisite for it. He explained that most Israelis and Palestinians were political moderates, but a violent fundamentalist minority in Israel was taking the lead. He said that the YESHA Council, a major fundamentalist group, repeatedly

pushed the Israeli Parliament and the Government to enact and implement settlement expansion policies. It was working hard to sacrifice the future in the name of its maximalist interpretation of history.

74. Mr. Harris said that One Voice was working to prevent Israel from turning into an apartheid binational State which violated basic human and civil values and the principle of self-determination. It was working with Palestinian partners, who supported pragmatic Palestinian leaders such as President Mahmoud Abbas, to monitor what Israel was doing and not doing to secure a two-State solution with mutually agreed land swaps. He noted that One Voice was not alone in Israel; 55 members of the 120-member Israeli Knesset supported the two-State solution, and hundreds of Israeli youth activists were working directly with almost 40 of those 55 members.

75. He said that together, they were confronting a bid by Knesset member Zevulun Orlev, set to be put to a vote, to legalize all illegal Israeli outposts in the West Bank before the order by the Supreme Court of Israel to dismantle those outposts took effect in the coming months. Youth activists from across Israel were planning to gather in front of the Israeli Prime Minister's house to set up their own "illegal outpost" and to post signs across Jerusalem calling on the Prime Minister, Defence Minister and the head of Kadima to prevent the legalization of the outposts, as well as make hundreds of phone calls urging Israelis to lobby for the same.

76. **Rutie Atsmon**, Co-founder and Director of Windows: Channels for Communication, said that she was participating in the Meeting because she refused to see the Palestinians as the enemy. She said that her organization was comprised of Israeli Jews, Palestinians who were Israeli citizens and Palestinians living in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The aim of the group was to end the occupation and enable both sides to live together in dignity. She noted that for generations, Israelis had been raised to believe the whole world was against them, that the occupied land was theirs alone, and that Israel's actions against the Palestinians were in self-defence. She pointed out that many Israeli youths were unaware of the grave injustice against the Palestinian people; most of the Israeli public had not even heard of the Arab League peace plan.

77. Ms. Atsmon noted that bringing together youths from both sides of the conflict enabled Israeli teenagers to break free from that perpetual cycle and understand that the security they desired could only be achieved through a true rights-based peace. It helped them understand the national, economic and cultural oppression of the Palestinian society. At the same time, she said, Palestinian youths learned that portions of the Israeli public supported Palestinian rights and aspirations. Together, the youths were taught coping skills and how to work together to end the occupation. She explained that at the end of their joint workshops, their exchanges of information on such issues as releasing prisoners, recruitment of youths to the Israeli army and violent and non-violent struggle, were published in a joint Windows magazine that was distributed to the public.

78. Moreover, Ms. Atsmon's organization worked to help teenagers understand the role of the international community in the conflict, and not be swayed by those with negative interests, she said. That included the financial interests of weapons manufacturers that profited from the conflict, Governments that had influenced it from its early stages, diasporas advocating for the complete defeat of the other side and international organizations, which, despite good intentions did not always know what to do. In conclusion, she said that young people growing up today between the sea and the Jordan River had not created this tragic conflict. They were born into it. She argued that they were all victims of the historical circumstances which had created it, and it was the adults' responsibility to give them the knowledge and the tools they needed to create change, the confidence to use them and the hope that this was possible.

79. In her talk, **Phyllis Bennis**, Director of the New Internationalism Project and a Fellow at the Institute for Policy Studies, pointed to the failed international diplomacy over the decades to bring peace with justice to the region. She said that the United Nations role in the Quartet, which was largely controlled by the United States, had done great damage to the reputation of the Organization in the region. United Nations resolutions often did not make it to the floor, and those that were passed were almost never implemented. She argued that this failure had delegitimized the United Nations in the eyes of the Arab world and within the civil society. She urged delegates to consider the 2006 statement before the General Assembly of the President of Brazil, which had acknowledged the failure of the global North's role in diplomacy and called for the global South to replace it. She emphasized that when traditional diplomacy failed, it was civil society's job to take up initiatives.

