



# UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL MEETING ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

*African solidarity with the Palestinian people for the achievement of its inalienable rights,  
including the sovereignty and independence of the State of Palestine*

**United Nations Conference Centre Addis Ababa, 29 and 30 April 2013**

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## CHAIRMAN'S SUMMARY

The United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine was held on 29 and 30 April 2013 at the United Nations Conference Centre in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, under the theme "*African solidarity with the Palestinian people for the achievement of its inalienable rights*". The Meeting examined, among others, the situation in Palestine as a State under occupation, responsibility and accountability of the occupying Power under international law, and lessons learned from African States' experience in ending colonization and achieving sovereignty and independence.

In the opening session, the **Secretary-General of the United Nations**, in his message to the Meeting, stressed that there was an urgent need for a concerted push for peace this year to salvage the two-State solution and stated that the status quo was unsustainable, both politically and economically. The accomplishments of the Palestinian State-building programme and donor funding would be difficult to maintain in the absence of concrete progress on the political track. He also stressed that all settlement activity in the West Bank and East Jerusalem was illegal under international law and constituted ever-greater impediments to peace.

The **Chairman of the Committee** stated that the Palestinian people and their supporters had a lot to learn from the experience of African States in their quest for decolonization, independence and sovereignty, as well as their experience on the path to economic independence and sustainable development. The Committee continued to call upon the Security Council to ensure Israel's compliance with international law. It also called upon the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to ensure respect for its provisions. Non-action by the Security Council and the State-Parties to the Geneva Conventions would put into question the credibility of the international legal system. The international community should put an end to the colonial policies and practices of the State of Israel with a view to encouraging a new dynamic between the two adversaries in the conflict. The **representative of the State of Palestine** said that Israel had not respected a single one of the many UN resolutions calling on Israel to commit itself to its responsibilities as an occupying Power. It was impossible to come up with a solution when incumbent Israeli ministers openly stated that the Government's official policy was to undermine the spirit of the Palestinian people. With the Oslo accords, the Palestinians had accepted a two-State solution based on the 1967 borders, a quarter of the mandate territory, but the following negotiations had never produced tangible results. Meanwhile, Israel had continued to expand settlements, making the establishment of a Palestinian State impossible. Tens of thousands of new homes had been built for settlers, while 25,000 Palestinian houses had been demolished in the West Bank. A network of settler-only roads connecting settlements in the West Bank isolated and fragmented the Palestinian community. Palestinians were forced to use side roads, while the main roads were kept for Israelis. Palestinians were subjected to Israel's military law, while the Israeli domestic law was applied to settlers. Israeli soldiers did not try to stop settlers' aggression against Palestinians, and complaints filed by Palestinians rarely resulted in prosecutions by the Israeli authorities. Israel controlled water resources in

the West Bank and allowed Palestinians to use only a fraction of the amount consumed by Israelis. Israel continued to imprison some 5,000 Palestinians, including children, and some had died because of torture. Even though the Palestinian people faced the same situation as South Africa's apartheid, it was not condemned in the same manner by the international community.

The **representative of Ethiopia** said the country had always associated itself with the decisions of the African States to support the Palestinian cause and struggle for freedom, national independence and sovereignty. Its relations with Palestine dated back to 1973, when the country formally recognized the PLO and provided full support for the opening of one of its offices in Addis Ababa in 1978. He reiterated Ethiopia's strong support of the objective affirmed in Security Council resolution 1397 (2002) of two States living side by side in secured and recognized borders. Also speaking in the opening session were the representatives of Senegal, Indonesia, Morocco, Iran (on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement), Egypt, the League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, who reiterated their solidarity with the Palestinian people and supported a wide international recognition of the State of Palestine.

Expert panelists gave detailed accounts of the "ugly, dirty and nasty" reality of the occupation. After the Oslo "agreements", Israel had increased the population of settlers in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The construction of more than half of the 700-kilometre separation wall was complete. It was pointed out that all settlements were actively set up with the Government's financial and military support. Land expropriated from Palestinians was given to settlers for free, and the economic activities in settlements accounted for 15 to 20 per cent of the entire Israeli economy. Seizure of land for settlement construction had shrunk the space available for Palestinian housing, infrastructure and services to sustain livelihoods. Moreover, Israeli settlers in the West Bank consumed approximately six times the water used by Palestinians there. Israel's strategic plan was to divide the West Bank and separate Jerusalem from the West Bank. Israel acted with virtual impunity. While people were under the illusion that negotiations were somehow underway, nothing was taking place in reality and the situation was only deteriorating. As one way to draw international attention to the plight of the Palestinian people, the use of new terminology was suggested: now that Palestine had been admitted to the United Nations as a non-member State, the term "occupied territory" should be replaced with "occupied country".

