



General Assembly

A/62/PV.53
19 November 2007

Official Records

General Assembly

Sixty-second session

53rd plenary meeting

Monday, 19 November 2007, 10 a.m.

New York

President : Mr. Kerim (The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

/...

Agenda items 71 and 72

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

Report of the Secretary-General ([A/62/324](#) and Corr.1)

/...

(c) Assistance to the Palestinian people

Report of the Secretary-General ([A/62/82](#))

/...

Mr. Al-Ajran (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): ...

/...

We affirm the importance of international cooperation in implementing the commitments made to the suffering Palestinian people; that is our responsibility. Here, I would like to pay tribute to the rapid intervention operations by the United Nations, non-governmental organizations and the temporary international mechanism, which have spent some \$800 million on food, budgetary and monetary support in emergencies. I would also like to highlight the fact that my country continues to extend assistance to the Palestinians, both directly through the Palestinian Authority or through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. Our shared international cooperation cannot solve the problems of the Palestinian people, and the assistance is not the ultimate desire of the Palestinians, as long as Israel continues its inhumane practices against the Palestinian people in undermining all efforts made in that respect and refuses to transfer the Palestinian taxation levies it has collected, except for one transfer that took place in 2007. These practices have added to the worsening of the situation of the Palestinians.

/...

Mr. Hannesson (Iceland): ...

/...

I would like to turn briefly to the issue of assistance to the Palestinian people. I thank the Secretary-General for his report (A/62/82) on the issue, which provides

a good overview of the situation and underlines the need for continued, and indeed increased, assistance. The report highlights the role of women. We all know that there are strong links between women's empowerment and poverty reduction in general, as has been said so often. In cases of humanitarian crisis, women and children are not only the principal victims; women and girls are also particularly vulnerable to various forms of abuse. We therefore welcome the intensified emphasis in the report on protection of women, children and other vulnerable groups in crises.

/...

The Acting President : I now call on the observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): Before I deliver my written statement, I just want to convey on behalf of the Palestinian people and our leadership our deepest condolences and to express solidarity with the people and Government of Bangladesh following the tragedy that has befallen them. We are sure that the Government and people of Bangladesh will be able to survive this tragedy and to move on with their own plans and agenda.

I stand before you today to address a most vital basis for continued Palestinian steadfastness towards their future independence and statehood: international assistance. For decades, international aid has helped ease the suffering and hardships endured by an entire people, more than half of whom have lived as refugees for nearly 60 years now and the remainder of whom have been living for more than 40 years under the subjugation of an oppressive foreign military occupation. The assistance that has been provided over the years in the various fields, both through the United Nations and as direct assistance to the Palestinian people, has helped to alleviate the hardship of scores of Palestinians and Palestinian families. For countless others, it has been the only source of survival and sustenance throughout endless periods of instability, crisis and uncertainty.

While the Palestinian people and its leadership are deeply grateful for that invaluable assistance, we believe it is imperative to ask ourselves the following questions as we convene to discuss this issue today. How much have we helped that assistance to reach its full potential, and how much sabotage has the international community endured to its sustained assistance efforts? How many more internationally funded projects and efforts are we willing to allow the occupying Power to undermine and decimate as it continues pursuing its illegal policies and practices and continues deepening the humanitarian crisis, inevitably forcing that assistance to go off track, from development and State-building to relief and crisis management? How much longer is the international community willing to pay for the illegal acts of the occupying Power by relieving the consequences of those acts instead of bringing them to an end?

Numbers do not lie, and the latest figures regarding the humanitarian and economic situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, are astounding and tragic. In fact, all recent reports have documented the enormous burden international agencies are enduring in trying to address the continuously emerging needs of the Palestinian civilian population and to alleviate the crisis. At the same time, all infrastructure projects, industries and employment-generation projects have come to a grinding halt because of the repressive and unlawful measures imposed by the occupying Power, which have turned the Palestinian people from a people seeking development towards the birth of their future State to a population sinking into abject poverty and struggling to put food on the table and barely survive.

