

occupied Palestinian territory: UN SG, on Day of Solidarity with Palestinian People, expresses deep concern in committee at year-long suspension of talks on 2-state solution

Original published date: 30 Nov 2009
Country: occupied Palestinian territory
Content format: News and Press Release
Language: English
Source: UN General Assembly
Origin notes: <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2009/gapal1140.doc.htm>

GA/PAL/1140

Committee on the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People
320th Meeting (AM)

Keynote Speaker from Institute for Palestine Studies Says United States Not Objective Observer, But Major Part of Problem, Major Actor in Solution

As the United Nations observed the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People today, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon expressed deep concern that talks between Israel's Prime Minister and the Palestinian President on a two-State solution had been suspended for almost a year.

Addressing the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Mr. Ban also called on Israel and relevant Palestinian authorities to conduct, without delay, credible domestic investigations into the many reported allegations of serious human rights violations committed last January in Gaza. He said that 10 months after hostilities had ended in Gaza and southern Israel, accountability for violations of international humanitarian and human rights law had not been adequately addressed.

"Now more than ever politics must be made credible. Those who try to undermine moves towards peace through violence or by changing facts on the ground must not be allowed to set the agenda," he said. He called for vigorous international efforts to advance the political process, end the occupation and solve all permanent status issues. He also stressed the need to reunify Gaza and the West Bank and create a sovereign Palestinian State on the basis of the 1967 agreed land swaps and a just, agreed solution to the refugee issue.

Mr. Ban commended the Committee for keeping the international community's focus on the question of Palestine, and pledged the United Nations commitment to continue working for a just, lasting peace through negotiations based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008), previous agreements, the Madrid framework, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

In a keynote address to the Committee, Walid Khalidi, General Secretary of the Institute for Palestine Studies, said that several United Nations resolutions called upon Israel to cease and desist and to comply with international law and the Geneva Convention, but Israel paid no attention because it only took notice of the United States. When it came to Israel, the United States -- which financed and provided tax-exempt private donations for the burgeoning number of Jewish settlements in Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Golan -- was not an objective observer; it was a major part of the problem and a major actor in the solution.

He said that an honourable and peaceful solution for Jerusalem rested on four pillars: the deconstruction of the Israeli and the United States concept of the "unification" of Jewish Jerusalem; no monopoly of sovereignty over both halves of the city, by either Israel or Palestine; no religious rights conferring preeminent status to any of the three faiths; and acknowledgment of the equality of the religious and non-religious dimensions of Jerusalem, for both the Israelis and the Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims.

Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of Palestine, reading a message from Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority and Chairman of the Executive Committee on the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), said there was a double-standard for United Nations resolutions, whereby resolutions on Israel were not implemented. Israel had never stopped its settlement campaign, arrests and attacks against the Palestinians, including the latest in Gaza, where it had

committed war crimes against the Palestinians, their national institutions and infrastructure, as documented in Justice Richard Goldstone's report. Israel's current Government had denied and retreated from all commitments and agreements reached by its predecessors, and it had seriously accelerated settlement policies and attempts to "judaize" Jerusalem by evicting and suffocating its indigenous population, and by excavating in and around Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Mr. Mansour said he was committed to a just peace as a strategic choice, based on the resolutions of international legitimacy, signed agreements, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative, and the Road Map. He expressed hope that the international community, particularly the Security Council, would support that position and push Israel — whose daily practice on the ground confirmed that it did not want to work towards a comprehensive settlement to the conflict — to move in the same direction. He thanked the meeting's participants for their strong show of solidarity, saying it gave the Palestinians strength to fight for their inalienable rights, and he noted that the League of Arab States had named Jerusalem as the Arab Cultural Capital for 2009.

United Nations General Assembly President, Ali Abdussalam Treki, noted that the Assembly this month had endorsed the *Report of the United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict* and had called on both sides to undertake independent, credible investigations to ensure accountability and justice. He lamented that the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip had forced 1.5 million Palestinian civilians into poverty and isolation, saying last year's Israeli military offensive had worsened that already desperate situation. Israel also continued to block international efforts to rebuild Gaza and assist the civilian population, enforcing a collective punishment on them, despite the Organization's repeated calls to lift the blockade.