80. Ms. Bennis noted it was important to acknowledge that the peace talks had failed, and to develop an entirely different kind of diplomacy, centred on a rights-based approach. She insisted that, moreover, United States policy must change, pointing out that in 2012, while the United States economy was faltering, its Government had added \$1 billion to its \$3.1 billion in annual aid to the Israeli military. She added that a new United States law required the United States Administration to protect the Israeli Government from being held accountable in the United Nations for violating international law. The obstacles were even greater when United Nations officials were directly recruited from the United States Administration. But, she said, the United Nations was able to do very little without the support of its Member States, and therefore civil society needed to call them out, and not allow the United Nations to be dominated by one Power. She argued that the Organization's delegitimization was the result of its collaboration with the United States. She pointed out that the Charter of the United Nations began with "We the peoples", not "We the Governments", and that civil society must challenge how the veto power in the Security Council was used.

81. She pointed to growing civil society action to end the occupation and human rights violations against Palestinians, such as the hunger strike of Palestinian prisoners, protests against the separation Wall, the Russell Tribunal and the World Social Forum Free Palestine, to be held in Brazil in September. Moreover, the public opinion in the United States was shifting towards rights and peace. The United States Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation advocated for boycotting Israeli products and divesting from and imposing sanctions on Israel. And growing civil movements in the United States, such as Jewish Voice for Peace, spoke out against the occupation. She noted that 63 per cent of United States Democrats believed the Israeli settlements were built on illegally expropriated land.

82. **Shifa Jayousi**, Programme Officer at the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process in Jerusalem, centred her talk on the need to engage civil society in the work of the United Nations, particularly since the Organization did not have the financial and human resources to respond to the needs of the Palestinian women and youths. She said that more than 25 United Nations agencies were working in the Occupied Palestinian Territory to address challenges facing young people in the areas of employment, education, financing, coordination and freedom of movement. A major concern was the "brain drain" of Palestinians to other markets owing to the lack of jobs at home. The Palestinians also faced difficulty in dealing with an inadequate education system, despite private and international investment. The lack of financing for projects was creating donor-driven interventions and competition among civil society organizations for money for their respective activities.

83. Ms. Jayousi noted that fragmentation and a lack of coordination and networking among various groups were also problematic. There was little information about what group was doing what and with whom, as well as a lack of transparency, accountability and responsiveness to constituencies. She argued that the key was for civil society organizations to interact in a way that made their input at the United Nations more effective and in the service of the basic needs of Palestinian society. The Organization needed to work with civil society groups to clearly define a shared set of underlying principles, enabling frameworks, goals and operational systems for partnerships.

84. The United Nations could support civil society organizations in developing a transparent system to become accountable to their respective constituencies and to each other, she said. It could help establish an enabling environment for effective partnership based on negotiation and agreed intentions and explicit outcomes that would bring benefits for all people. She emphasized, however, that this partnership between the United Nations and civil society organizations should enhance the activity of the Government and not serve as a substitute for their responsibilities to address people's basic needs. United Nations agencies, on the other hand, should strengthen inter-agency coordination and collaboration at all levels, she concluded.

85. **Fadwa Khawaja Al-Shaer**, Director General at the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Department of the Ministry of Interior of the Palestinian Authority, said that there were more than 4,000 NGOs registered in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and 200 organizations registered with the Ministry of Interior. Another 450 had been deregistered for failing to represent their stated mandates or for serving as covers for other causes. She said that civil society organizations frequently complained that international organizations weakened the role of women's and other civil society groups, and that the organizations used these groups to export and implement their own strategies. She noted that international organizations were also criticized for monopolizing areas in which local institutions were highly competent, weakening their power and ability.

86. The United Nations agencies did not sufficiently, or sometimes not at all, coordinate their projects with local civil society groups, resulting in overlapping efforts which often negatively impacted programme implementation, she said. NGOs that registered with the Palestinian ministries were called upon to cooperate in good faith with Israel. But she said that she had not seen the same policy on the Israeli side. She called on Israeli civil society groups to work to ensure that the status of NGOs was also clearly supervised to ensure reciprocal cooperation.

