



General Assembly

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Sixty-eighth General Assembly
Fourth Committee
25th Meeting (AM)

FOURTH COMMITTEE FORWARDS 28 DRAFTS TO GENERAL ASSEMBLY

FOR ADOPTION, CONCLUDING WORK FOR SESSION

Texts Approved on Special Political Missions, Atomic Radiation, Middle East

The Fourth Committee today concluded its work for the session with the approval of 11 draft resolutions and one draft decision, including, for the first time, a text on special political missions, bringing to 28 the total number of drafts it sent to the General Assembly for adoption.

Approved today were four draft resolutions concerning the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), five on the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, and one on the effects of atomic radiation. The Committee also approved its provisional programme of work for the sixty-ninth session.

Committee members coalesced around the draft resolution on special political missions, introduced by Mexico, and, acting without a vote, approved the text acknowledging the significant increase in the missions' number and complexity, and requesting the Secretary-General to hold regular, inclusive and interactive dialogue on the overall policy matters pertaining to those missions and to submit a report, including on efforts to ensure their transparency, accountability, geographical representation, gender participation, expertise and effectiveness.

Following the usual pattern of action, the five drafts on the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices, introduced by Cuba, required recorded votes. The traditional text on the Special Committee's work, approved by a recorded vote of 88 in favour to 8 against (Australia, Canada, Federated States of Micronesia, Israel, Nauru, Palau, Panama, United States), with 73 abstentions, would have the General Assembly reiterate its demand that Israel, the occupying Power, cooperate, in accordance with its obligations as a United Nations Member State, with the Special Committee in implementing its mandate.

The text would have the Assembly deplore those policies and practices of Israel that violated the human rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs of the occupied territories and express grave concern about the critical situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, particularly in the Gaza Strip, as a result of unlawful Israeli practices and measures.

Another resolution in that cluster, approved by a recorded vote of 156 in favour to 8 against (Australia, Canada, Federated States of Micronesia, Israel, Nauru, Palau, Panama, United States), with 7 abstentions (Cameroon, Honduras, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Solomon Islands, South Sudan, Vanuatu) would have the Assembly condemn all acts of violence, including all acts of terror, provocation, incitement and destruction, especially the excessive use of force by the Israeli occupying forces against Palestinian civilians, particularly in the Gaza Strip, while at the same time, expressing grave concern at the firing of rockets against Israeli civilian areas resulting in loss of life and injury.

Recorded votes were also required for the draft resolutions on the applicability of the Geneva Convention; occupied Syrian Golan; and on Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan.

Among the four drafts on UNRWA, introduced by Indonesia, the text on the Agency's operations would have the Assembly call on Israel to cease obstructing the movement and access of Agency staff, vehicles and supplies; encourage the Agency to provide increased assistance to affected Palestine refugees in Syria, as well as those who had fled to neighbouring countries, and call on donors to urgently ensure sustained support to the Agency in that regard.

Deeply concerned about the Agency's extremely critical financial situation, the Assembly would urge all States, the specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations to urgently increase their contributions to the Agency. It was approved by a recorded vote of 164 in favour to 6 against (Cameroon, Canada, Federated States of Micronesia, Israel, Palau, United States), with 3 abstentions (Papua New Guinea, South Sudan, Vanuatu).

Also by a recorded vote, the Committee approved draft resolutions on assistance to Palestine refugees; persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities; and on Palestine refugees' properties and revenues.

Acting without a vote, the Committee approved a draft resolution, introduced by Australia, on atomic radiation, which would have the Assembly request the Scientific Committee to continue its work, including its important activities to increase knowledge of the levels, effects and risks of ionizing radiation from all sources. It would endorse the strategic plan of the Scientific Committee for the period 2014-2019.

The Committee also approved a draft decision submitted by its Bureau on its programme of work for the sixty-ninth session.

The representative of Iran spoke in explanation of vote on the draft on atomic radiation, as well as on the series of drafts relating to the Middle East. The representative of the European Union delegation also explained his position on those texts. Making general statements were representatives of Syria, Israel, United States, Canada and Germany.

The Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine also spoke.