He commended United States President Barack Obama's renewed commitment to peace in the Middle East, but said that the ongoing construction of the illegal separation wall in the Occupied Territory was a serious obstacle to peace on the ground. Continued Israeli actions to change the status of Jerusalem endangered the viability of a Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The continued construction of settlements in the Occupied Territory, notably in and around East Jerusalem, and the announced construction of 900 new units in Gilo, could not be tolerated, as it was the main impediment to the peace efforts.

Andrew Whitley, Director of the Representative Office in New York of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), reading a message from the Agency's Commissioner-General, said that Palestinians drew strength from the realization that most United Nations Member States believed there was an urgent need to end the Israeli occupation. But Israel's action in East Jerusalem and in Area C of the West Bank, which were under full Israeli control, had made daily life increasingly difficult for Palestinians and called into question the likelihood of that a meaningful State would be created. Moreover, at almost two a day, humanitarian access incidents in the West Bank were still at unacceptably high levels.

He pointed to UNRWA's current financial woes, which threatened to cut the Agency's already meagre and overstretched services. On 14 November, UNRWA would hold its annual Pledging Conference in the Assembly, he said, and added that it would be "timely and extremely welcome" if UNRWA received new pledges of support from "unexpected quarters" or increased funds from those who had historically underperformed in that respect.

Also during the meeting, Committee Chairman Paul Badji (Senegal) read out the names of the many Heads of State and Government, Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Governments and organizations that had sent messages of support and solidarity, and said they would be published in a special bulletin of the Division for Palestinian Rights.

Also making statements today were Thomas Mayr-Harting (Austria), President of the Security Council, and Palitha T.B. Kohona, (Sri Lanka) Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.

The representatives of Egypt, Syria and Libya (in his capacity as representative of the Chairman of the African Union) also spoke.

The Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States also made a statement.

In addition, a member of the Steering Committee on the United States Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation made a statement.

The Committee will meet again at a time and date to be announced.

Background

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People met today to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Opening Statements

Opening the session, PAUL BADJI (Senegal), Chairman of the Palestinian Rights Committee, said today's gathering was a reaffirmation of the international community's ongoing commitment to promote a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine. Sixty-two years ago, General Assembly resolution 181 provided for the creation of two States in Mandate Palestine -- one Jewish and one Arab. To date, only one State had come into being. The Palestinian people's hopes and aspirations for their own homeland remained unfulfilled. Generations of Palestinians in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza had lived under the longest military occupation in modern history. The situation on the ground today was bleak. There was little reason to believe the occupation would end anytime soon. In the land where the future Palestinian State was supposed to be created, illegal Israeli settlements continued to multiply.

He said that the occupying Power's refusal to halt settlement expansion was a major obstacle to resuming peace talks. The construction of the separation wall on Occupied Palestinian Territory, which stifled Palestinian daily life, continued despite the International Court of Justice's ruling. During Israel's three-week military invasion of Gaza, more than 1,400 Palestinians, including 1,100 civilians, had been killed and more than 5,000 others had been injured, many permanently. Israel reported 14 Israeli deaths, including four civilians, and 182 injured. The ceasefire between the two sides had since been observed, but the economic blockade continued, allowing for only basic relief to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe.

"The Palestinian people need and deserve our solidarity. Due to the compelling imbalance of power between Israel and the Palestinians, this courageous people need seriously our active solidarity," he said. Developments on the ground clearly showed how the occupying Power had been consolidating its hold on Palestinian land and resources. "The Palestinian people deserve even more our solidarity because their leadership has vowed to achieve its national goals by peaceful negotiations. And it has demonstrated through concrete steps in the territory under the Palestinian Authority that it is serious in building its institutions in accordance with widely accepted norms of transparency and good governance," he said.