About 43 per cent of the West Bank was allocated for settlements and Israeli military use. Since 2000, some 12,400 Palestinian houses and structures had been demolished, forcibly displacing thousands of Palestinians within their homeland. In East Jerusalem, only 13 per cent of the land was allowed for Palestinian construction. Some 10,000 children did not have access to education. Since 1967, 14,000 East Jerusalemites had been stripped of their residency rights, while 150,000 Israelis had been given residency. At least 93,100 residents were at the risk of displacement since they did not have "permits" from the Israeli authorities. In Area C, 63 per cent of the West Bank, there was no Palestinian autonomy. Over 350,000 Palestinians used to live in Area C, but now there were only 150,000, while 325,000 settlers lived in some 135 settlements and 100 outposts. In 2012, 540 Palestinian-owned structures, including 165 residences, had been demolished, displacing 815 people, over half of them children. In this reality, many people would decide to leave their homeland simply to protect their family. Palestinians were showing increasing signs of depression, anxiety, stress, frustration and post traumatic stress disorders, and children were having difficulties learning.

In Gaza, 44 per cent of the population were food insecure and about 80 per cent were aid recipients, while until six years ago there had been no such thing as food insecurity; 34 per cent of the workforce, including more than half of youth, was unemployed; and 35 per cent of farmland and 85 per cent of fishing waters were totally or partially inaccessible. A severe fuel shortage resulted in outages of up to 12 hours a day: electricity went out in the middle of surgeries at hospitals, and people were forced to use flights of stairs to avoid getting stuck in elevators. Some 95 per cent of the water from the Gaza aquifer contained nitrate eight times more than the normal level, but parents had no choice but let their children drink it to survive although knowing the risk of cancer.

It was pointed out that the occupation cost the Palestinians some US\$7 billion annually. Meanwhile, the continued restrictions on Palestinians' movement and access coupled with a \$1 billion drop in donor aid in the last four years, had exacerbated the Palestinian Authority's fiscal crisis. It also had caused the Palestinian economy to slow from 11 per cent real growth in 2011 to 6 per cent in 2012. Moreover, in 2011, the Palestinian Authority suffered from a \$200 to \$220 million donor financing shortfall, while its 2012 budget finance gap was estimated at \$500 million. The Palestinian Authority's many challenges were pointed out, among them programme fragmentation and duplication, and the lack of accurate data on funding. Donor aid must be in line with the Palestinian National Development Plan, coordinated through the Ministry of Finance's Aid Management and Coordination Unit, and monitored through such mechanisms as the Paris Declaration Monitoring Survey, the Gender Mainstreaming Survey and the Security Sector Working Group Survey. Moreover, donors should continue sharing information on their disbursements by updating the national aid information management system.

The Meeting then reviewed the responsibility and accountability of the occupying Power under international law. A legal expert said that the duties and responsibilities of an occupying power were primarily found in the 1907 Hague Regulations, more specifically in articles 42-56. They were also laid down in the Fourth Geneva Convention as well as in certain provisions of Additional Protocol I and customary international humanitarian law. This body of law was commonly referred to as international humanitarian law. The principles of the main rules of law placing duties and responsibilities on the occupying power include: the occupier does not acquire sovereignty over the territory; occupation is only a temporary situation, and the rights of the occupier are limited to the extent of that period; the occupying power must respect the laws in force in the occupied territory, unless they constitute a threat to its security or an obstacle to the application of the international law of occupation; the occupying power must take measures to restore and ensure, as far as possible, public order and safety; the occupying power shall devote particular care to the well-being of children; collective or individual forcible transfers of population from and within the occupied territory are prohibited; transfers of the civilian population of the occupying power into the occupied territory, regardless whether forcible or voluntary, are prohibited; collective punishment is prohibited; the confiscation of private property by the occupier is prohibited; cultural property must be respected; and people accused of criminal offences shall be provided with proceedings respecting internationally recognized judicial guarantees. Israel, as an occupying Power, was also bound by another body of law referred to as human rights law, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Covenant on the Rights of the Child.

A former US Congressperson stated that Israel's impunity was brought to bear by the pro-Israel lobby operating in the political sphere of the United States. The well funded pro-Israel lobby ensured the ouster from Congress of anyone who dared to draw attention to Israel's human rights violations, Israel's misuse of US weapons, or any other inconvenient facts. She suggested that much of the Palestinian suffering could be alleviated if sufficient energy and resources were put behind making public how the pro-Israel lobby misdirected US and European policies by preventing pro-peace and pro-justice politicians from initiating a public debate on important values and basic human dignity.