At the start of the meeting, the Committee observed a moment of silence in honour of the victims of the typhoon in the Philippines, following which, the country's representative expressed gratitude for the show of solidarity and noted the international community's immediate mobilization of resources. "We feel the caring, we see the sharing," he said, adding that in this time of grief, the Philippines was reminded that "we are one human family."

Committee Chairman Carlos Garcia Gonzalez (El Salvador) delivered closing remarks.

Background

The Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) met this morning to conclude its work for the session, by taking action on all pending drafts before it, including four draft resolutions relating to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), five on the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, one on special political missions, another on atomic radiation and a draft decision on the Committee's programme of work.

Atomic Radiation

ANASTASIA CARAYANIDES (Australia), introducing the draft resolution on effects of atomic radiation (document A/C.4/68/L.7/Rev.1), said the text endorsed the intentions and plans of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation for conducting its scientific review and assessment, in particular, its strategic plan for 2014 to 2019 and its next Global Survey of Medical Radiation Usage and Exposures. On resourcing, the co-sponsors called for the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to strengthen the "sufficient, assured and predictable" funding of the Scientific Committee to arrange annual sessions, coordinate the development of scientific reviews of the sources and effects of ionizing radiation, and make publications of these findings.

She welcomed the strategy of the Scientific Committee to improve data collection, and encouraged the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations to provide further relevant data about doses, effects and risks from various sources of radiation to the Secretariat. Australia acknowledged that all Member States were entitled to express their interest in becoming members of the Scientific Committee, and noted Iran's expressed interest, which, she said, would be considered in line with General Assembly resolution 66/70.

Action on Text

The Chair noted that agreement had been reached on operative paragraph 16 of that draft resolution, and that an amendment to it (document A/C.4/68/L.8), had therefore been withdrawn by its sponsor.

Then, acting without a vote, the Committee approved "L.7/Rev.1", by which the General Assembly would request the Scientific Committee to continue its work, including its important activities to increase knowledge of the levels, effects and risks of ionizing radiation from all sources, and notes the expression of interest by Member States in membership in the Scientific Committee.

Speaking in explanation of position after the vote, the representative of Iran said that his delegation attached great importance to the Scientific Committee and its work. To fulfil its responsibility efficiently, it should benefit from the knowledge of all interested countries. Iran welcomed the resolution's approval, and inter alia, the operative paragraph 16 of the resolution, and considered it a positive step for countries interested in enhancing the membership of the Committee. Further, Iran thanked those delegations that supported his amendment regarding membership in the Scientific Committee.

Special Political Missions

RICARDO ALDAY (Mexico), introducing the draft resolution on special political missions (document A/C.4/68/L.11), submitted by El Salvador, Finland, Ireland, Mexico and Paraguay, said that in the last two years, the substantial trials and tests conducted on the relevance of those missions made it possible to talk further about their development and to ensure that the General Assembly conducted forums on them, concerning their deployment and eventual end. The draft resolution would also provide the General Assembly with information to enable it to decide the most appropriate way to support the missions. Mexico looked forward to discussion, during the Assembly's next session, on the role of the special political missions and their strengthening. The encouragement of Member States for reviewing the missions reaffirmed that the General Assembly was the appropriate forum for that process.

Action on Text

The Committee then went on to approve, without a vote, "L.11".

By its terms, the Assembly would ask the Secretary-General to submit a report on the overall policy matters pertaining to special political missions, including efforts towards ensuring transparency, accountability, geographical representation, gender participation, expertise and effectiveness in respect of all special political missions. It would decide to include in the item in the provisional agenda of its sixty-ninth session.

General Statements

YUSRA KHAN (Indonesia) introduced four draft resolutions concerning the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) — "L.12" through "L.15". He said that the texts reaffirmed fundamental principles and positions regarding the Palestine refugees, and reflected the strong support of the international community for the Agency and its mandate, pending a just solution to the refugees' plight. In addition to reaffirming the right of return of the Palestinians and the provision of essential education, health, relief and other services, the drafts also emphasized the necessity of UNRWA's work and its vital contribution to stability in the region. The international donor community was urged to increase support to the Agency, and ensure continued assistance to the Palestinian community.