International solidarity with the Palestinian people was as strong as ever, he said. The international community had immediately called for calm and respect for the lives of innocent people when the Israeli army invaded Gaza in December 2008, and it had condemned the rockets attacks by Palestinian groups that indiscriminately targeted Israeli civilians. The Security Council and the Assembly had called for a permanent and durable ceasefire and the Secretary-General had intervened and visited Gaza.

He urged the Secretary-General to continue to permanently maintain responsibility towards the question of Palestine until it was fully resolved in accordance with international law. The international community's solidarity with the Palestinians people had been reaffirmed at the Sharm el-Sheikh donor conference last March with pledges of some \$4.5 billion for Gaza's reconstruction, although the bulk of those funds had yet to reach the Palestinians in Gaza.

Solidarity with the Palestinian people had never been and would never be at the expense of Israel and it was not directed against the Israeli people, he said, adding, "When the Committee criticizes certain policies of the Israeli Government, it does so because these policies violate international law, international humanitarian and international human rights law and prevent progress towards a comprehensive, just and lasting solution of the Israeli- Palestinian conflict".

"Let us turn the spirit of solidarity into collective power to remove the obstacles lying in the way of a solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," he urged. The Committee would continue pursuing its Assembly mandate until the Palestinian people's inalienable rights were achieved, the illegal occupation of their land ended and a two-State solution realized.

ALI ABDUSSALAM TREKI, President of the United Nations General Assembly, noted that the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People was a solemn occasion and an opportunity to renew the Organization's commitment to a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine and a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. It was also an occasion to reflect on the continued occupation, which had meant decades of suffering for the Palestinian people. Mr. Treki described the situation in the Occupied Territory, especially in the Gaza Strip, as "grave", and said that the ordeal would continue until the question of Palestine was resolved and the occupation was brought to an end.

Already, he said, the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip had forced 1.5 million Palestinian civilians into poverty and isolation. The Israeli military offensive last year, had worsened that already desperate situation. Israel also continued to block international efforts to rebuild the Gaza Strip and assist the civilian population and, although the United Nations had repeatedly called on Israel to lift its inhuman and illegal blockade, Israel continued to enforce a collective punishment on Gaza's civilian population, in defiance of international law and in breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

This month, the Assembly had endorsed the Report of the United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict and had called on both sides to undertake independent, credible investigations to ensure accountability and justice, he noted. "Without justice, there can be no progress toward peace," he said, commending United States President Barack Obama's renewed commitment to peace in the Middle East, which was an engagement with the issue that inspired hope.

However, he pointed to serious obstacles to peace on the ground, among them, the ongoing construction of the illegal separation wall in the Occupied Territory, in violation of United Nations resolutions. Continued Israeli actions to change the status of Jerusalem endangered the viability of a Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The excavations near the Al-Haram Al-Sharif and the attacks against Palestinian worshippers at the holy sites of Al-Haram Al-Sharif and Al-Aqsa mosque provoked an already volatile situation. The continued construction of settlements in the Occupied Territory, notably in and around East Jerusalem, and the announced construction of 900 new units in Gilo, could not be tolerated, as it was the main impediment to the peace efforts.

In conclusion, he reaffirmed the Assembly's commitment to a just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine and the United Nations permanent responsibility in that regard, until the question was resolved, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions.

BAN KI-MOON, United Nations Secretary-General, commended the Committee for keeping the international community's focus on the question of Palestine, which was as fundamental today as it was 62 years ago when Assembly resolution 181 put forth a two-State solution. Today, the State of Israel existed, but the State of Palestine did not. The Palestinian people continued to struggle for their inalienable right to self-determination — a fundamental, universal human right enjoyed by so many others across the world. The international community continued to assist and protect the Palestinian people, including through the work of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and other United Nations agencies. "However, our interventions must not be limited to managing the humanitarian dimension of this conflict. What is urgently needed is a political solution that addresses the root of the conflict," he said.

