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OPENING DEBATE ON QUESTION OF PALESTINE, OBSERVER FOR PALESTINE STATES ISRAELI POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES SABOTAGE ALL CHANCES FOR PEACE

**Israel Says Declaration of Palestinian State by PLO Chairman Would Entitle
Israel to All Necessary Steps to Protect Security and Defend Borders**

The policies and activities of Israel had sabotaged all chances for peace, the observer for Palestine told the General Assembly this afternoon as it opened debate on the question of Palestine.

While difficult negotiations in October had resulted in the signing by the Palestinian Authority and Israel of the Wye River Memorandum, he said the agreement had ignored the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land -- the source and reason for all acts of terrorism and violence. Israel claimed it was a democratic State, but it was pursuing all forms of opposition, it had violated human rights and it practised racial discrimination. He noted that all security agreements reached so far would not help unless a final settlement was reached which took into account the interests of the people in the region.

The representative of Israel said today's debate, which focused on the rights of parties in the disputed West Bank and Gaza Strip, could not be based alone on the most recent Assembly resolutions. The reality conveyed by politically loaded adjectives in those resolutions reflected more what United Nations bloc voting would sustain, rather than what was historically true.

Yesterday, the Israeli representative said, Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat had stated his plan to declare a Palestinian State on 4 May 1999. On the basis of past declarations of that sort, Israel had decided in November that such a declaration would constitute a substantive and fundamental violation of the interim agreement between the parties. In the event of such a violation, the Government of Israel would consider itself entitled to take all necessary steps to protect its security, including the assurance of defensible borders, to which it was fully entitled.

Ibra Deguene Ka (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, said the recent Wye River Memorandum was yet another agreement which demonstrated that a diplomatic solution to the question of Palestine was possible. Sporadic violence by extremists from both sides only underscored the need to proceed with urgency and determination towards a just and peaceful settlement. However, for a settlement to last, it must be widely accepted and could not be imposed by one side to serve its own interests. Israel's understandable security needs were also not helped by unilateral actions which increased Palestinian dispossession.

Mr. Ka also introduced the four draft texts related to the debate on the work of the Committee, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information, as well as on the peaceful settlement of the Palestinian question.

George Saliba (Malta), Rapporteur of the Committee on Palestine, said the United Nations had a permanent responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine until a satisfactory settlement based on international legitimacy was reached. The involvement of the United Nations in the peace process, both as guardian of international legitimacy and in the mobilization and provision of international assistance for development, was essential for the success of the process.

The representative of Austria, on behalf of the European Union and associated States, said sustained political commitment by the parties and a determination to resist attempts to frustrate progress would lead to the full implementation of the Wye River Memorandum. He called upon the parties to complete negotiations on those remaining unsettled issues under the interim agreement regarding the industrial zone in Karni, the Gaza Port and the West Bank and to fully engage with a spirit of cooperation in final status negotiations. The Union insisted that no unilateral acts be taken which could prejudice the final outcome of the negotiations.

Statements were also made by the representatives of Indonesia, China, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Botswana, Bangladesh, United Arab Emirates, Niger, Malaysia and India.

The Assembly will meet again tomorrow at 10 a.m. to continue its debate on the question of Palestine.

Assembly Work Programme

The General Assembly meets this afternoon to begin its deliberations on the question of Palestine, by reviewing the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the report of the Secretary-General on the question of Palestine. It was also expected to take up draft resolutions on the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian people; the Division for the Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat; special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information (DPI); and the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine.

In its report, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (document A/53/35) states a crucial stage has been reached in the question of Palestine. Of the two States envisaged by the Assembly, only the Jewish State has come into being, while four million Palestinians continue to live in refugee camps. Despite the undeniable achievements of the peace process since 1993, most of the Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied by Israel in 1967, including Jerusalem, remain under occupation. The area under the Palestinian Authority remains fragmented, its social and economic life jeopardized by damaging closures, lack of free passage and access to the outside world.

The continuation of this situation is unacceptable, the Committee states, particularly since agreements outlining the framework for a peaceful solution

were already reached by the parties. The Committee believes that it is incumbent upon the co-sponsors of the peace process, the Security Council and the international community to do everything to achieve peace and reconciliation in the Middle East. In this context, the Committee expressed the hope that the Wye River Memorandum, signed on 23 October, would be fully implemented, while providing the much needed impetus to the Oslo process, and help the parties to move forward to the negotiations on permanent status issues.