87. During the ensuing discussion, a journalist asked the Israeli panellists to elaborate on what they believed was a two-State solution and why right-wing politicians were increasingly elected to office in Israel.

88. The Minister for Women's Affairs of the Palestinian Authority, **Ms. Diab**, joined several others in lauding the efforts of the Israeli activists, but she cautioned that on a practical, physical level it was nearly impossible for Israeli and Palestinian activists to work together owing to laws restricting their physical movement.

89. One participant asked Mr. Harris how he would deal with the right of return of Palestinian refugees, if given the role of the Israeli Prime Minister. Some participants directed their questions to Ms. Bennis. One asked if there could ever be a realistic way forward to find a solution to the conflict as long as United States military aid to Israel continued.

90. In response, **Rutie Atsmon** said the right wing in Israel was indeed getting stronger and that civil society groups like hers, with limited resources, were in ongoing competition with them. Still, there were positive changes on the ground. For instance, Israelis were increasingly refusing to serve in the army, particularly in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. She noted that 30 years previously, Israeli authorities did not talk about two States, but that today, no one in Israel questioned the right of existence of a Palestinian State. She argued that the two-State solution was not a question of what, but of when. For her organization, it was important that any solution was based on equality and human rights. She said that while tens of thousands of Palestinian and Israeli women were involved in such civic activism, too few women held political office. Civil society in Israel was working to end the occupation now before it was too late.

91. **Tal Harris** said that he envisioned a two-State solution based on the 1967 borders and comprising a prosperous Palestinian State. As Prime Minister, he said he would advocate for the right of return of Palestinian refugees to the Palestinian State, and the right of return of Jewish refugees to Israel. He explained that One Voice did not directly address human rights, focusing instead on political advocacy. In his view, the right wing in Israel was strong owing to several factors, among them the fact that the 35 per cent of Israelis who were aligned with the centre-left did not vote at all.

92. **Phyllis Bennis** said that the problem was the United States, whose support made it possible for Israel to, at best, look at the Palestinians as unequal partners. She argued that the United Nations could not be even-handed because the occupation was not even-handed. She insisted that a new road map was not needed; the Charter and the Geneva Conventions already were the road map. She emphasized that civil society's goal was to ensure that international law guaranteed human rights and equality for everyone.

IV. Closing session

93. In the closing session, **Rabiha Diab** said that the ideas presented during the two-day Meeting could lead to a brighter future for the Palestinians and an end to the occupation. Reflecting on the speeches, she said that the members of the Security Council had a particular responsibility to hold Israel to account. There must also be a change in the Israeli mindset, starting at a young age, so that the Israelis and the Palestinians could jointly end the occupation. She agreed with Ms. Bennis' views on the implications of the United States unconditional support for Israel, including in the United Nations, and said that the United States and the European taxpayers should question why their money was being used to help Israel buy weapons.

94. Ms. Diab also praised the fact that young Israelis were refusing to serve in the Israeli army and encouraged more to follow suit, while calling for heightened awareness among Jews worldwide to stop immigrating to Israel, which further pushed out the Palestinians from the homeland. The use of modern information technology to resolve the conflict would in the end prove to triumph over all military arsenals, she said. In closing, she expressed the hope that the membership of Palestine in UNESCO would be followed by its admission to several other international organizations.

95. In closing, the Chair of the Committee, **Mr. Diallo**, said that the Committee, when it chose the theme of the Meeting, had not been expecting such an overflow of ideas, energy and creativity. He assured the participants that although the Meeting had not answered all concerns, the Committee had learned the necessary lessons and would decide on the ways to implement and to build on this new path that it had begun to explore.

96. Mr. Diallo said that women and young Palestinians faced many problems, including the lack of justice, freedom, dignity, and, increasingly, of hope. He acknowledged that in the understanding of many observers, the United Nations resolutions on the question of Palestine appeared to have little more weight than the paper they were written on and would be doomed to oblivion as soon as they were adopted. But he reminded the participants that these resolutions did not implement themselves; it was up to each individual to act.