He said it was vital to create a sovereign State of Palestine on the basis of the 1967 agreed land swaps and a just, agreed solution to the refugee issue. He welcomed the commitment of Israel's Prime Minister and the Palestinian President to a two-State solution, but expressed deep concern that talks between the two parties had been suspended for almost a year. He supported the United States' commitment and continuing efforts to bring about a resumption of meaningful negotiations on final status issues, including the security of Israelis and Palestinians, borders, refugees and Jerusalem. Efforts to address Israel's legitimate security concerns should include mechanisms to prevent weapons smuggling from Gaza and an end to Palestinian rocket fire at Israeli civilians.

Ten months after hostilities had ended in Gaza and southern Israel, the issue of accountability for violations of international humanitarian and human rights law had not been adequately addressed, he said, calling on both Israel and the relevant Palestinian authorities to "conduct, without delay, credible domestic investigations into the many reported allegations of serious human rights violations". Reunification of Gaza and the West Bank was essential, and he supported Egypt's efforts in that regard, grounded in Arab League resolutions and supported by Council resolution 1860 (2009).

"Now more than ever politics must be made credible. Those who try to undermine moves towards peace through violence or by changing facts on the ground must not be allowed to set the agenda," he said. Vigorous international efforts were essential for advancing the political process, ending the occupation and solving all permanent status issues. The United Nations would continue to work for a just, lasting peace through negotiations based on Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008), previous agreements, the Madrid framework, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

THOMAS MAYR-HARTING, President of the United Nations Security Council for November, (Austria), said that the Council remained committed to comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. It had received monthly briefings on the situation from the Secretary-General's Special Coordinator and the Department of Political Affairs throughout last year, and continued to hold open debates on the situation, including at the ministerial level. The Council had adopted two resolutions — 1850 (2008) and 1860 (2009) — and a presidential statement on the matter during the past year, and while the situation remained of "serious concern" to the Council, there had been intensified diplomatic efforts to restart bilateral negotiations this year, which the Council welcomed and encouraged.

He reiterated the Council's call for efforts towards an agreement that ended the occupation; resolved all permanent status issues, as previously defined by the parties; and fulfilled the aspiration of both parties for independent homelands through two States for two peoples -- Israel and an independent, contiguous and viable state of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

In May, the Council had called for the parties to fulfil their obligations under the performance-based Road Map, refraining from any steps that could undermine confidence or prejudice the outcome of negotiations on all core issues, he said, adding that the 15-member body had repeated the call every month. The Council remained "deeply concerned" about the humanitarian situation in Gaza and stressed that it was urgent for reconstruction to begin. He praised the efforts of humanitarian organizations on the ground, especially those of UNRWA and its staff, and encouraged all countries to financially support the Agency.

To achieve peace, transformative change on the ground was needed and he welcomed the Palestinian Authority's plan for the

construction of Palestinian State institutions within the next two years to demonstrate the Authority's serious commitment to an independent State that provided opportunity, justice and security to the Palestinian people, and was a responsible neighbour to all States in the region. The international community should provide assistance to help rehabilitate and develop the Palestinian economy, to maximize the available resources to the Authority and to build Palestinian institutions.

He recalled that, earlier this month during its open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, the Council had adopted resolution 1894, affirming its resolve to strengthen the protection of civilians in armed conflict, advance compliance of parties to armed conflict with their obligations under international law, and to prevent and deter the reoccurrence of serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law. Mr. Mayr-Harting reaffirmed that resolve and reiterated the Council's commitment to the achievement of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East and the realization of an independent and democratic State for the Palestinian people.