The policies and practices of occupation, continues the report, which seek to create actuality on the ground and to permanently alter the demographic composition of the occupied territory, violate the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and statehood, and make the achievement of real peace impossible. The international community, in particular the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, must intensify efforts to ensure protection for the Palestinian people, pending the achievement of a final settlement. The Committee will remain fully engaged in efforts to convene the conference requested by the Assembly at its tenth emergency special session.

The Committee reiterates that the involvement of the United Nations in the peace process is essential for the successful outcome of the peace efforts. The Committee pledges itself to continue mobilizing the international community at the governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental levels, in support of a comprehensive, just and lasting solution of this question, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions. The Committee will continue to review and assess its programme in order to achieve maximum effectiveness in its programme of meetings and other activities, and to respond adequately to developments on the ground and in the peace process. Recommendations to that effect will be submitted in due course.

The Committee hopes that Bethlehem 2000 -- a consensus Assembly resolution on a millennial celebration at Bethlehem in the context of a global vision of peace and reconciliation, adopted during the current Assembly session -- will enjoy the greatest international participation. It stresses the essential contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights of the United Nations Secretariat in support of the objectives of the Committee and requests it to continue its activities, in particular the further development of the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL) collection, and the completion of the project for the modernization of the records of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine.

The Committee also considers that the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information (DPI) should be continued. The strengthening of cooperation and coordination with the DPI will help enhance the special information programme on the question of Palestine and assist the Committee in the implementation of its mandate. The Committee is of the view that cooperation and coordination between DPI and the Division for Palestinian Rights should also be strengthened. The Committee requests the Department to give particular attention to the preparation of audio-visual and other informational materials aimed at the general public.

Wishing to make the greatest possible contribution to the achievement of a just and lasting peace during the difficult times that lie ahead, the Committee calls upon all States to join in this endeavour and invites the Assembly again to recognize the importance of the role of the Committee and to reconfirm its mandate with overwhelming support.

Attached to the report of the Secretary-General on the question of Palestine (document [A/53/652](#)) is a note verbale, dated 9 October, from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General which says that during the last year, the deadlock in the Middle East peace process had continued. No progress has been made with regard to the implementation of the agreements reached. The situation on the ground, including the economic and living conditions of the Palestinian people, has continued to deteriorate. Regional tension has increased as a whole, all as a result of the policies and practices of the Israeli Government. The Israeli Government, since taking office, has: adopted guidelines contradicting the letter and spirit of the agreements reached; made it clear that the timetable agreed upon would not be respected; resumed settlement activities in the occupied territory; and opened a tunnel in the vicinity of Al-Aqsa Mosque in Occupied East Jerusalem.

According to the note, it is clear that the Government of Israel has continued its drive to Judaize Jerusalem and to change its status and demographic composition. In this regard, the Israeli Government recently announced the creation of an 'umbrella municipality' which would expand the borders of Jerusalem and extend the administrative powers of the illegal municipality over nearby towns in Israel, as well as over some Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank.

The Palestinian side hopes that the United Nations will contribute to the efforts being undertaken to salvage the peace process and to bring it back on track. The involvement of the Security Council would also be a very important factor in the interest of the peace process. The Palestinian side believes that for the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine to be achieved through the current Middle East peace process, it is necessary to respect the mutual recognition between the two sides and the basis upon which the process was initiated, namely the principle of the return of land for peace and the implementation of Security Council resolutions [242 \(1967\)](#) of 22 November 1967 and [338 \(1973\)](#) of 22 October 1973. Furthermore, all actions that violate international law, relevant Council resolutions and those agreements must cease completely.

According to the Secretary-General, the signing of the Wye River memorandum by the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization is a promising development. This agreement complements and adds details to the accords that the parties concluded in the past and, more importantly, paves the way to permanent status negotiations. It is to be hoped that the Wye agreement will bring to an end, the delays and unilateral actions that have hampered progress in the Middle East peace process for far too long. The primary obligations of the Palestinians and Israelis are clear: to take all legal measures to combat violence and terrorism, and to carry out, on time, further redeployments in the West Bank as laid down in the agreement.