97. In conclusion, he asked from everyone - men and women, young and old - to reflect on what each of them could do to realize their common dream. Even though it might seem impossible, it was by sheer tenacity that the dream would be realized if everybody understood that the future was in their hands, he concluded.

Annex I

Summary of the Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

1. The United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine, convened by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, brought together representatives of Governments and intergovernmental organizations, United Nations organs and agencies, civil society

organizations and the media, at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris. The Meeting aimed at mobilizing international support for on-the-ground initiatives of youth and women, harness their energy and resourcefulness to achieve a peaceful end to the Israeli occupation, empower them through education, training and economic opportunities, and involve them more in the political process. It looked at social media networks and their impact on building an open Palestinian society, while considering how Governments, United Nations entities and international civil society organizations could better coordinate efforts with Palestinian and Israeli youth and women's organizations to peacefully solve the question of Palestine.

2. The Meeting saw expressions of palpable frustration at the lack of effective international action, including that of the United Nations, to help liberate the Palestinian people from the occupation, and the lack of protection of civilians, especially women and children, in spite of resolutions adopted by the United Nations Security Council. On the other hand, there were numerous expressions of hope at the new opportunities arising with the increasing involvement of youth and women in actions of peaceful resistance which led to concrete results, including through new tools such as the social media that facilitated their actions and amplified their effect. The Palestinian society was vibrant and active; there was an acute sense of urgency to resolve the conflict and a lot of potential that could be tapped. Regrettably, the Israeli public continued to be disconnected from the situation of Palestinians; social media was useful in reaching out to the other side. A main thread of discussions throughout the Meeting, shared by many expert speakers and meeting participants, was also the need for the rights-based diplomacy.

3. The Secretary-General of the United Nations, addressing the Meeting in a video message, said that the Palestinian women and youth continued to face exclusion, unemployment and poverty, with the occupation making access to education, jobs and health care more difficult. He noted the important role of Palestinian women and youth in achieving a durable peace between Israel and the Palestinians and the need to listen to them and to work with them. He called for a greater say for both groups in decision-making while stressing that the two-State solution was long overdue.

4. The Chair of the Committee noted that youth accounted for 64 per cent of the Palestinian population and women comprised half. These were the ones who suffered the most under the occupation, from violence, unemployment, lack of opportunities, social pressures and exclusion. The Chair noted that through social media, youth had shown their readiness to become agents of change, and invited the youth to use these means to further create pathways for peace while refraining from spreading messages of hate. He recalled that the changes that had swept the Middle East region, including protests by Palestinian youths and women, resulted also in the Palestinian factions coming together to lay the groundwork for a longed-for reconciliation.

5. The Deputy Director-General of UNESCO noted that the Meeting had come at a watershed moment, seven months after Palestine had become the 195th member of UNESCO. The Agency was deeply committed to a just, lasting peace in the region, and was working to create conditions for genuine dialogue, based upon respect for shared values and equal dignity for all. As part of its long-lasting commitment to strengthen Palestinian institutions, the UNESCO Office in Ramallah was highly active in educational and cultural activities. Building peace must start with women and it must begin in the minds of girls and boys, he said. Experience showed that women's empowerment was a breakthrough strategy for sustainable development. UNESCO was working toward that goal in Palestine.

6. The Palestinian Authority Minister for Women's Affairs, speaking on behalf of President Mahmoud Abbas, said that notwithstanding all that was happening in the region and the present obstacles, the Palestinian people still extended their hand to achieve the two-State solution. Speaking as a keynote presenter, the Minister echoed the call for women to have a central role in resolving the conflict and creating a strong, vibrant Palestinian State. Palestinian women had demonstrated their resistance by standing up to the occupier for over 60 years alongside men and through women's groups and women's movements; they played a major role in building State institutions, and effectively contributed to political parties and the political arena. Today, female leaders promoted a positive image of women, which encouraged the Palestinian Authority to include other women in national decision-making and to integrate a gender focus into all Ministries. Women were increasingly educated, representing more than 60 per cent of college graduates. However, job opportunities after they graduated were limited. To prosper, young women needed a peace that guaranteed their rights. The Minister appealed to the international community to consider the plight of women and youth, who were the key to the future.