The first of the four drafts, "L.12", on assistance to Palestine refugees, reaffirmed core principles regarding the refugees and UNRWA, and stressed the imperative of resolving the Palestine refugee problem. The second draft, "L.13", reaffirmed the rights of persons displaced by the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities to return to their homes. The third, "L.14", addressed the difficulties faced by UNRWA during the reporting period and reaffirmed that the Agency's functioning remained essential for the well-being and human development of the Palestine refugees. The final draft in that series, "L.15", reaffirmed the refugees' rights to properties and their revenues. He hoped that they would once again receive overwhelming support from Member States.

OSCAR LEÓN GONZÁLEZ (Cuba) introduced the five draft resolutions concerning the Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices, "L.16" through "L.20", saying that that the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, had deteriorated as Israel continued its illegal policies and measures in a deliberate manner, particularly in terms of the intensification of its unlawful settlement campaign. The draft resolutions to be considered by the Fourth Committee addressed those violations. The first emphasized the need to bring a complete end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967. The draft also renewed the Special Committee's mandate. The second draft resolution reaffirmed the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and the third underscored the detrimental impacts of the illegal Israeli settlement policies and activities. The fourth draft focused on the wide range of Israeli practices violating the human rights of the Palestinian people, and demanded that the occupying Power cease all such practices. The

last resolution concerned the occupied Syrian Golan. Cuba hoped that Member States would give their strong support to those important texts.

Action on Texts

The Committee then proceeded to take recorded votes on the four draft resolutions relating to UNRWA.

Draft resolution "L.12" on Assistance to Palestine Refugees was approved by a recorded vote of 165 in favour to 2 against (Cameroon, Israel), with 6 abstentions (Canada, Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, South Sudan, United States, Vanuatu).

By its provisions, the General Assembly would call upon all donors to continue to strengthen their efforts to meet the anticipated needs of the Agency, including with regard to increased expenditures arising from the serious socioeconomic and humanitarian situation and instability in the region, particularly in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and those needs mentioned in recent emergency appeals and in the regional crisis response plans to address the situation of Palestine refugees in Syria, as well as those who had fled to countries in the region.

Draft resolution "L.13" on Persons displaced as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities was approved by a recorded vote of 162 in favour to 6 against (Cameroon, Canada, Federated States of Micronesia, Israel, Palau, United States), with 5 abstentions (Nauru, Panama, Papua New Guinea, South Sudan, Vanuatu).

By its terms, the General Assembly would endorse the efforts of UNRWA's Commissioner-General to continue to provide humanitarian assistance, as far as practicable, on an emergency basis, and as a temporary measure, to persons in the area who are currently displaced and in serious need of continued assistance as a result of the June 1967 and subsequent hostilities.

Draft resolution "L.14" on Operations of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East was approved by a recorded vote of 164 in favour to 6 against (Cameroon, Canada, Federated States of Micronesia, Israel, Palau, United States), with 3 abstentions (Papua New Guinea, South Sudan, Vanuatu).

By its provisions, the General Assembly would call upon Israel to, among others, cease obstructing the movement and access of the Agency's staff, vehicles and supplies, and to cease the levying of taxes, extra fees and charges, which affect the Agency's operations detrimentally.

The Assembly would urge all States, the specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations to urgently increase their contributions to the Agency in order to address the persistent, growing and serious financial constraints and underfunding, especially with respect to the Agency's regular budget deficit, noting that financial shortfalls have been exacerbated by the current humanitarian situation and instability on the ground that have resulted in rising expenditures.

It would encourage the Agency to provide increased assistance, in accordance with its mandate, to affected Palestine refugees in Syria, as well as those who had fled to neighbouring countries, and call on donors to urgently ensure sustained support to the Agency in that regard.

By the terms of draft resolution "L.15" on Palestine refugees' properties and revenues, the General Assembly would urge the Palestinian and Israeli sides, as agreed between them, to deal with the important issue of Palestine refugees' properties and their revenues within the framework of the final status negotiations of the Middle East peace process.

That text was approved by a recorded vote of 163 in favour to 7 against (Cameroon, Canada, Federated States of Micronesia, Israel, Nauru, Palau, United States), with 3 abstentions (Papua New Guinea, South Sudan, Vanuatu).

The Committee then proceeded to take recorded votes on the five draft resolutions relating to the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.