The Secretary-General states that it is imperative that the goodwill demonstrated at Wye Plantation be translated into scrupulous implementation of the commitments made by both sides, thereby rebuilding confidence and raising new hope for peace, stability and security for the region. The Wye agreement offers economic opportunities for the Palestinian people. Such opportunities are essential if peace in the Middle East is to prosper. The United Nations system will continue to support progress in the Israeli-Palestinian talks and to provide economic, social and other assistance to the occupied territories.

It is to be hoped that advances in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations will create favourable momentum for the resumption of the Israel-Syrian Arab Republic and Israel-Lebanon talks, says the Secretary-General. This will be essential for the settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict on the basis of relevant Security Council resolutions.

By the terms of the draft resolution of the Committee (document [A/53/L.48](#)), the Assembly would request the Committee to continue to keep under review the situation relating to the question of Palestine and to report and make suggestions to the Assembly or the Security Council, as appropriate. The Assembly would also authorize the Committee to continue all efforts to promote the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, to make such adjustments in its approved programme of work as it may consider appropriate and necessary, and to give special emphasis to the need to mobilize support and assistance for the Palestinian people.

The Assembly would request the Committee to continue to extend its cooperation and support to the Palestinian and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in order to mobilize international solidarity with and support for the achievement by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights and for a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, and to involve additional NGOs in its work. The Assembly would request the United

Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine, and other of the Organization's bodies associated with the question of Palestine to continue to cooperate fully with the Committee and to make available to it, the relevant information and documentation which they have at their disposal. The Assembly would also request the Secretary-General to circulate the report of the Committee to all the competent bodies of the United Nations, and urges them to take the necessary action as appropriate. The co-sponsors of the draft are: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Comoros, Cuba, Djibouti, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sudan, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Viet Nam, Yemen and Palestine.

By the terms of the draft on the Division for Palestinian Rights (document [A/53/L.49](#)), the Assembly would note with appreciation, the action by the Secretary-General in compliance with its [resolution 52/50](#) on the Division activities and consider that the Division continued to make a useful and constructive contribution. It would also request the Secretary-General to provide the Division with necessary resources and to ensure that it continued to carry out its programme of work in consultation with the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and under its guidance.

Also by the terms of the draft, the Assembly would request the Secretary-General to ensure the continued cooperation of the DPI and other units of the Secretariat in enabling the Division to perform its tasks and in covering adequately the question of Palestine. It would also invite all governments and organizations to lend their cooperation to the Committee and the Division, and note with appreciation, the action taken by Member States to observe annually the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People and request the Committee and the Division to continue to organize an annual exhibit on Palestinian rights in cooperation with the Permanent Mission of Palestine.

The co-sponsors of the draft are: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Comoros, Cuba, Djibouti, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Viet Nam, Yemen and Palestine.

By the terms of the draft on the DPI programme (document [A/53/L.50](#)), the Assembly would note with appreciation, the action taken by the DPI in compliance with [resolution 52/51](#) on the programme and consider that the special information programme on the question of Palestine was very useful in raising the awareness of the international community.

It would further request the DPI, in cooperation with the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to continue, with the necessary flexibility, its special information programme for the biennium 1998 to 1999, and in particular, to disseminate information on all the activities of the United Nations system relating to the question of Palestine; to issue updated publications on the question; to expand its collection of audio-visual materials and continue production of such materials; to organize seminars or encounters for journalists; and to provide assistance to the Palestinian people in the field of media development, in particular, to strengthen the training programme for Palestinian broadcasters and journalists. The co-sponsors of the draft are: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Comoros, Cuba, Djibouti, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Viet Nam, Yemen and Palestine.

By the terms of the draft on the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine (document [A/53/L.51](#)), the Assembly would stress the necessity for commitment to the principle of land for peace and the implementation of Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and the need for the immediate and scrupulous implementation of the agreements reached between the parties, including the redeployment of the Israeli forces from the West Bank and the commencement of the negotiations on the final settlement. The Assembly would call upon the concerned parties, the co-sponsors of the peace process and other interested parties, as well as the international community to exert all the necessary efforts and initiatives to bring the peace process back on track and to ensure its continuity and success.

The Assembly would stress the need for: the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian peoples -- primarily the right to self-determination; and the withdrawal of Israel from Palestinian territory occupied since 1967. In addition, it would stress the need for resolving the problem of the Palestine refugees in conformity with its [resolution 194 \(III\)](#) of 11 December 1948. It would urge Member States to expedite the provision of economic and technical assistance to the Palestinian people during this critical period. The Assembly would emphasize as well, the importance for the United Nations to play a more active and expanded role in the current peace process and in the implementation of the Declaration of Principles. The co-sponsors of the draft are: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Comoros, Cuba, Djibouti, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, Viet Nam, Yemen and Palestine.

