



**UNITED NATIONS ROUNDTABLE ON LEGAL
ASPECTS OF THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE
CONVENED BY THE COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE
OF THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF
THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE**

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

OPENING SESSION

Statement by

H.E. Mr. Abdou Salam Diallo
Chairman
Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights
of the Palestinian People

Mr. Issa Qaraqe, Minister for Prisoners Affairs of the State of Palestine

Mr. Michael Moller, Director-General of the United Nations Office in Geneva, representative of the United Nations Secretary-General

Mr. Anders Kompass, Director and representative of the High Commissioner for Human Rights,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I welcome you all to this first roundtable on the legal aspects of the Question of Palestine. I would like to convey our sincere appreciation and gratitude to the Government of Switzerland and the United Nations Office here in Geneva for the warm welcome to the Committee and participants in this roundtable.

Last November, the United Nations General Assembly, in its resolution 68/12 proclaimed 2014 as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People and requested our Committee to organize activities in cooperation with Governments, United Nations organizations and civil society organizations. The objective of the Year is to raise international awareness of the main issues of the question of Palestine, and to promote peace between Palestine and Israel. This also requires raising awareness about the obstacles to the ongoing peace process, particularly settlements, Jerusalem, the blockade of the Gaza strip and the humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Our Committee is grateful for the continued diplomatic engagement by the international community, in particular the persistent efforts of US Secretary of State Kerry. At the same time, we call on all parties to act responsibly to create an appropriate climate for productive negotiations, which will resolve all final status issues and bring about an end to the Israeli occupation, a total Israeli military withdrawal from the Palestinian Territory occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem, and the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination.

However, despite the international community's calls on Israel to stop settlement activity, the expansion of settlements continues at an alarming rate in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, accompanied by the demolition of Palestinian homes and expropriation of Palestinian land. Settlement construction in 2013 more than doubled compared to 2012. These actions are a clear violation of Articles 49 and 53 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

On March 29, Israel failed to meet its commitment to release the fourth group of 26 Palestinian prisoners, part of the agreement with the US and Palestinians that led to the resumption of talks. The decision not to release this fourth batch of prisoners has further complicated the continuation of the political dialogue.

Given these harsh realities, it is a rather fortuitous coincidence that we find ourselves in Geneva today. The General Assembly demonstrated its solidarity with the Palestinian people by adopting its historic resolution 67/19 on 29 November 2012, recognizing Palestine as a United Nations non-Member Observer State. This recognition enabled President Abbas to sign 15 letters of accession to international conventions and treaties on April 1, including a letter to the Swiss authorities in their capacity as depositories of the Four Geneva Conventions of 12 August, 1949 and the first Additional Protocol. The Geneva Conventions define the basic, wartime rights of prisoners, both civilian and military, establish protections for the wounded; and establish protections for the civilians in and around a war-zone. Moreover, the Geneva Conventions also define the rights and protections afforded to non-combatants. The State of Palestine formally acceded to these Conventions effective 2 April, 2014, a day that will be remembered by future generations as momentous.

During the next two days, together with our Palestinian colleagues, and the incredible panel of legal experts who accepted our invitation, we will be learning a great deal about the application of the Geneva Conventions to prisoners held by the occupying Power and applicable international mechanisms. We will also hold discussions about the broader legal implications of Palestine's accession to international conventions and treaties. This is critical since if the current round of negotiations fail, the Palestinians will have other legal options open to them. I encourage all of you to participate actively to enable our Palestinian colleagues start to exercise, the full depth and breadth of their inalienable rights.

I look forward to two days of fruitful discussion. Thank you very much.

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