RIYAD MANSOUR, Permanent Observer of Palestine, reading a message from MAHMOUD ABBAS, President of the Palestinian Authority and Chairman of the Executive Committee on the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), said the question of Palestine was the only issue facing the international community for which relevant resolutions had not been implemented. That confirmed the belief that there was a double-standard for United Nations resolutions, whereby resolutions on Israel were not implemented, allowing Israel to continue to behave as if it were above international law. Since 1948, Palestinians had lived in refugee camps, in the diaspora or continued to suffer under colonial occupation. All initiatives and negotiations with the Israelis since the 1993 Oslo Accords had not yielded the results envisaged by the international community, namely an end to the Israeli occupation and the creation of an independent State of Palestine in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

He said that Israel had never stopped its settlement campaign, arrests, aggression and attacks against the Palestinian people, including the latest in the Gaza Strip, where war crimes had been committed against the Palestinian people, their national institutions and infrastructure, as documented in Justice Richard Goldstone's report. The current Israeli Government had taken a position of complete denial and retreat from all commitments and agreements reached by its predecessors, and it had seriously accelerated settlement policies and attempts to Judaize Jerusalem by evicting and suffocating its indigenous population. It had gone as far as endangering Al-Aqsa Mosque by excavating under and around it and by allowing extremist Jews to invade its compound and surroundings. That threatened to expand the conflict to a dangerous religious dimension.

"The concept of negotiations for the current Israeli Government is that they can do whatever they wish on the ground and that we can talk whatever we want at the negotiating table. This is something that we cannot accept," he said. Despite that, he pledged full commitment to a just peace as a strategic choice and said that the Palestinian Authority had never been an obstacle to the desired peace, based on the resolutions of international legitimacy, signed agreements, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative, and the Road Map. He expressed hope that everyone would support that responsible Palestinian position in order to achieve peace in the region and to push Israel — whose daily practice on the ground confirmed that it did not want to work towards a comprehensive settlement to the conflict — to move in the same direction.

"It is time, after all these years of negotiations that have not yielded results, for the international community, particularly the Security Council, to shoulder its responsibilities and to take immediate and decisive action that reflects the positions the countries of the world, which have repeatedly called for the two-State solution and an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967, in order to bring an end to this conflict and gave credibility to the Charter of the United Nations and its resolutions," he said.

Keynote Address

WALID KHALIDI, General Secretary of the Institute for Palestine Studies, gave a historic overview of the history of Jerusalem, saying that there had been no conflicts between Islam and Judaism over the city until the advent of political Zionism, a primarily Russian Jewish nationalist movement which, towards the end of the nineteenth century, had aimed to establish a Jewish State in a country inhabited by Muslim and Christian Arabs. After the Second World War, British and American efforts had helped establish Israel, sponsoring its drive for exclusive control of both West and East Jerusalem. "It is approaching midnight in Jerusalem," he added.

He said that, since 1967, under the heading of "unification" or "reunification" of Jewish Jerusalem, the Palestinian inhabitants of East Jerusalem had been subjected to harassment, intimidation, isolation, discrimination, displacement, expropriation and demolition and other deeds designed to make them leave the city. Metropolitan Jerusalem now included 634 square kilometres, or, more than 10 per cent of the West Bank. From zero in 1967, the Jewish population in East Jerusalem had grown to about 300,000 on West Bank soil within Metropolitan Jerusalem. "If this is natural growth, Israeli geneticists have discovered a remarkable drug," he said.

A number of United Nations resolutions called upon Israel to cease and desist and to comply with international law and the Geneva Convention, but Israel paid no attention. "Why? Because the only country Israel takes notice of is the US." Three things were apparent with regard to American decision-making on the Middle East. First, that Congress played an

increasingly influential role in formulating Middle East policy and that the priorities of those legislators were too parochial for the job. Secondly, successive Administrations had retreated on the early principled position on Jerusalem and the applicability of international law and the Geneva Convention to Israel as the occupying power of the West Bank and the Golan. And thirdly, that there was a disconnect between how the American foreign policy elite diagnosed cause and effect and developments on the ground in the Middle East.

