

Chapter 5

GROWING RECOGNITION OF PALESTINIAN RIGHTS BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY



Photo: United Nations

Voting board in the General Assembly hall granting the Palestine Liberation Organization observer status, 22 November 1974.

On the question of Palestine, international attention during the 1950s and the early 1960s focused primarily on the problem of Palestinian refugees and interstate conflict. Following the 1967 war, the question of Palestine began to be understood in a broader political context. There was a resurgence of activity by Palestinians to achieve their national rights. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which had been established in 1964, adopted a new national charter in 1968. The document stated that the international community had so far failed to discharge its responsibility and called for continuing the fight to achieve Palestinian rights.

Reintroduction of the question of Palestine in the General Assembly agenda, 1974

In December 1969, the General Assembly recognized that “the problem of the Palestine Arab refugees has arisen from the denial of their inalienable rights under the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights”. In September 1974, 56 Member States proposed that “the question of Palestine” be included as an item in the General Assembly’s agenda. They pointed out that the question of Palestine and the status and fate of the Palestinian people had not appeared as a separate item before the Assembly for more than 20 years. Their proposal was accepted, and since then the question of Palestine has again been part of the Assembly’s agenda.

In a resolution adopted on 22 November 1974, the General Assembly reaffirmed the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, which included the right to self-determination without external interference, the right to national independence and sovereignty, and the right to return to their homes and property. The rights of the Palestinian people, as set forth by the Assembly in 1974, have been reaffirmed every year since.

Observer status for PLO, 1974

Also in 1974, the General Assembly invited the PLO to participate in its proceedings with observer status, as representative of the Palestinian people. The observer status was later extended to cover all United Nations bodies.

Later, in its resolution 43/177 of 15 December 1988, the General Assembly acknowledged the proclamation of the State of Palestine made by the Palestine National Council. The Assembly reaffirmed the need to enable the Palestinian people to exercise sovereignty over its territory occupied since 1967. Also, the General Assembly decided that the designation “Palestine” should be used in place of the designation “Palestine Liberation Organization” in the United Nations system, without prejudice to the observer status and functions of the

Palestine Liberation Organization within the United Nations system.

Ten years later, in 1998, the General Assembly, in its resolution 52/250 of 7 July, decided to confer upon Palestine, in its capacity as Observer, additional rights and privileges of participation in the sessions and work of the General Assembly, as well as in United Nations and international conferences.

Creation of the Palestinian Rights Committee, 1975

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, also known as the Palestinian Rights Committee, was established by the General Assembly in 1975. The Committee was asked to prepare a programme to enable the Palestinians to exercise their inalienable rights. In 1976, the Committee presented two sets of recommendations, one concerned with the Palestinians’ right of return to their homes and property; and the other with their rights to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty.

The Security Council discussed the recommendations but was unable to reach a decision owing to the negative vote of the United States, a permanent member of the Council. The Council considered the matter again on subsequent occasions, but adjourned each time without taking a decision. The recommendations were, however, endorsed by the General Assembly in 1976 and in subsequent years. The Assembly also requested the Committee to keep the situation relating to the question of Palestine under review and to report and make recommendations to the General Assembly or the Security Council. The Committee was also mandated to promote the greatest possible dissemination of information on its recommendations through non-governmental organizations and other appropriate means.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the Committee followed the situation with regard to rights of the Palestinians and brought its findings before the General Assembly and the Security Council. Its programme of seminars, symposiums and

other activities helped increase awareness of the question of Palestine at the international level, and focused efforts on the need for achieving a peaceful settlement based on the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

UN facts

PLO is granted observer status

The General Assembly, in a resolution adopted on 22 November 1974, invited the Palestine Liberation Organization to participate in the sessions and the work of the General Assembly in the capacity of Observer.

The General Assembly,

Having considered the question of Palestine,

Taking into consideration the universality of the United Nations prescribed in the Charter,

Recalling its resolution 3102 (XXVIII) of 12 December 1973,

Taking into account Economic and Social Council resolutions 1835 (LVI) of 14 May 1974 and 1840 (LVI) of 15 May 1974,

Noting that the Diplomatic Conference on the Reaffirmation and Development of International Humanitarian Law Applicable in Armed Conflicts, the World Population Conference and the World Food Conference have in effect invited the Palestine Liberation Organization to participate in their respective deliberations,

Noting also that the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea has invited the Palestine Liberation Organization to participate in its deliberations as an observer,

1. *Invites* the Palestine Liberation Organization to participate in the sessions and the work of the General Assembly in the capacity of observer;
2. *Invites* the Palestine Liberation Organization to participate in the sessions and the work of all international conferences convened under the auspices of the General Assembly in the capacity of observer;
3. *Considers* that the Palestine Liberation Organization is entitled to participate as an observer in the sessions and the work of all international conferences convened under the auspices of other organs of the United Nations;
4. *Requests* the Secretary-General to take the necessary steps for the implementation of the present resolution.

A/RES/3237(XXIX), 22 November 1974