Statements

IBRA DEGUENE KA (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, said that today, more than 50 years after the partition of Palestine, almost half of the seven million Palestinians still lived in refugee camps. Since 1967, some 350,000 settlers had been installed in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, in an ongoing violation of Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Settlement building had intensified in recent years and continued relentlessly. He said East Jerusalem had been illegally annexed and surrounded by settlements. Land continued to be confiscated not only for new settlements and the expansion of existing ones, but also to construct bypass roads to link them to each other and to Israel. The occupied territory was gradually being fragmented into a patchwork of separate areas which could be closed and easily controlled by military force. During all those years, however, and through all their hardships, the Palestinian people had never given up. They had steadfastly continued to believe in the justice of their cause, and had patiently continued to appeal to the international community to help restore their inalienable rights, he went on to say.

The historic compromise of 1993 had been an important milestone along the way, he said. The agreements achieved since then, including the recent Wye River Memorandum, demonstrated that a diplomatic solution that took into account the rights and needs of both sides was indeed possible. The sporadic incidents of violence by extremists from both sides opposed to reconciliation and territorial accommodation only underscored the need to proceed with urgency and determination towards a just and peaceful settlement. It was clear that to be lasting such a settlement must be widely accepted and could not be imposed by one side to serve its own interests.

He said Israel's understandable security needs were not helped by unilateral actions which increased Palestinian dispossession and deprived them of the very rights and well-being that were fundamental to a peaceful outcome of negotiations. His Committee had tried to carry out its mandate in a manner that would be concretely helpful, while continuing to press for the full exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. It would continue to cooperate with all governments and intergovernmental organizations in its effort to make a constructive contribution to the achievement of the just and peaceful settlement "we all desire, until our Palestinian friends can gain the seat that is rightfully theirs among the Member States of this Assembly".

Introducing the four draft resolutions, he informed the Assembly that Algeria and Mali had become co-sponsors of the four texts. The intent of the resolutions, in accordance with the objectives of the Committee, was to ensure that efforts for Palestinian rights and for a just and peaceful solution to the question were as useful and as constructive as possible in the coming year. They embodied positions, mandates and work programmes that were of particular importance at a crucial stage of the peace process. He called on the Assembly to express its support by even greater majorities than in

the past.

GEORGE SALIBA (Malta), Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, said that during the past year, the Committee had continued to do its utmost to implement the mandate given to it by the Assembly. The annual report of the Committee covered its activities, as well as new developments related to the question of Palestine and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process over the last year. The Committee was of the view that the policies and practices of occupation, which sought to create actuality on the ground and to permanently alter the demographic composition of the occupied territory, violated the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and statehood and made the achievement of real peace impossible. The international community, in particular the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, must intensify efforts to ensure protection for the Palestinian peoples, pending the achievement of a final settlement.

The Committee reaffirmed that the United Nations had a permanent responsibility with respect to the question of Palestine until a satisfactory settlement based on international legitimacy was reached. It also reiterated that the involvement of the United Nations in the peace process, both as guardian of international legitimacy, and in the mobilization and provision of international assistance for development, was essential for the success of the process. The Committee also supported the Bethlehem 2000 project launched by the Palestinian Authority. It was planning to convene an international conference on "Bethlehem 2000" at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Headquarters in Rome in February 1999, with the agreement and support of the Italian Government.

FAROUK KADDOUMI, observer for Palestine, said as a result of Israel's non-adherence to relevant resolutions and agreements, the Assembly had been forced to discuss the issue year after year. After Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu took power, the negotiations had faltered and reached a deadlock. So far, there had been no tangible achievements. The relevant resolutions stipulated that the Israeli forces must withdraw from the occupied territories, including Al-Quds, and that the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination must be ensured. He hoped those objectives would be realized so that peace would prevail.

However, he said Mr. Netanyahu wanted to evade his commitments, and impose a new fait accompli and policy of confiscation of land. He did not carry out the agreements he himself had signed. He wasted time on the notion that it was necessary to conclude security agreements. When those security agreements were concluded, the Palestinians insisted that Israel abide and end its policies and withdraw from the occupied territories, in accordance with the Oslo agreement. However, that did not take place. Even while at the Wye meeting, he had exercised the economic and security blockade on Palestinians, and pursued oppressive and terrorist policies.