With regard to Israel, the United States was not an objective observer, he went on. Jewish settlements in Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Golan were financed by the United States and tax-exempt private donations. They were defended by arms supplied by the United States, sustained by the American mass media, shielded by American diplomacy and manned by colonists born in the United States. "The US is a major part of the problem and a major actor in the solution," he said. "Clearly, the current incumbent of the Oval Office does not lack good intentions, but does he have the time amidst his other momentous priorities? And does he really have the leverage over [...] Congress?" he asked.

In conclusion, Mr. Khalidi said that an honourable and peaceful solution for Jerusalem had to rest on four pillars: the deconstruction of the Israeli and American concept of the "unification" of Jewish Jerusalem; no monopoly of sovereignty over both halves of the city, by either Israel or Palestine; no religious rights conferring preeminent status to any of the three faiths; and acknowledgment of the equality of the religious and non-religious dimensions of Jerusalem, for both the Israelis and the Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims.

Presentations

PALITHA T.B. KOHONA (Sri Lanka), Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian Peoples and other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, said that this year's International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People came at a critical time, when the hopes for a viable peace in the Middle East and a lasting solution to the Palestinian issue seemed distant and bleak. The extensive harm caused to civilians and property during the Gaza war had shaken the confidence and trust of parties to the conflict, thus hindering any imminent meaningful negotiations. The deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the continued Israeli siege had only added to the civilian population's misery and had stalled momentum during recent peace initiatives. But continued efforts to revive dialogue engendered hope that the stage for peace could be set up again.

He said that in 2009 alone, several United Nations-mandated bodies presented reports, following investigations of different aspects of the situation in the Occupied Territory. Those had included the Special Committee's forty-first report, presented two weeks ago, which corroborated on the dire humanitarian situation there. Subsequent extensive discussions had echoed the need for an expeditious resolution of the Palestinian question. The Special Committee was particularly concerned over continued violations of human rights in the Occupied Territory. Operation Cast Lead had reportedly killed more than 1,200 Palestinian civilians, many of them women and children. The sanctions and blockades imposed by Israel precluded rebuilding Palestinians' lost livelihoods. Economic development and trade prospects were grim. Stringent restrictions on the flow of humanitarian aid and other vital daily supplies into Gaza had led to greater poverty and worsened living conditions for the Palestinians.

The human rights situation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem was also precarious, he said. Illegal Israeli settlement activities, settler violence and the construction of the separation wall were serious threats to the viability and contiguity of a future Palestinian State. Israeli security measures often exceeded legitimate security concerns. "No peace solution is viable, nor is it bound to last, unless couched in a process that seeks to redress injustice and afford equal protection and rights to all the people," he said.

MAGED ABDELAZIZ (Egypt), reading out a message from HOSNI MUBAREK, President of Egypt, reiterated the country's full support for the Palestinian people in their legitimate quest to establish an independent, sovereign and viable State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. To achieve that goal and solve the question of Palestine, all parties in the international community had to ensure the resumption of negotiations, according to clear terms and a definite time frame, so that the final status issues, including borders, security, Jerusalem, refugees and water were resolved in a manner conducive to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State and Middle East peace.

Egypt's delegate reiterated a call for the Committee to work towards terminating Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian Territory and Israeli violations of Palestinian human rights, especially the illegal siege of Gaza and the continued targeting of Palestinian civilians. He also called for an end to all attempts by Israel to change the geographic and demographic features of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem; intensified settlement activity; land confiscation; transgressions that violated the sanctity of Islamic holy places, especially the Al-Aqsa mosque; the continued construction of the separation wall; and all other practices in violation of international law.

In conclusion, he reiterated Egypt's commitment to Palestinian national reconciliation and achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, according to international rules and the land-for-peace principle.

BASHAR JA'AFARI (Syria), reading a message from WALID AL-MOUALEM, Syria's Minister for Foreign Affairs, in his capacity as Chairman of the Thirty-sixth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, stressed the importance of the rights of the Palestinian people to their homeland. He described Mr. Khalidi's historical overview as "intellectual medicine" for the many people in the United Nations who refused to support the cause of Palestine. They would benefit from having such "intellectual medicine" administered to them and would see that the Palestinian issue was a fair one. All actions against the Palestinian people and other Arabs ran contrary to the United Nations Charter. He supported the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people -- who had suffered for more than 60 years -- to their own State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and to return to their homeland.