7. In a deeply touching keynote address of a fighter and human rights advocate of over 60 years, Stéphane Hessel, a diplomat, writer, and concentration camp survivor, described how he saw the decades pass, while the Palestinians remained in an unacceptable situation, subjected to continuing occupation; a true reason for outrage. In the meantime, the Israeli propaganda had prevented many in the world from truly understanding the Palestinian plight. The Russell Tribunal on Palestine, launched in 2009 by human rights activists and lawyers, with international law as a legal frame of reference, had scrutinized the actions of Israel, the European Union, the United States and major industrial companies that violated international resolutions and court rulings concerning the rights of the Palestinian people, he said. The Government of Israel, which had never taken seriously the need to move toward peace, would have to acknowledge one day they had gone down the wrong path, as it was in the Israeli public's best interest to understand that Israelis and Palestinians must be able to stand on equal footing to build a prosperous Middle East.

8. During the plenary sessions, expert speakers reviewed the impact of Israeli policies and practices on women and youth. They shed light on the series of laws adopted by the Government of Israel aimed at maintaining in Jerusalem a population ratio of 70 per cent Jews and 30 per cent Arabs, through strict control of Palestinian construction, leading to forced family separations and fragmentation, and high poverty and unemployment rates among Palestinians. Owing to access restrictions, including checkpoints and the separation Wall, students and teachers had difficulties reaching schools; this, together with sexual and psychological harassment to which women and girls were subjected at checkpoints, contributed to high school dropout rates. Movement restrictions also impeded Palestinian access to health care. Home demolitions destroyed family structures and increased their poverty and vulnerability. Palestinian female prisoners constantly faced torture, humiliation and horrendous living conditions. Similarly, Palestinian children, sometimes as young as 12 years old, were deprived of the protection guaranteed under international law; they were detained and prosecuted, blindfolded, stripped and beaten, and were used as human shields in Israeli military operations. The psychological and emotional side effects of the occupation on women, who had the double burden of enduring detention, physical assault, home demolitions and movement restrictions, while raising and protecting their children, often while their husbands were in Israeli jails, were immense.

9. The representatives of United Nations agencies, in particular UNRWA and UNESCO, reviewed targeted programmes that benefited women and youth, providing them short-term job opportunities; training to acquire skills to better compete in the labour market; support services for female victims of domestic and sexual violence; and programmes promoting the development of social media which gave the Palestinians a vital tool for communication with the outside world. UNRWA briefed about its efforts to take the views of youth more into account and its commitment for a more effective approach to address their concerns, particularly employment, capacity-building and youth participation.

10. However, it was noted the very complex environment in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, with its constant humanitarian emergencies, where initiatives were launched and subsequently demolished, made it difficult to consolidate gains in the empowerment and participation of women and youth. There was a general feeling of uncertainty individually and collectively, which had particular repercussions for these groups. The massive material and physical losses, coupled with the lack of economic and educational opportunity, uncertainty about the future and psychological stress owing to the occupation had created a cohort of disaffected youth, which had the potential to become a socially and politically destabilizing force. Moreover, many of the most talented and skilled women and youth left to pursue careers and lives abroad.