Active American diplomacy for two years had been unsuccessful in convincing the current Israeli Government to implement its agreements, he said. The Israeli Government had defined, through a resolution adopted in January, its vital interests, which could not be considered in any interim or final agreement. Those interests included its western and eastern security zones, Jerusalem, the zones of Jewish settlement, the interests of infrastructure, security and military sites, roads from the north to south and east to west, and Jewish places of worship. Israel had confirmed it would keep those areas when it endorsed the Wye Agreement.

Following difficult negotiations in Wye, the negotiators had reached an agreement for partial redeployment of the Israeli army from Palestinian areas, he continued. They stressed security issues, particularly with reference to combatting terrorism. However, that agreement had ignored the Israeli occupation, which was the source and reason for all acts of terrorism and violence.

Israel, in its occupation of Palestinian territory, was the condemned party, not the Palestinian people, he said. The Palestinian people were exposed to ill treatment as a result of the practices of the Israeli army and settlers. The Israeli Government had not only contradicted those agreements, but Mr. Netanyahu had falsified historical facts to try to deny Palestine's right to sovereignty and self-determination, and create a historical legitimacy for Israel.

Israel was supposed to implement all its obligations during the interim period, he said. A committee, including representatives of Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinians and Israel had met to find a formula during the transition stage. However, Israel had frozen the work of that committee. The Wye Memorandum had ignored that vital issue. Israel had maintained their vital interests and infrastructure, confiscated land, and thousands of Palestinian detainees were still in jails. In addition to blockades and curfews, the Israeli rulers had claimed that they wanted to achieve a historical reconciliation with Palestine. It was regrettable that Israel alone could estimate its security needs and determine any appropriate solutions. Israel was determined to absolve itself of its commitments and its responsibility to implement the third phase of redeployment.

The conflict never related to institutions or administration, but the Palestinian land, their rights, and the exercise of those rights on their own land, he said. It was strange that the declaration of Palestinian statehood was considered a unilateral action and violated the agreement in Israel's eyes. However, the demolition of Palestinian homes and building of settlements were not viewed as unilateral actions. Israel claimed it was a democratic State, but it was pursuing all forms of opposition, had violated human rights and practised racial discrimination. The return of refugees was a right established and confirmed by international law, but Israel refused to comply.

Israel, in its policies and activities, had sabotaged all chances for peace, he said. The continuing occupation carried with it elements of tension and explosion. Israeli occupation must be eliminated including from Al-Quds. Refugees had to be returned so other tracks would meet with success. The Palestinians were looking forward to the participation of the international community in preparation for the Bethlehem 2000 events.

The Lebanese and Syrian tracks were facing a deadlock, he said. Israel persisted in ignoring the agreements by previous governments on those tracks. Israel had rejected the relevant resolutions with regard to the withdrawal from southern Lebanon and the Syrian Golan. The continued blockade of the Iraqi and Libyan people would increase tensions in the Middle East. The Arab people believed that Israel owned weapons of mass destruction and was not accountable to anyone. The security agreement reached so far would not help unless a final settlement was reached, taking into account the interest of the people in the region. He affirmed that solving the Israeli-Arab conflict was based on finding a just settlement for the Palestinians in accordance with international legitimacy. The United Nations was still the only forum for addressing the question of Palestine.

ERNST SUCHARIPA (Austria), speaking on behalf of the European Union and associated States, said sustained political commitment by the parties and a determination to resist attempts to frustrate the progress would lead to the full implementation of the Wye River Memorandum. The European Union welcomed the steps undertaken by both parties in the field of security arrangements and the redeployment of troops, as well as the recent inauguration of the Gaza Airport. He called upon the parties to complete negotiations on those remaining unsettled issues under the Interim Agreement, regarding the industrial zone in Karni, the Gaza port and the West Bank, and to fully engage with a spirit of cooperation in final status negotiations.

The European Union insisted on no unilateral acts being taken which could prejudice the final outcome of the negotiations. He reiterated that the principles set out in the Council resolution 242 (1967) and the Fourth Geneva Convention were fully applicable to all occupied territories, including Jerusalem. In that regard, the European Union considered settlement activity as illegal and an obstacle to peace.