The latest report by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan, sums up the bleak situation as follows:

"The Israeli closure system remains a primary cause of poverty and humanitarian crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory, and restricts Palestinian access to health and education services, employment, markets and social and religious networks." (*A/62/75, summary*)

The closures, movement restrictions and the wall, among other unlawful Israeli measures, have battered the economy, destroyed thousands of livelihoods and made thousands of families destitute. In that regard, according to the International Labour Organization, 7 out of 10 Palestinian households, comprising 2.4 million people, are living in poverty in the occupied Palestinian territory. A report of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) also addresses the extent of economic devastation caused by Israel's measures to the Palestinian economy, concluding that the Palestinian economy has been reduced to a size smaller than it was a decade ago due to Israeli restrictions on movement of Palestinian persons and goods. At the same time, the trade deficit has reached unprecedented proportions of 73 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP), 30 per cent higher than its 30-year average. The World Bank monitoring report of September 2007 also noted that, in 2006 alone, Palestinian GDP contracted by nearly 8.8 per cent, and by a further 4.2 per cent in the first quarter of 2007.

The picture is of course most bleak in the Gaza Strip, where Israel's crippling siege has managed to bring the entire territory to the verge of collapse — socially, economically, medically and in all other aspects of life. This most brutal form of collective punishment by the occupying Power of the Palestinian civilian population is of course most bleak in the Gaza Strip, where Israel's crippling siege has managed to bring the entire territory to the verge of collapse — socially, economically, medically and in all other aspects of life. This most brutal form of collective punishment by the occupying Power of the Palestinian civilian population, which undoubtedly amounts to a war crime, has thus far been unaffected and unshaken by international expressions of concern and calls for cessation. Instead, Israel continues to tighten the noose around Gaza and its population, choking life, hope and the prospects of a dignified future out of that part of the Palestinian territory, using illegal pretexts to cover up its abhorrent crimes. In reference to Israel's closures and siege of Gaza, Mr. John Dugard, the Human Rights Council's Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, has stated that "it is a controlled strangulation that seriously violates norms of human rights law and humanitarian law". Indeed, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, as well as countless other relevant instruments and provisions of international law, are being gravely violated by the occupying Power.

For months now, Israel has closed down all six of Gaza's crossings, significantly restricting and reducing the amount and quality of goods allowed into Gaza and ending the prospect of export from Gaza at the same time. The effects have been devastating. Gaza's export agriculture sector is facing the most serious threat to its existence as we speak because of that policy. Additionally, tens of millions of dollars in internationally funded projects, including construction projects — such as projects worth \$160 million in necessary construction funded by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, UNDP and other agencies — have been suspended. Additionally, a shocking 90 per cent of Gaza's industries have shut down their operations, adding tens of thousands more Palestinians to the list of unemployed and needy. The siege has raised prices, sent living standards plummeting and forced international aid organizations and donors to divert their attention to providing Palestinians in Gaza with their most basic needs, namely, food and medicine.

The World Bank has noted that the "pace of capital flight has reached an all-time high in the last two years, with almost no foreign direct investment" because of Israel's punishing policy of closure and siege on the occupied Palestinian territory.

UNCTAD also notes a downward economic spiral in the West Bank and Gaza, warning that this has reinforced the momentum of de-development. Meanwhile, the report of the Secretary-General on this matter, which is contained in document A/62/82, while seriously lacking in terms of political context, does not address this situation in the context of the occupation that exists. Nevertheless, the report states in paragraph 73 that "The effects of these closures could not be reversed with increased humanitarian assistance. Development initiatives to improve the Palestinian economy were expected to have limited impact in an environment where intense access restrictions prevailed."

Therefore, despite a marked increase in aid levels, socioeconomic indicators have continued to show significant decline. UNCTAD's report concludes that the Palestinian economy has lost \$8.4 billion in potential income in five years, which is twice the size of the Palestinian economy today. That should alarm us all; for such potential income, combined with the losses incurred by destroyed or sabotaged internationally funded projects and efforts, shows the grave trap that Palestinian development efforts and international assistance have actually fallen into.

The alarming situation I have just described is not the whole picture. For over a year now, Israel, the occupying Power, has not only tightened its punishing siege but continues to illegally withhold hundreds of millions of dollars in Palestinian tax revenues, further curtailing the Palestinian Authority's ability to function normally and serve the Palestinian public. Despite the disbursement of some of the withheld Palestinian tax revenues, Israel continues to withhold a significant amount, cynically using it as a political bargaining chip.