Draft resolution "L.16", on the work of the Special Committee was approved by a recorded vote of 88 in favour to 8 against (Australia, Canada, Federated States of Micronesia, Israel, Nauru, Palau, Panama, United States), with 73 abstentions.

By its terms, the General Assembly, gravely concerned about the continued detrimental impact of ongoing unlawful Israeli practices and measures in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, would request the Special Committee continue its effort to investigate Israeli violations of the Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949 in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and other Arab territories occupied by Israel since 1967.

Draft resolution “L.17”, on the Applicability of the Geneva Convention to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the other occupied Arab territories was approved by a recorded vote of 160 in favour to 6 against (Canada, Federated States of Israel, Nauru, Palau, United States), with 5 abstentions (Australia, Cameroon, Papua New Guinea, South Sudan, Vanuatu).

That draft would have the General Assembly demand that Israel accept the de jure requirements and comply scrupulously with the provisions of the 1949 Geneva Convention, and call upon all High Contracting Parties to the Convention to exert all efforts to ensure respect for its provisions by Israel, the occupying Power.

By a recorded vote of 158 in favour to 6 against (Canada, Federated States of Micronesia, Israel, Nauru, Palau, United States), with 8 abstentions (Australia, Cameroon, Honduras, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, South Sudan, Vanuatu), the Committee approved “L.18” on Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan.

According to that text, the General Assembly would reiterate its demand for the immediate and complete cessation of all Israeli settlement activities in all of the occupied territories. Furthermore, it would call for the prevention of all acts of violence, destruction, harassment and provocation by Israeli settlers, especially against Palestinian civilians and their properties, including historic and religious sites, and agricultural lands.

Then, the draft resolution on Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, “L.19”, was approved by a recorded vote of 156 in favour to 8 against (Australia, Canada, Federated States of Micronesia, Israel, Nauru, Palau, Panama, United States), with 7 abstentions (Cameroon, Honduras, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Solomon Islands, South Sudan, Vanuatu).

The General Assembly, by that text, would demand that Israel, the occupying Power, cease the construction of the wall, dismantle the structure and make reparation for all damage caused by its construction, which has gravely impacted the human rights and the socioeconomic living conditions of the Palestinian people. It would also demand that Israel cease its prolonged closures and economic and movement restrictions – amounting to a blockade on the Gaza Strip – and allow for sustained and regular movement of persons and goods for the long overdue reconstruction in the Gaza Strip.

The Committee then turned to draft resolution “L.20” on the occupied Syrian Golan, approving it by a recorded vote of 159 in favour to 1 against (Israel), with 11 abstentions, by which the Assembly would call on Israel, the occupying Power, to comply with Security Council resolution 497 (1981), in which the Council decided Israel’s imposition of its laws, jurisdiction and administration on the occupied Syrian Golan was null and void and without international legal effect. The Assembly would also call on Israel to desist from imposing Israeli citizenship and Israeli identity cards on the Syrian citizens in the occupied Syrian Golan, and discontinue its repressive measures against the population of the Golan.

Speaking in explanation of vote after the votes, the representative of Lithuania, on behalf of the European Union, said that the Union had not expressed a legal qualification regarding the term “forced displacement” used in a number of resolutions.

Also speaking in explanation of vote after vote, the representative of Iran said that his country had voted in favor of all the resolutions under agenda item 52, concerning the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices, in order to show solidarity with the Palestinian people. Iran continued to emphasize their inalienable rights, and believed that resolution of the Palestinian crisis was achievable only if those rights were fully restored. Due to lack of attention to root causes, the conflict had remained unsolved for six decades. A durable peace was only possible through the end of the occupation of the Palestinian Territory by the Israeli regime and the return of all Palestinian refugees to their homeland.

General Statements

RIYAD MANSOUR, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine, said that today’s votes were a resounding reaffirmation of the rights of the Palestinian peoples, including the refugees, and the quest for a just and lasting solution. The Fourth Committee’s actions today exemplified the role that the United Nations could and must play in upholding international law and safeguarding human rights. It also illustrated the tangible difference that could be made through multilateral diplomacy.