An important aspect of the progress in the peace process, he continued, was improving investor confidence, promoting sustainability and greater self-sufficiency of the Palestinian economy. The European Union would continue offering economic and technical assistance aimed at facilitating social and political stability among the Palestinians. Important contributions were planned in the education, health and food aid sectors. The European Union would also play a central role in the technical follow-up to today's Ministerial Conference in Washington to support Middle East Peace and Development.

ARIZAL EFFENDI (Indonesia) said it was important that the provisions of the Wye River Memorandum be fully implemented, in good faith and sincerity, to replace the prevailing atmosphere of despair and tension among the peoples of the territories with confidence and trust, and to provide the

much needed momentum to expedite the final status negotiations. The inauguration of the Gaza International Airport was a positive step forward in the peace process and in symbolizing the consolidation of Palestinian sovereignty in its territories.

The issue of settlements was one of the main obstacles on the road to a secure peace, he said. Those activities must be ended; they were in complete violation of the Geneva Convention on the protection of civilians in time of war, as well as of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, and the relevant peace agreements. The United Nations had a pivotal role in the mobilization of international assistance for development as the Palestinians faced the arduous process of nation-building. Emancipation without development was independence without substance; therefore, the international community had to marshal resources to help that nascent nation.

SHEN GUOFANG (China) said that the October agreement reached between Palestine and Israel on the second phase of the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the West Bank of the Jordan River represented an important step forward in the process of self-rule for the Palestinian people. China welcomed that development, and hoped that the relevant parties would carry out their obligations seriously, continue to adopt a flexible and pragmatic approach, implement the existing agreements in earnest, remove obstruction and push the peace process forward on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, as well as the principle of land-for-peace.

He said that since Palestine had achieved a level of self-rule, for reasons of which everybody was well aware, economic development in the self-rule areas was far from satisfactory. The international community was duty-bound to provide stronger support and more assistance to the Palestinian people and to help the Palestinian self-rule government reinvigorate and develop its economy.

In recent years, the United Nations had played an increasingly important role in settling regional disputes and maintaining world peace, he said. The Organization had made a tremendous contribution to the settlement of the question of Palestine and that of the Middle East as a whole. Last July, the General Assembly had adopted the resolution Participation of Palestine in the work of the United Nations by which the Palestine's observer status at the United Nations had been elevated. China believed that the Organization would play an even more active role in promoting the Middle East peace process and bringing about a final settlement of the question of Palestine and the Middle East.

He said that the Chinese Government and people were very much concerned about the recent developments in the Middle East. The question of Palestine was at the core of the Middle East question. Only when that question was solved in a just reasonable manner, and all the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people were restored, could Palestine and Israel enjoy real and lasting peace. China would join the rest of the international community and continue to work tirelessly for a comprehensive and fair settlement of the question of Palestine and the question of the Middle East.

ALOUNKEO KITTIKHOUN (Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that his delegation was concerned over the grave deterioration of the Middle East peace process in the wake of new settlements in the oriental sector of Jerusalem. Even worse, violent acts and armed clashes had jeopardized the peace process advocated by the international community, leading to a loss of trust between the parties and a general climate of tension and insecurity. Since then, the international community had encouraged the parties to make a greater effort to achieve a global solution to the dispute. The agreement signed at the Wye Plantation in October was commendable for finally breaking a two-year deadlock and possibly leading to the settlement of a problem which had existed for five decades.

Wisdom, restraint and a great deal of patience from both parties was important to solving one of the thorniest problems of the times, he continued. The question of Palestine, in his view, was solvable providing the parties concerned had the necessary political will. The international community must do everything possible to assist that effort. The cause of peace represented the ardent hope of the region's people to coexist and cooperate peacefully. Noting the creation of the Israeli State in May 1948, the international community had waited patiently for the creation of an independent Palestinian State in accordance with the partition plan approved by the General Assembly in 1947.

The Assembly's President, DIDIER OPERTTI (Uruguay), then informed the Assembly that the Open-Ended Working Group on equitable representation and increase in the membership of the Security Council and other matters would hold its first meeting of the fifty-third session on organizational matters relating to the appointment of Vice-Chairman, on Wednesday, 2 December, at 10 a.m. in the General Assembly Hall.

He also announced that the open-ended informal consultations on agenda item 30 (United Nations reform: measures and proposals) would also take place on Thursday, 3 December, at 10:30 a.m. in Conference Room 4.