Furthermore, the punishing sanctions imposed by the international community on the Palestinian Authority, combined with earlier disruptions in assistance, have made a bad economic situation almost catastrophic. The suspension of direct international aid to the Palestinian Authority in early 2006 — which resulted in limiting assistance to basically humanitarian needs — and the bypassing of the existing mechanisms for coordinating aid with the Palestinian Authority have had lasting negative consequences. As a result, although international aid through temporary mechanisms has increased, that cannot alleviate the long-term ramifications of Israel's siege and closure. Moreover, it is necessary to recall here the assessment by the World Bank that the Palestinian Authority achievements in transparency and accountability have been undermined by donor mechanisms to sidestep the Palestinian Authority.

Perhaps the devastating results and implications of these sanctions were most aptly described by the Special Rapporteur, Mr. John Dugard, who said in his report, "In effect, the Palestinian people have been subjected to economic sanctions — the first time an occupied people have been so treated. This is difficult to understand. Israel is in violation of major Security Council and General Assembly resolutions dealing with unlawful territorial change and the violation of human rights and has failed to implement the 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, yet it escapes the imposition of sanctions. Instead, the Palestinian people, rather than the Palestinian Authority, have been subjected to possibly the most rigorous form of international sanctions imposed in modern times". (A/HRC/4/17, para. 54)

Moreover, the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Ms. Karen Koning AbuZayd, in a speech on 22 May 2007, also said that

"There is a staggering irony in the contrast between the universal commitment to poverty eradication and the decision to impose on Palesti "There is a staggering irony in the contrast between the universal commitment to poverty eradication and the decision to impose on Palestinians one of the most severe sanctions regimes in recent history, thereby virtually guaranteeing the widespread incidence of extreme poverty".

The Secretary-General's report highlights that the rapid interventions by the United Nations system, temporary international mechanism and non-governmental organizations, which together disbursed upwards of \$800 million in emergency food, cash and budget support, alleviated what could have been a much worse situation. However, recent reports by UNRWA, the World Food Programme (WFP) and other agencies also note that despite this increase, incomes have dropped while extreme poverty and food insecurity have substantially increased.

In fact, approximately two thirds of the children in Gaza now suffer from anaemia, that is, iron deficiency. Let me repeat that: approximately two thirds of children in Gaza today suffer from anaemia as a result of this situation, and, 51 per cent of the population in Gaza is food insecure. UNRWA and WFP are providing food assistance to 1.1 million people in Gaza, out of a population of 1.4 million. Mr. John Jing, UNRWA's Director of Operations in Gaza, has described one of the consequences of this bleak reality by saying that the 200,000 schoolchildren attending UNRWA-run schools come to school "hungry and unable to concentrate".

International sanctions may now have been partially lifted, but the long-term economic damage arising out of the situation I have just described remains. Hence, our responsibilities are tremendous and the challenges that lie ahead are almost overwhelming. But failure is not an option, and we continue to rely on international action to support us in addressing this critical issue, somehow reversing the downward economic trend and meeting the continuing needs of the Palestinian people in the meantime.

We wish to recall that in the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) held in London in 2005, donors established new aid coordination bodies. However, the effectiveness of those structures was undermined by the aid boycott. Going forward, those aid coordination bodies must be revitalized, especially with the presence of the new Quartet representative, Mr. Tony Blair, and his leveraging of those structures, which could strengthen them considerably. We welcome the results of the AHLC meeting held in New York on 24 September 2007 and chaired by Norway, which confirmed the commitment of the international community to support the Palestinian Authority in building strong and viable institutions. We look forward to the meeting to be held in this regard in December in Paris.

As the Palestinian Authority continues to find itself facing a large deficit, significant debt and failing revenues, which hinder its ability to plan for the fiscal year ahead or to take charge of its planned economic and other reform plans as a result of the situation I just described, we attach high hopes and expectations for the upcoming donor conference in Paris. In this regard, we look forward to seeing a tangible translation of the AHLC's confirmation of the Palestinian Authority's Reform and Development Plan 2008-2010, which must be regarded as a key test of true international support of and commitment to Palestinian-driven institution-building, recovery and growth. We hope that the December conference will change the fragmented nature of aid flowing into the West Bank and Gaza so far — aid which has largely remained based on short-term political positions rather than a collective, long-term view based on broader economic fundamentals, which is what the Palestinian economic recovery needs most.