He pointed to the occupying Power's daily acts and barbarous practices against an entire population, its methodical demolition of housing, destruction of crops and land, and arrests of thousands of citizens, including women, children and the elderly. That tragic situation was aggravated by inhumane practices. It was deplorable that the Security Council was unable to reach a firm decision to end those practices, particularly the building of Israeli settlements, including in East Jerusalem. Despite appeals from the United Nations and the international community, Israel continued to ignore more than 600 resolutions and decisions of the United Nations, which called for Israel's withdrawal from the Occupied Territories to achieve a permanent, lasting peace settlement in the region. Israel also continued to uphold its illegal separation wall, rendering the West Bank and Gaza like two enormous prison camps.

Israel's war of aggression in Gaza last year had unleashed lethal weapons, leaving thousands of dead and injured, he said. Israel completely flouted the United Nations Charter. The Goldstone Fact Finding Mission had listed Israel's violations of international humanitarian law, which could be deemed war crimes. Last year, Israel redoubled its acts of aggression in Jerusalem. Syria, home to almost 500,000 Palestinian refugees, believed that a comprehensive, lasting and durable settlement could be reached through simple means, including full implementation of United Nations resolutions, particularly Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and the principles set forth in the Madrid peace process and the Arab Peace Initiative. He called on the United Nations to put an end to Israel's destruction and for the Committee to continue supporting the Palestinian's just struggle to liberate their stolen lands and to realize their legitimate right to return.

ABDURRAHMAN SHALGHAM (Libya), speaking as representative of the African Union Chairman, said that today was a day to express solidarity with the Palestinians in Gaza; the children who suffered from severe shortage of medicines; those who suffered from kidney diseases and could not have dialysis; the thousands of children without roofs over their head or access to schools. He expressed solidarity with all oppressed Palestinians, including the 11,000 prisoners languishing in Israeli jails.

He said it was a day of solidarity with those whose houses were demolished in the West Bank, with those who were killed for their organs -- as a Swedish journalist had documented -- and with those whose places of worship were violated every day. On this day, he wanted to salute all honourable people in the world, who provided assistance to the people of Gaza, whether the help came from people in the United States, Europe or anywhere else in the world.

In conclusion, he thanked the Committee Chairman for organizing the meeting and expressed the hope that, this time next year, the Palestinian people would be living under better circumstances, having achieved their inalienable rights.

YAHYA MAHMASSANI, Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States, reading out a message from AMRE MOUSSA, the Secretary General of the League, said that Israel's war crimes should not go unpunished, as they were in flagrant violation of international law and various United Nations conventions. As several special briefings and reports, including the Goldstone Report, had described, Israel had deliberately attacked civilians during the Gaza offensive, used weapons that were banned by United Nations conventions, and destroyed religious sites, homes and hospitals.

He said that the Israeli Government continued to colonize the West Bank and Gaza in order to create facts on the ground that would prevent the creation of a Palestinian State. United States President Barack Obama's serious attempts to achieve comprehensive peace in the region were encouraging, and the League called for an end to Israeli settlement activity, especially in East Jerusalem, which was a very serious hurdle on the road to peace.

Israeli authorities continued to ignore all rules and operate with impunity, he said, urging the Security Council to respond to the situation in the Occupied Territory, which showed the flagrant imbalance in international relations. The international community should not allow Israel to continue its occupation of Palestinian Territory and should ensure an end to the blockade of Gaza and the reopening of border crossings. The situation was grave, and countries should work towards "the dawn of a new era in the Middle East".

The Committee Chairman then announced that the Committee had received messages of support and solidarity from many Heads of State and Government, Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Governments and organizations, and he read out their names. He said the messages would be published in a special bulletin of the United Nations Division for Palestinian Rights.

