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**THE COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE OF THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF
THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE**

AND

THE DIVISION FOR PALESTINIAN RIGHTS

INFORMATION NOTE



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**Committee on the Exercise of the
Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People**

Mandate and objectives

The question of Palestine was first brought before the General Assembly in 1947, when the Assembly decided to partition Palestine into

two States, one Arab and one Jewish, with a special international régime for Jerusalem (resolution [181 \(II\)](#) of 29 November 1947). In later years, as the Arab State did not come into being and several wars were fought in the area, the Palestine problem was discussed as part of the larger Middle East conflict or in the context of its refugee or human rights aspects. It was only in 1974 that the question of Palestine was reintroduced in the Assembly's agenda as a national question and the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people were reaffirmed and specified. In resolution [3236 \(XXIX\)](#) of 22 November 1974, the Assembly stated that those rights included: the right to self-determination without external interference; the right to national independence and sovereignty; and the right of Palestinians to return to their homes and property, from which they had been displaced and uprooted. The Assembly also stated that the realization of those rights was indispensable for the solution of the question of Palestine.

The following year, expressing grave concern that progress had not been achieved towards the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights, the Assembly decided to establish the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. By its resolution [3376 \(XXX\)](#) of 10 November 1975, the Assembly mandated the Committee, which is the body within the United Nations exclusively devoted to the question of Palestine, to consider and recommend to the Assembly a programme of implementation, designed to enable the Palestinian people to exercise its rights. The Committee was requested to submit its report and recommendations to the Secretary-General, no later than 1 June 1976, for transmission to the Security Council.

In its first report submitted to the Security Council in June 1976, the Committee affirmed that the question of Palestine was "at the heart of the Middle East problem" and that no solution could be envisaged without fully taking into account the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people. The Committee urged the Council to promote action for a just solution, taking into account all the powers conferred on it by the Charter of the United Nations. The recommendations of the Committee included a two-phase plan for the return of Palestinians to their homes and property; a timetable for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied territories by 1 June 1977, with the provision, if necessary, of temporary peacekeeping forces to facilitate the process; an end to the establishment of settlements; recognition by Israel of the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the occupied territories pending withdrawal; and endorsement of the inherent right of Palestinians to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty in Palestine. The Committee also expressed the view that the United Nations had the historical duty and responsibility to render all assistance necessary to promote the economic development and prosperity of the future Palestinian entity.

The Committee's recommendations were not adopted by the Security Council, due to the negative vote of a permanent member, and have not been implemented. They were, however, endorsed by an overwhelming majority in the General Assembly, to which the Committee reports annually. The Assembly reaffirmed that a just and lasting peace in the Middle East could not be established without the achievement of a just solution of the problem of Palestine based on the attainment of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. The Assembly also requested the Committee to keep the situation relating to the question of Palestine under review and to report and make suggestions to the General Assembly or the Security Council as appropriate, and to promote the greatest possible dissemination of information on its recommendations through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other appropriate means.

In pursuance of this mandate, the Committee's programme of work has been gradually expanded. With the establishment in 1978 of a supporting unit in the United Nations Secretariat (later re-designated as the Division for Palestinian Rights), the programme came to include the convening of international meetings and conferences, including meetings with civil society, in all regions of the world, with the participation of political personalities, representatives of Governments and intergovernmental organizations, United Nations officials, academics, the media and others. Ongoing cooperation was established with a wide network of NGOs and other civil society institutions active on the question of Palestine. To commemorate the 1947 resolution of the United Nations General Assembly partitioning Palestine, 29 November was designated as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in observance of which the Committee introduced annual special events at United Nations Headquarters, with similar activities taking place at the United Nations Offices at Geneva and Vienna, under Committee sponsorship.