Experts pointed out that there was no real motivation for Israel to end the occupation. The devastating effects of Israel's failure to respect international law were compounded by a lack of political will to neutralize Israel's incentives to prolong the occupation. While most people around the world did not approve Israel's policies, Governments had accepted it and the political will to rectify it was almost nonexistent. Only a vast people's movement would make a difference, and action must be taken before a point of no return was reached.

The Meeting reiterated the important role of African States in support of the State of Palestine. African States and the African Union had always strongly supported the Palestinian people and their right to self-determination. In January 2012, the African Union General Assembly had affirmed its full support to the Palestinian people in their legitimate struggle to end the Israeli occupation and to establish an

independent State, under the leadership of the PLO. The African Union had supported Palestine's bid for full United Nations membership. Forty-nine African Union Member States, the vast majority, now recognized Palestine as a State. Most African States had full diplomatic relations with Palestine.

Experts then discussed lessons that the Palestinian people could draw from Africa's experience in ending colonization and achieving sovereignty and independence. A Namibian expert emphasized the value and power of international solidarity. During Namibia's independence movement, supporters around the world had never lost faith in supporting Namibia's struggle for freedom, and that persistence had eventually prevailed on their Governments to impose sanctions on the South African regime. The same faith in solidarity should be applied to the Palestinian cause. Solidarity with Palestine should be further expanded to Africa to include the masses, especially university students and other youth. The Palestinian Rights Committee was planning to ask the General Assembly to proclaim 2014 as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which would be a great opportunity to send a message to people around the world to pressure their Governments to support Palestine. The Palestinian people should unite behind the Palestinian leadership to force Israel to comply with resolutions and decisions of the international community.

A South African expert stated that the basis for South Africa's anti-apartheid campaign had been armed struggle; the internal underground; international solidarity and international isolation of the South African State; and mass mobilization within the country. But it had taken decades to make gains. By the time South African liberation movements had been internationally recognized, many Western countries, in particular, had still staunchly refused to adopt sanctions. When the occupier was strong militarily, economically and diplomatically, as was the case in apartheid South Africa and in Israel today, strategies to isolate it would deliver results.

One expert suggested the launching of an "African Peace Initiative", whose objective would be to assist the parties in the Middle East conflict to remove the barriers through a peace agreement in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 and 338. Based on the Arab Peace Initiative, it would call upon the Governments of Israel and Palestine to complete the peace negotiations and achieve a peace agreement which would end the occupation and the conflict, in return for Africa's and the Non-Aligned Movement's commitment to accepting and recognizing Israel, with a message that Israel was not isolated or de-legitimized. The move undoubtedly would resonate boldly in the Israeli peace camp, the Israeli civil society and, hopefully, the Government of Israel.

Specific initiatives and action by civil society were discussed. On 9 July 2005, about 200 Palestinian civil society and political organizations had called on the world to boycott, divest from and sanction Israel. Four days later, the UN International Conference of Civil Society in Support of Middle East Peace held in Paris had endorsed the call in its Action Plan 2005. Known as the BDS movement, the call demanded that Israel end its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantle its separation wall; recognize the fundamental rights of Israel's Arab-Palestinian citizens to full equality; and respect, protect and promote the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in General Assembly resolution 194. The BDS campaign, which focused its attention on institutions and companies linked to settlement activity, had produced tangible results, as several Israeli companies had filed for liquidation or closed offices. Universities and artists joined the movement, and churches and other civil society groups had divested. South Africa and some European Governments were poised to pass legislation to label settlement products. Over the past eight years, the Palestinian BDS campaign had achieved more successes in various parts of the world than South Africa's campaign had in about twenty years. However, it was pointed out that, while many African countries had Palestinian solidarity organizations, they had not succeeded thus far to develop a continent-wide solidarity network that could make their activities more effective.

In the closing session, the **Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations** pointed out that the adoption of General Assembly resolution 67/19 had been vital for the Palestinian struggle for freedom. Palestine's status as a full Member State or an Observer State was not as important

as the fact that the international community had recognized the existence of a Palestinian State. Now the pillars of that State must be strengthened. The notion that self-determination could not be accorded to Palestinians until negotiations with Israel were finalized was completely unacceptable. When Israel had declared independence, it had not asked for permission by other countries, and when the US had declared independence, it had not negotiated with the British. They had just exercised their right. It was not enough to characterize settlements as illegal and an obstacle to peace, practical steps must be taken to stop that practice. For example, countries should determine the source of products from Israel to make sure they were not produced in settlements. Countries should deny entry to settlers who committed crimes against Palestinians.

Closing the Meeting, the **Chairman of the Committee** said that beyond the historic adoption of General Assembly resolution 67/19, there was still a difficult path ahead for Palestine to gain full membership. He called for African States' further support for the Palestinian people, particularly as part of the African Group and the Non-Aligned Movement at the United Nation.

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