The international community should not allow Israel to continue to defy its obligations as an occupying Power through the illegal policies and practices that have led to the state of economic regression Palestine now faces. It is incumbent upon the international community to ensure that the occupying Power does not continue attacking internationally funded projects and aid workers with impunity, as these repeated attacks have clearly derailed the development process and frustrated assistance efforts.

Indeed, the international community must exercise its moral and legal authority by compelling the occupying Power to cease its violations and end its choking siege of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, which plunges Palestine into hopelessness and deprivation. The cause of the utter destitution Palestinians now suffer is known to all parties concerned — it is the continued Israeli military occupation. Thus, and as numerous international organizations agree, full economic recovery and rehabilitation in the occupied Palestinian territory, which are the goals driving international assistance, will only be possible when this occupation ends.

Mr. Al-Jarman (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): ...
/...

The United Arab Emirates attaches great importance to support and assistance for the Palestinian people and their Government during the humanitarian crisis caused by the cruel, aggressive policies imposed on them by the Israeli occupying forces. Direct assistance by the United Arab Emirates to the Palestinians over the past five years has amounted to more than \$1 billion, in addition to other humanitarian assistance extended through United Nations agencies, in order to meet immediate needs, and to rebuild towns destroyed by the continued Israeli assault.

In this regard, the Emirates has doubled its contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for 2008. Up to last August, it had also contributed \$80 million to help support the budget of the Palestinian Authority. Meanwhile, the value of relief and humanitarian projects carried out in Palestine by the United Arab Emirates Red Crescent Authority, has exceeded \$122 million, in addition to other in-kind assistance.

The United Arab Emirates is deeply concerned at the humanitarian conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territories, which are deteriorating as a result of continuing Israeli attacks on people, property and infrastructure. We are also concerned at the policy of closures and blockades imposed on the Palestinian people by the Israeli occupying forces and at the denial of access to humanitarian assistance. This poses the threat of a serious humanitarian catastrophe.

We laud the role played by the United Nations and its relevant entities in assisting the Palestinian people, but at the same time we reaffirm the need to compel Israel, the occupying State, to end its attacks immediately, to lift its blockade of the Palestinians and to comply with legal international resolutions and the provisions of international humanitarian law, as well as to resume peace negotiations on the basis of relevant international resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. We further urge donor countries to increase their assistance to the Palestinian people and Government so as to alleviate their suffering until the end of the Israeli occupation of their territory and the establishment of an independent state of Palestine, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Until then, we continue to reaffirm our support for the ongoing mandate of UNRWA to provide services for refugees throughout its area of operation. In our view, it is necessary to continue financial support for the regular and emergency activities of the Agency so that it can fulfil its commitments to Palestinian refugees.

/...

Mr. Hussein (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): ...

/...

Recent events highlight the importance of according particular attention to the Secretary-General's report on assistance to the Palestinian people (A/62/82). The tragic realities faced by the Palestinian people — including the destruction of infrastructure, the cutting off of electricity and water, the chopping down and uprooting of trees and the destruction of farmland — have worsened their humanitarian situation and caused a human tragedy. That requires greater efforts by the international

community, particularly the United Nations, to intervene to stop those policies and practices and to provide the assistance necessary to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian people.

The continued closure operations, the financial crisis and the withholding of Palestinian tax revenues by Israel have had an immediate impact in terms of declining income, increasing poverty, lack of food security and reduced capacity to respond to natural disasters in the occupied Palestinian territories. Therefore, we call on the international community to provide greater financial support in order to prevent further deterioration of the quality of life within the occupied Palestine territories and a further decline of the Palestinian economy, and to meet the increasing economic, social, and humanitarian needs of the Palestinian people. Continued international efforts to that end should be accompanied by efforts to establish a viable independent Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital.

The role of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East must also be supported so it can play its role in the Palestinian territories. Israel must respect the Agreement on Movement and Access, enabling the Palestinian people to interact freely with the outside world, to gain access to humanitarian assistance and to lift restrictions on delivery of such assistance.

/...

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-154A. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.