During 1982-1983, the Committee served as the preparatory body for the International Conference on the Question of Palestine, which was held at Geneva from 29 August to 7 September 1983. The Conference adopted a Declaration and Programme of Action for the Achievement of Palestinian Rights, which included guidelines for a solution of the Palestine question through the convening of an international peace conference on the Middle East under the auspices of the United Nations. The proposal and guidelines for such a conference were endorsed by the General Assembly and were then revised in 1988, following the Palestinian "Declaration of Independence" and the statement made before the General Assembly meeting in Geneva by Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

Accordingly, during the 1980s, the Committee attached high priority in its work programme to promoting the convening of the proposed international peace conference. The Committee also continued to monitor the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and to call for international measures to ensure protection and respect for human rights and humanitarian law by the Israeli authorities, particularly after the outbreak of the Palestinian uprising, the first intifada, in December 1987.

In 1991, the General Assembly welcomed the convening on 30 October in Madrid of a peace conference under the co-sponsorship of the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, with the goal of attaining a settlement based on Security Council resolutions [242 \(1967\)](#) and [338 \(1973\)](#). The General Assembly considered, however, that the convening of a conference under United Nations auspices, as previously proposed, would contribute to the promotion of peace in the region. The Committee also voiced support for the Madrid conference and was of the view that an active role by the United Nations, the Security Council and the Secretary-General was essential for a successful outcome of the peace process. The Committee reaffirmed the international consensus that the attainment of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people was indispensable for the achievement of peace and expressed hope that the Israeli Government would recognize and

respect those rights and institute radical changes in its policies in favour of peace.

Following the mutual recognition between the Government of Israel and the PLO, and the signing, in September 1993, of the “Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements”, the Committee welcomed this evolution in the peace process as an important step towards the attainment of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and other relevant United Nations resolutions. The Committee called for intensified support and assistance by the international community to the Palestinian people under its recognized leadership, the PLO, in order to ensure the successful implementation of the agreement reached. In particular, the Committee stressed the need for the full engagement of the United Nations in the peace process and in building the Palestinian Authority, as well as providing broad assistance to the Palestinian people in all needed fields. On its part, the General Assembly also welcomed the Declaration of Principles and reaffirmed that “the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine until the question is resolved in all its aspects in a satisfactory manner in accordance with international legitimacy”.

In subsequent years, the Committee welcomed the signing of various bilateral agreements in implementation of the Declaration of Principles, particularly the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip of September 1995 and other positive developments, such as the partial withdrawal of Israeli forces and the Palestinian elections to the Legislative Council and the Presidency of the Palestinian Authority. It also expressed its belief that, during the interim period, Israel must recognize and respect its obligations as the occupying Power under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

By the late 1990s, the Committee had started to voice increasing concern at the stalemate in the peace negotiations and the growing tension and violence in the region. It participated in meetings of the Security Council and of the General Assembly, including the Assembly's tenth emergency special session, convened to deal with the deteriorating situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. While condemning all acts of violence against civilians, the Committee expressed its alarm at the position and actions of the Government of Israel with regard to East Jerusalem, the construction of settlements, land confiscation and punitive collective measures, which had a devastating effect on the Palestinian people and their living conditions and undermined the peace efforts.

Those concerns were further heightened following the outbreak of the second, or Al-Aqsa, intifada in late September 2000. The subsequent serious escalation of violence between Israel and the Palestinians left thousands of people dead, wounded and permanently disabled, mostly among Palestinians, including a large number of casualties among children. The Committee continued to express its concern over the illegal actions of the occupying Power, such as the disproportionate use of force against Palestinians, attacks on the institutional and physical infrastructure of the Palestinian Authority, the reoccupation of population centres, the stifling internal and external closures, curfews and blockades, the extrajudicial killings and the arbitrary detentions, the demolition of houses, the destruction of agricultural land, and settlement construction.

In 2002, Israel began building a wall in the occupied West Bank. The de facto annexation of Palestinian land resulted in dire economic and social consequences for over 800,000 Palestinians. The Committee reminded the Government of Israel of the need to fulfil its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Pursuant to the request of the General Assembly's tenth emergency special session, the International Court of Justice on 9 July 2004 issued an Advisory Opinion on the legal consequences of the construction of a wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in and around East Jerusalem. The Court determined that the construction of the wall and its associated regime were contrary to international law, and that Israel was under obligation to cease the construction and dismantle portions of the wall built on Palestinian land and to provide reparations to Palestinians whose lives had been harmed by the wall.