JAMES J. MARUATONA (Botswana) said Middle East peace and stability were not only in the interest of the Israelis and Palestinians, but also in the interest of regional and international peace and security. Both parties, especially Israel, should comply fully with the Oslo Agreements, and refrain from all unilateral measures and actions that might compromise the outcome of the final status negotiations.

He said the construction of Jewish settlements in the occupied territories contributed negatively to the peace process. Botswana called on Israel to desist from that policy. The signing of the Wye River Memorandum was a welcome development; the Wye River spirit of cooperation and understanding should contribute to the implementation of the accords previously reached between the two parties.

A solution to the question of Palestine had never been closer, he said. Israel's uncompromising position with regard to its security needs had certainly contributed to the retardation of the peace process. Israel had legitimate security concerns and had the right to live in safety within secure boundaries, but that right could not be realised by means which could make the Palestinians lose trust and confidence in the leadership of the Palestinian Authority.

NURUL ISLAM NAHID (Bangladesh) said Israeli occupation of Palestine and other Arab territories, was a violation of international law. Israel applied tactics that generated various forms of human rights violations and continued an agenda of suppressing resistance to occupation. Individual actions received massive retaliation by Israel in the form of collective punishment such as blockade, demolition of houses, confiscation of property and collective search. The inalienable rights of the Palestinian people had to be recognized and realized. Israeli withdrawal from all Palestine and occupied Arab territories, including Golan, was essential for any meaningful progress in the peace process.

Meanwhile, he continued, Israel had to stop all sorts of settlement plans in Palestine and the occupied Arab territories. Of the 194 Israeli settlements, 67 had been expanded or built since the signing of the Oslo accords. It was regrettable that instead of freezing settlement activities, in February 1997, Israel had authorized the building of new ones, including the one in Jabal Abu Ghneim in East Jerusalem. When finished, Arab-populated East Jerusalem would be completely encircled by Israeli settlements. He called on Israel to end completely and without delay, its occupation of Palestine and other Arab territories, including Jerusalem. Developments following the signing of the Wye River Memorandum were promising. Bangladesh would like to underscore the need for the implementation of relevant Security Council resolutions, he added.

MOHAMMAD J. SAMHAN (United Arab Emirates) said it was frustrating that despite General Assembly resolutions related to Palestine and reaffirming the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, successive Israeli Governments had violated commitments made. The policy of land-for-peace had enjoyed the support of the international community and the Arab territories. Regrettably it had been met by one obstacle after another from the Israeli side. Illegal settler expansion policies, the creation of tensions, closure, violence, murder, confiscation of land, and the rescinding of the rights of Arab citizens were all factors that had created a state of insecurity in the occupied Arab territories.

After two years of a stalemate, he said, the Israeli Government was now attempting to shirk its responsibilities in the Wye River Memorandum. Those were the release of all Palestinian detainees, the transfer of authority, and the ceasing of all unilateral action. The Israeli Government had even gone as far as forming armed militias among Jewish settlers, in another attempt to establish a State of occupation. He called upon donor countries and international development and financial institutions to provide all types of assistance to the Palestinians to help then develop their own institutions.

DORE GOLD (Israel) said historical experience of the Jewish people could not be divorced from the general debate over the Israeli-Palestinian question. Today's debate, which was focused on the respective rights of the parties in the disputed territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, could not be based on the most recent General Assembly resolutions alone. The reality conveyed by the deliberate use of politically loaded adjectives in

those resolutions reflected more what United Nations bloc voting would sustain, rather than what was historically true. The choice of terminology like "occupied Palestinian territory" suggested a straightforward problem: that a sovereign Palestinian Arab State had once existed; that Israel, like as European colonial power, had invaded its territory; and, now, Israel had to simply withdraw from that same territory and restore the Palestinian State. The respective rights of the parties could only be understood if three basic sources were examined: the events surrounding decisions taken in 1947 and 1948, the aftermath of the six-day war, including the adoption Security Council resolution 242 (1967); and finally the Oslo agreements.