ANDREW WHITLEY, Director, UNRWA Representative Office in New York, read out a message from KAREN KONING

ABUZAYD, UNRWA Commissioner-General. He noted first that Ms. Koning would retire at the end of the year, after nine years on the job. On her behalf, he said that, at present, when hopes of an early breakthrough in the peace process had dimmed, national polity remained deeply split, the blockade of Gaza persisted for 28 months and the inhabitants of Nahr el-Bared as well as many other refugees remained homeless — it was appropriate to reflect on the importance of maintaining solidarity with the Palestinian people.

He said that for 62 years, the Palestinians had shown extraordinary resilience, educating their children in the face of adversity, without ever losing touch with their collective identity. Palestinians' understandable and fully-justified search for justice had been matched with pragmatism. They had not been a passive, aid-dependent group. Rather, they had seized an opportunity in the process, contributing amply to the societies in which they lived.

The realization that the vast majority of United Nations Member States shared the Palestinians' belief in the urgent need to end the occupation and for them to exercise their right to self-determination is what kept their spirits alive, he said. "The concept of a two-State solution may be looking a little ragged these days; but the alternative — a unitary State in which Palestinians would struggle for equal civil and political rights — is anathema to Israelis and a distant second-best goal for the vast majority of Palestinians, wherever they may live," he said. "Thus we must continue to press ahead with efforts to achieve a viable Palestinian State, while remaining vigilant to those unilateral measures that might ultimately render the goal unachievable."

Israel's action in East Jerusalem and in Area C of the West Bank, which remained under full Israeli control, had made daily life increasingly difficult for Palestinians and called into question the likelihood of Palestinian statehood, he said. The refugees, who comprised 40 per cent of the population of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, had suffered in equal measure with the non-refugee counterparts from those negative developments. At almost two a day, humanitarian access incidents in the West Bank were still at unacceptably high levels. Quoting the World Bank, he said that the West Bank remained a "shattered economic space", in which its integrity as a viable socio-economic and political unit had been severely compromised. In Gaza, hope was increasing that Israel Staff Sergeant [Gilad] Shalit would be released, as part of a larger prisoner swap, which would remove yet another pretext for maintaining the blockade.

He said that solidarity with a suffering and wronged people took many forms, including through financial support of donor Governments and private individuals to voluntarily-funded organizations such as UNRWA. At present, UNRWA was experiencing particularly difficult financial times, needing to appeal for more support in the coming weeks and months in order to maintain its already meagre and overstretched services. On 14 November, UNRWA would hold its annual pledging conference in the General Assembly. It would be "timely and extremely welcome" if UNRWA received new pledges of support from "unexpected quarters", or increased funds from those who had historically underperformed in that respect.

BILL FLETCHER, member of the Steering Committee of the US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation, said that Israel's practices against the Palestinian people amounted to apartheid, and that, as an African American, he was keenly aware of the similarity between the systems of Israeli apartheid, South African apartheid and Jim Crow segregation in the United States. Although Israel tried to cloak its actions with religious justifications, the descriptions of the racial distinctions of national-ethnic differences between "officially sanctioned Jewish citizens of Israel" and Palestinians within Israel sounded all too familiar.

He said that the Goldstone Report paved the way for a fuller discussion of the Israeli occupation and the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination. He commended former United States President, Jimmy Carter, and his book, *Palestine: Peace, not Apartheid*, which had dramatically helped to create awareness about the situation faced by the Palestinians in the Occupied Territory. According to the *New York Times*, Arab families were three times more likely to live below the poverty line than Jewish families, and that racial, national or ethnic differential also extended to marriage, with the Israeli Government only recognizing so-called mixed marriages when they took place in other countries.

In closing remarks, Mr. MANSOUR thanked everyone present in the meeting for their strong show of solidarity, saying it gave the Palestinian people strength to fight for their inalienable rights. He also thanked Mr. Khalidi for his address. It was fitting considering that the League of Arab States had named Jerusalem as the Arab Cultural Capital for 2009.

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