The Committee has consistently supported all international efforts directed at stopping the violence and resuming the peace negotiations with a view to ending the occupation and resolving the question of Palestine in all its aspects. In 2002, the Committee welcomed the affirmation of the vision of a region where two States, Israel and Palestine, would live side by side within secure and recognized borders, as set out in Security Council resolution [1397 \(2002\)](#). The Committee urged the swift realization of that objective, through a concrete step-by-step mechanism covering the political, economic and security fields and within a specified time frame. In this respect, the Committee was also encouraged by the peace initiative adopted by the Arab States at their Summit in Beirut on 28 March 2002 and asked Israel to reciprocate in good faith.

The Committee, which has always encouraged direct negotiations between the parties, welcomed the summit held on 8 February 2005 in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, between Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas. It was hoped that the understandings reached by the parties, in particular as regards the cessation of all acts of violence, the return to the control of the Palestinian Authority of five Palestinian cities in the West Bank and the release of Palestinian prisoners, if fully implemented, would create a new momentum towards the resumption of the peace process. The Committee considered the removal of all Israeli settlements from the Gaza Strip and parts of the northern West Bank and the withdrawal of the Israeli army from the Gaza Strip in August and September 2005, the most significant political developments in the conflict in recent years.

The Committee supported the continuing efforts of the diplomatic Quartet, consisting of the United States of America, the Russian Federation, the European Union and the United Nations, particularly in initiating “A Performance-Based Road Map to a Permanent Two-State Solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” which was endorsed by the Security Council in its resolution [1515 \(2003\)](#). The Committee urged the Quartet and the international community to help the parties implement their obligations under the plan, relating notably to questions of security and the freezing of settlement activity.

In the view of the Committee, the Road Map offers a way to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), and the principle of a permanent two-State solution based on the 1967 borders, the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, and the right of all States in the region to live in peace and security.

Membership and officers

At present, the Committee has twenty-two members:¹

Afghanistan, Belarus, Cuba, Cyprus, Guinea, Guyana, India, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, Namibia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tunisia, Turkey and Ukraine.

A total of 26 observers, including the African Union, the League of Arab States and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, participate in the work of the Committee. On the basis of General Assembly resolutions [3210 \(XXIX\)](#) and [3237 \(XXIX\)](#) of 1974 and a decision taken by the Committee in 1976, the PLO, as the representative of the Palestinian people and the principal party to the question of Palestine, was invited to participate in the Committee's deliberations as an observer.²

The following officers of the Committee, comprising its Bureau, were elected on 7 February 2005: Paul Badji, the Permanent Representative of Senegal to the United Nations, as Chairman; Ravan A.G. Farhâdi, the Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations; and Orlando Requejo Gual, the Permanent Representative of Cuba to the United Nations, as Vice-Chairmen; and Victor Camilleri, the Permanent Representative of Malta to the United Nations, as Rapporteur.

¹ At the time of its establishment in 1975, the Committee had 20 members.

² On 15 December 1988, the General Assembly adopted resolution [43/177](#), in which it decided that the designation "Palestine" should be used in place of the designation "Palestine Liberation Organization" in the United Nations system, without prejudice to the observer status and functions of the PLO within the United Nations system, in conformity with relevant United Nations resolutions and practice.

Division for Palestinian Rights

Following the affirmation of the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people and the establishment in 1975 of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the General Assembly recognized the need to create an informed public opinion around the world in support of the achievement of those rights. Accordingly, the Assembly mandated the establishment of a Special Unit on Palestinian Rights in the United Nations Secretariat to assist the Committee in its work and to prepare studies and publications on the issue and to promote maximum publicity for them (resolution [32/40 B](#) of 2 December 1977). The Unit, later renamed the Division for Palestinian Rights, is part of the Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat. Its mandate has been renewed annually and has been expanded several times over the years. It includes the organization of international meetings, the implementation of a publications programme, the establishment and development of a computer-based information system called the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL), which is now available on the Internet, and the holding of an annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority.

International meetings and conferences

The Division for Palestinian Rights is mandated by the General Assembly to organize international meetings and conferences in all regions, in consultation with the Committee and under its guidance, to promote constructive analysis and discussion of the various aspects of the question of Palestine and mobilize international support for and assistance to the Palestinian people.