11. In spite of the many challenges, there were also strong feelings of resilience and hope. Palestinian women and youth were highly involved in human and social rights activism. Drawing on social media and other tools to make their voices heard, Palestinian youth were creating new political dynamics. They have helped to propel the politicians towards a national reconciliation process; have carried out global awareness campaigns to rally support for Palestine's bid for full United Nations membership; and have turned the world attention to the plight of Palestinian prisoners through daily rallies and social media campaigns in support of the prisoners' recent massive hunger strike. Youth groups fighting the occupation through non-violent popular resistance, which increasingly involved women, achieved many individual victories – among them the return of confiscated land and property to the Palestinians, the opening of roads and the building of houses -

which collectively made daily life easier for the Palestinians and fuelled aspirations for fully ending the occupation. Organizations such as Youth Against Settlements had carried out hundreds of protests and campaigns to end human rights violations against Palestinians and spread awareness about them globally. In Gaza as in the West Bank, young Palestinians understood their situation and expressed hope for the future. More than half supported a two-State solution and ending the occupation through non-violent means.

12. Representatives of Palestinian civil society pointed to the disconnect between the Israeli public and the situation of Palestinians, noting there was not much of a common language between Palestinian and Israeli youth; while there were some youth movements in Israel that defended the rights of Palestinians, they had not yet broken the Israeli silence on Palestinian rights. Representatives from Israeli civil society noted there were portions of the Israeli public that supported Palestinian rights and aspirations. Representatives of One Voice-Israel and Windows: Channels for Communication shared some of their organizations' actions in support of the two-State solution, including action against the legalization of Israeli outposts in the West Bank, and programmes bringing together youth from both sides of the conflict, aimed at helping the Israeli youth understand that the security they desired could only be achieved through a true rights-based peace. A representative of the United States Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation, a coalition of more than 250 member organizations, which advocated for boycotting Israeli products and divesting from and imposing sanctions on Israel, pointed to the growing civil society action to end the occupation and human rights violations against Palestinians, such as the hunger strike of Palestinian prisoners, protests against the separation Wall, the Russell Tribunal and the World Social Forum Free Palestine, to be held in Brazil in September. She noted that public opinion in the United States was shifting towards rights and peace, and growing civil movements in the United States, such as Jewish Voices for Peace, were speaking out against the occupation.

13. Participants discussed the empowering effect of the widespread use of information and communications technology and the ways in which social media was being used to reveal the reality of the occupation. It was noted that Palestine had the world's highest rate of Facebook users per capita. Ninety per cent of the population had cell phones; more than 30 per cent had access to the Internet. Information technology was becoming the greatest weapon of war. Social media networks also enabled Palestinian youth to connect personally with their peers in the diaspora, and served as a bridge to Israelis who opposed the occupation, helping to form friendships and communications between the two sides and facilitating Israeli participation in weekly peaceful demonstrations against the separation Wall.

14. The Meeting also addressed the role of the international community in the resolution of the question of Palestine. The representative of the United States Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation stressed the importance of acknowledging that the peace talks had failed, and of developing an entirely different kind of diplomacy, centred on a rights-based approach. The Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations discussed the failure of the Security Council to protect Palestinian civilians from the Israeli occupation. He noted that since adopting landmark resolution 1265 (1999) on protecting civilians in armed conflict, the Council had incorporated such protection into the mandates of peacekeeping operations in a myriad of strife-torn areas; however, owing to the lack of political will of some members of the Council, Palestinians remained the exception to the rule. Palestinian women and girls were particularly vulnerable to the occupation. But again the Council had exhibited paralysis in applying its resolution 1325 (2000) towards protecting Palestinian women and girls from violence. Participants also pointed to the need to better coordinate the efforts of the civil society, whose goal was to ensure that international law guaranteed human rights and equality for everyone, with those of the United Nations. The importance of creating partnerships between the civil society and the private sector in Arab countries was also noted.

15. In closing the Meeting, the Minister for Women's Affairs of the Palestinian Authority reminded members of the Security Council that they had a particular responsibility to hold Israel to account. There must also be a change in the Israeli mindset, starting at a young age so that Israelis and Palestinians could jointly end the occupation. She expressed the hope that the use of modern information technology to resolve the conflict would in the end prove to triumph over all military arsenals. The Chair of the Committee emphasized that it was important to show the reality of the occupation that had lasted 45 years, to strengthen the commitment to put an end to it. In that regard, the efforts of the United Nations and civil society in terms of empowerment, capacity-building and training, were valuable and fundamental.

Annex II

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