Palestine, he said, urged Member States to support UNRWA's vital work, including at the 3 December pledging conference. Today's resolutions reaffirmed the international consensus regarding the illegality of the gross systematic violations perpetrated by the Israeli regime and called for a complete cessation of those grave breaches, which were "sabotaging the small opportunity that remained for realizing the two-State solution for peace". Those who truly supported the cause of peace must be firm in the demand for human rights.

BASHAR JA'AFARI (Syria) thanked the delegations for their support of those series of draft resolutions, including the one on the occupied Syrian Golan. Once again, Member States had sent a clear-cut message to Israel, the occupying Authority, to terminate its occupation of all Arab territories and to cease its violations of human rights and international law. The majority voting today in support of the draft resolution on the occupied Syrian Golan indicated that Israel's attempts to annex the Syrian Golan were null and void and had no legal effect. It was not a secret that Israel's violation of international law was manifold and dangerous. After occupying the Syrian Golan in 1977, it had established absurd laws, in a dangerous and provocative stance, reminiscent of Europe at the beginning of the Second World War. Only Israel had voted against the resolution on the Syrian Golan, which showed how it and its rulers and politicians paid no heed to international law. The "law of the jungle" must not replace international law, he cautioned.

BENJAMIN SHARONI (Israel) said that it took a lot of audacity from the Syrian representative to criticize Israel, considering Syria was responsible for the murder of hundreds of thousands of civilians.

Mr. JA'AFARI (Syria) advised the representative of Israel to continue playing with his phone instead of talking politics, since he did not seem to understand the provisions of the United Nations Charter. Israel had annexed the Syrian Golan and the Security Council had condemned that annexation. But this Israeli representative had not yet been born and, therefore, did not remember or understand that resolution. That decision by the Israeli occupying Authority reminded the international community of the unjust decisions taken by Hitler on the eve of the Second World War. Hitler's Nazi policies such as annexing territories by force and other criminal violent actions were seen in the occupied territories today. According to an old Arab proverb, "it was better to hide during a catastrophe". It was better for the Israeli delegate to hide after the meeting and play with his phone instead of making himself a source of laughter and irony.

Mr. SHARONI (Israel) said that his experience in diplomacy might be slight, but it did not take a long time to see that war crimes were being conducted on a daily basis. Syria's cynical statements were a desperate attempt to distract attention from a regime that had zero credibility. It did not care for the people of its own country or the Middle East. Assad and his cronies could not fool anyone.

CATERINA VENTURA (Canada) said that her delegation regretted Syria's comments making a connection between Israel and the Nazi era. Canada expressed concern about such statements.

WALTER MILLER (United States) said that his delegation also regretted the characterization made about Israel connecting it to Nazi Germany.

HENDRIK SELLE (Germany) said that while his country had voted in favour of the resolution on the occupied Syrian Golan, it rejected the comparisons made by the Syrian delegate, which displayed "a stunning lack of historical insight".

IHAB HAMED (Syria), responding to the representatives of the United States, Canada and Germany, stated that he reaffirmed the advice to Israel to respect the United Nations resolutions and to end its occupation of the Arab territories. If Israel's violations of human rights ceased, then Syria would not need to make the comparisons it had made. Then such exchanges in this room would be unnecessary and there would be no need for repeated United Nations resolutions.

Action on Programme of Work

The Committee then approved a draft decision, submitted by its Bureau, on the proposed programme of work for the sixty-ninth session (document A/C.4/68/L.10).

Committee Chairman CARLOS GARCÍA GONZÁLEZ (El Salvador), concluding the session, noted that the Committee had approved a total of 26 draft resolutions and two draft decisions. The work of Fourth Committee was "mainly political", and, as agreed among the members, "this character should be retained and strengthened".

At the same time, the Committee covered other important issues related to the Secretariat's work, such as public information, outer space and atomic radiation.

The agenda items provided opportunities to consider the issues in depth and with the flexible working methods adopted by the Committee in recent years.

He reviewed the debates and action on subsequent drafts on decolonization, information, peaceful uses of outer space, effects of atomic radiation, and peacekeeping. Concerning the latter, he said many issues raised would be considered in greater detail during the 2014 session of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations. The Fourth Committee also considered assistance in mine action, and undertook a comprehensive review of special political missions, on its docket for the first time this year. It also considered matters related to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices. And, it approved its proposed programme of work for the sixty-ninth session.

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