In the programme of international meetings and conferences, special emphasis is placed on promoting the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, providing support for the political process and encouraging international efforts, such as the Road Map of the Quartet, towards a peaceful solution of the conflict.

Starting in 1993, the Committee has also convened virtually every year, in either Europe or the Middle East, a seminar on assistance to the Palestinian people. Those seminars deal with various aspects of the socio-economic development of the Palestinians living in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.

Additional information about various Committee-sponsored events is available on the Internet at <http://www.un.org/depts/dpa/ngo/calendar.htm>. Reports of the proceedings of such events are available online, through UNISPAL, or can be obtained in hard copy from the Division for Palestinian Rights.

Cooperation with civil society

On the basis of the Committee's programme of cooperation with civil society, which started in connection with the preparations for the International Conference on the Question of Palestine held in 1983 in Geneva, the General Assembly mandated the Division to increase its contacts with NGOs and to convene meetings for NGOs in different regions in order to heighten awareness of the facts relating to the question of Palestine, a mandate that is being renewed every year. Since 1983, the Committee has accredited close to 800 civil society organizations, including many women's organizations, that have programmes in support of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. The Division liaises with over 1,000 organizations in all regions that have a special interest in the question of Palestine. Civil society organizations are invited to all Committee-sponsored international meetings and conferences.

As the Committee encourages cooperation, coordination and networking among civil society organizations, the Division maintains contacts with national, regional and international coordinating mechanisms and periodically holds consultations with various organizations on ways and means to enhance cooperation with civil society. On occasion, representatives of the Committee or staff members of the Division participate in conferences and meetings organized by civil society organizations.

A separate information note entitled "The United Nations and Non-Governmental Organization Activities on the Question of Palestine" provides more details on the accreditation process, criteria and guidelines, as well as other relevant information. It is available online and in hard copy from the Division for Palestinian Rights.

Research, monitoring, publications and the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine

The Division has been requested to monitor political and other relevant developments affecting the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. The collection and dissemination of information by the Division are considered by the Committee to be of particular importance to its endeavours to make a constructive contribution to the peace process, in support of efforts at reaching a just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine.

The publications programme of the Division includes the preparation of monthly bulletins on international action on the question of Palestine; monthly chronological media summaries; periodic bulletins on developments related to Middle East peace efforts; and special bulletins on the annual observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

The Division has published a number of studies on legal, political and economic aspects of the question of Palestine. The latest such study, currently being prepared for publication, is entitled "The Origins and Evolution of the Palestine Problem, Part V (1989-2000)".

In response to the mandate contained in General Assembly resolution [46/74 B](#) of 11 December 1991, and subsequent annual resolutions, the Division has developed UNISPAL, the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine, with a view to creating an electronic facility that would contain, in a full text format, all significant United Nations documents relating to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the question of Palestine. Those documents are available on the Internet at <http://domino.un.org/unispal.nsf> as part of the United Nations website that also features a separate section on the question of Palestine at <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpa/qpal>.

Training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority

Since 1996, as requested by the Committee and subsequently mandated by the General Assembly, the Division has conducted an annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority. The programme is carried out at United Nations Headquarters, in cooperation with the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations, from September to December each year, in conjunction with the convening of the General Assembly. It is designed to help staff of the Palestinian Authority, usually two per year, familiarize themselves with the various aspects of the work of the United Nations. The trainees are also expected to conduct research and prepare papers.

International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is observed annually. The Day commemorates the adoption by the General Assembly on 29 November 1947 of resolution 181 (II), which provides for the partition of Palestine into two States. The observance is held at United Nations Headquarters, the United Nations Offices at Geneva and Vienna, and elsewhere. The event includes solemn meetings at which statements on the question of Palestine are made by high-level officials of the United Nations and intergovernmental organizations and representatives of the international network of NGOs. It also usually includes, at Headquarters, the display of a Palestinian exhibit, film screenings and other activities. At other locations, various activities are organized by governmental bodies and NGOs in cooperation with United Nations Information Centres around the world.