The rights of the Jewish people to the territories were embedded in the League of Nations mandate, he said. The aftermath of the six-day war further reinforced that claim, since Israel entered the West Bank only in exercise of its lawful right to self-defence. Fully aware of its historic and legal rights, Israel had nonetheless opted for a process of negotiations to resolve the final status of those disputed territories, because it was committed to reaching peace with its neighbours and determined not to rule another people against their will. In fact, Oslo had led to situation whereby 98 per cent of the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip were under the administration of the Palestinian Authority -- and not of Israel. But, the fundamental underpinning of Oslo, as well as the Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) was that issues must be resolved only through negotiations between the parties. The Oslo interim agreement was explicit in that regard: "Neither side shall initiate or take any step that will change the status of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip pending the outcome of the permanent status negotiations".

The clear intention of that language was to preclude the unilateral declaration of a Palestinian State or the unilateral annexation of West Bank or Gaza territory by Israel, for those were the only acts that could change the legal status of the disputed territories. That commitment had been made again in the recently- concluded Wye River Memorandum. Despite those specific obligations contained in Oslo, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Chairman Yasser Arafat had stated on 29 November, that he planned to declare a Palestinian State on 4 May 1999. On the basis of past declarations of that sort, the Government of Israel, on 11 November, had taken the decision that such a declaration would constitute a substantive and fundamental violation of the interim agreement. In the event of such a violation, the Government of Israel would consider itself entitled to take all necessary steps, including the application of Israeli rule, law and administration to settlement areas and security areas in Judea, Samaria and Gaza as it sees fit. Israel preferred the path of a negotiated settlement to the path of unilateralism, but should Chairman Arafat carry out his declared intent, Israel would do what was necessary to protect its security, including the assurance of defensible borders, to which it was fully entitled.

JOSEPH DIATTA (Niger) said the Oslo Accords had raised tremendous hopes for peace and stability in the Middle East. Unfortunately, the process soon ran into a deadlock because of Israel's refusal to honour its commitments and its imposition of measures, including the establishment of new settlements and the confiscation of Arab lands. The Palestinian and Israeli leaders, and the sponsors of the peace process, were called on to take action. For that reason, the international community placed all its hopes on the recently concluded negotiations in Wye River. He said Niger wanted to pay tribute to the role of the President of the United States and the King of Jordan in concluding the Wye River Memorandum. To maintain the momentum, the parties must refrain from unilateral measures which were contrary to international law, and foster calm and understanding.

He said the future of the peace process depended on the full realization of the rights of the Palestinian people to return to their homes, and to achieve self-determination and sovereignty. The United Nations, which bore the full responsibility for Palestine, had to step up efforts to ensure the rights of the Palestinians, and work towards the success begun in Madrid and continued in Oslo.

HASMY AGAM (Malaysia) said the Wye River Memorandum was a welcome breakthrough in the stalled Middle East peace process. However, the continuing adverse human rights situation and deteriorating socio-economic conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories remained a major concern of the international community. Only a comprehensive peace settlement would resolve the refugee issues. The Israeli policies of confiscating Palestinian-owned lands on a massive scale and demolishing Arab-owned houses, as well as establishing new Israeli settlements and expanding existing ones in the occupied territories, had to be terminated forthwith.

He said immediate amelioration of the plight of the Palestinians was an essential prerequisite to further consolidation and promotion of the peace process. Progress in the search for a political settlement had to be accompanied by economic growth and development, in particular the improvement of the conditions of Palestinians in the occupied areas. Repressive and discriminatory policies and actions by the occupying power must be brought to an end without delay, and replaced by honest efforts to build trust and confidence, as well as social justice and mutual security among the concerned parties. The immediate release of more Palestinians under detention would be a step in the right direction.

KAMALESH SHARMA (India), said India's cherished bonds of friendship with the Palestinian people were based on civilized links spanning almost all aspects of human endeavour: cultural; social; religious; economic; and political. There was general agreement that, together with political support for the peace process, there was a need to focus on the multi-faceted tasks of nation-building. The Palestinian Authority required generous assistance, particularly for health, education and employment creation. Infrastructural development was of critical importance. Regional cooperation, complemented by international efforts, was essential for enhancing peace and prosperity in the region.

He said India would continue, within its resource constraints, to extend material and technical assistance to the people of Palestine to consolidate their progress towards self-government and nation-building. The assistance included scholarships and exchange programmes. India had offered more than 50 specialized training slots in 1996 and 1997 at an estimated Rs 5.5 million. India had also pledged \$1 million at the pledging conference in Paris in January 1996. The Indian Government had offered to establish a common facility centre for training in vocational activities such as software development, computer programming and computerized numerically controlled machines. It had also been contributing to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

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