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Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

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New York

Chair: Mr. Seck (Senegal)

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

The Chair (*spoke in French*): Today, we are gathered here for a special meeting to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in accordance with the provisions of resolution 32/40 B, of 2 December 1977.

It is my honour and pleasure to welcome His Excellency Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, President of the General Assembly; His Excellency Mr. Sebastiano Cardi, President of the Security Council; Ms. Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General and representative of the Secretary-General; His Excellency Mr. Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations and representative of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas at this meeting; Mr. Jeffrey Feltman, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs; and Mr. Andrew Gilmour, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights and Head of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in New York. I also welcome His Excellency Mr. Amrith Rohan Perera, Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka and Chair of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, who will join us for the second part of this meeting.

I wish also to welcome representatives of Member States, intergovernmental organizations and civil-society organizations and all those who have accepted the invitation of the Committee to participate in this special meeting. Our special thanks go to Mr. Salit Shetty, Secretary General of Amnesty International, who has kindly accepted our Committee's invitation to participate in this meeting and to deliver a message on behalf of civil-society organizations active on the question of Palestine.

I would now like to make a statement in my capacity as Chair of the Committee.

Today, as we gather once again to show our solidarity with the Palestinian people, we recall another anniversary — the centenary of the Balfour Declaration. Undertaking to address the question of Palestine, the General Assembly, in resolution 181 (II), of 29 December 1947, decided to partition Palestine with a view to the establishment of two sovereign adjacent States. However, today, one of those States — the State of Palestine — has still not obtained either independence or sovereignty over its territory.

While the General Assembly continues unequivocally to reaffirm annually the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, how can we not regret the amount of work that remains to be done for the Palestinian people, including the refugees, to be able to enjoy their universal rights? As the international community, it is our duty to make greater efforts for the realization of their rights, in line with the Charter of

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the United Nations, international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. We must also ensure the realization of our collective desire for a future where the Palestinian and the Israeli people live in peace and security without fear or prejudice so that another generation will not suffer such a tragedy.

However, this year, there has been a glimmer of hope in the efforts to promote reconciliation among Palestinians, unity between the two Palestinian policies and an end, therefore, to the division between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Those are positive steps towards dealing with the numerous challenges, such as the catastrophic humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, as well as the harmonization and strengthening of Palestinian positions in the context of the peace process. We welcome the efforts of Egypt in that regard. We urge the Israeli authorities, moreover, in line with their commitments, to seize this opportunity to constructively join that process by taking decisive measures to promote peace.

It is essential that the Palestinian reconciliation translate into a results-oriented peace process based on the long-established parameters, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map. In that regard, we support and encourage the ongoing efforts to relaunch the peace process on the ground by the United States, the Russian Federation and Egypt, in particular.

On this International Day of Solidarity, on behalf of the Palestinian and the Israeli people, let us pledge not to weaken in our resolve to implement all measures at our disposal — moral and diplomatic — for the ultimate goal of the two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders. In any case, I would like to affirm that, for its part, our Committee, in line with the mandate bestowed upon it by the General Assembly, will continue to promote the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to self-determination and independence.

I now have the honour to give the floor to the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Miroslav Lajčák.

Mr. Lajčák (President of the General Assembly): We are all here to mark the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. I would like to begin by thanking the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for organizing this special meeting. In preparation, I

looked up the definition of solidarity, and I read that it is a union that arises from common responsibilities and interests. There is no doubt that the international community has a common responsibility towards the Palestinian people and a shared interest in the peaceful resolution of this long-running conflict. So it is clear why we are here: to show our solidarity with the Palestinian people. Today, I will make two main points in that regard.

The first point is that we can show our solidarity through humanitarian assistance. We cannot address the needs of the Palestinian people only on international days or at annual events such as the one we are celebrating today. They demand our attention 365 days a year.

As we speak, people throughout the Palestinian territory are in need of concrete support. However, I want to focus on the Gaza Strip, where the situation is grave. The ongoing blockade has left people wholly dependent on international aid. The rebuilding of critical infrastructure has been hampered. The economy remains weak. Many people are in dire humanitarian need, with women and children living in particularly difficult circumstances. The Gaza Strip is home to more unemployed people than almost any other part of the world.

I would like to use this opportunity to sincerely thank all actors and entities that continue to provide humanitarian support to the Palestinian people. They include Member States, United Nations bodies and regional and non-governmental organizations. A vital role is played by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. I am concerned about the Agency's current serious shortfall of \$77.5 million. I encourage discussions on funding modalities to continue. Importantly, I want to express my appreciation to all Member States that contribute, on a voluntary basis, to the Agency's budget and work.

We know that the question of Palestine can give rise to debate. However, when it comes to assistance to the Palestinian people, all States Members of the United Nations have been able to express solidarity with one voice, and the consensus of the General Assembly has been essential in that regard. However, I wish to stress that our responsibility to the Palestinian people extends beyond humanitarian support. That brings me to my second point, which is that international solidarity

must be used to facilitate a peaceful resolution of the Palestinian question.

In 1947, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II). That formed the legal basis for the establishment of the State of Israel, as well as a second State, for the Palestinian people. In the 70 years that followed, only one of those two elements has come to pass. I firmly believe that a two-State solution is the only answer to what we call the question of Palestine. Support for that solution also acts as an expression of solidarity with the Palestinian people.

That further means supporting the establishment of conditions that are conducive to a successful peace process. We have seen some of those conditions beginning to take shape. I am, of course, referring to the recent commitments made to intra-Palestinian reconciliation. But we need more, including an immediate halt to settlement expansion. Other necessary conditions include the cessation and condemnation of all acts of violence, including terrorism, as well as incitement to such acts.

Before I conclude, I would like to return to the definition of solidarity. In doing so, I wish to stress that solidarity is not sympathy. We usually express sympathy when there is nothing that we can do. However, when it comes to the question of Palestine, we have a responsibility and an interest. The Palestinian people do not need our sympathy. They deserve our solidarity.

We came here today to express it. However, the people who need it the most will not be able to hear us. They are not sitting among us. They are not listening from the gallery. They are on the ground — many of them in conditions that we could not imagine. So, while our words in this Hall are important, our actions outside it will speak louder.

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I thank the President of the General Assembly for his important remarks. The Committee is thankful for his stewardship of the Assembly in dealing with the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory and in the Middle East as a whole.

I now have the honour to give the floor to the President of the Security Council, Mr. Sebastiano Cardi.

Mr. Cardi (Italy): I would like to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for inviting me to address this meeting in my capacity as President of the Security Council for November. The Security Council has

remained seized of the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. The Council has continued to have monthly briefings from the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and from the Department of Political Affairs, to hold open debates on that agenda item on a quarterly basis and to receive the reports of the Secretary-General in briefings by the Special Coordinator every three months.

The situation in the Middle East remains of constant concern to the Security Council due to the lack of a just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Council remains fully committed to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East based on the relevant Security Council resolutions. The Council members continue to recognize and commend the vital humanitarian work by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, along with other United Nations and humanitarian organizations, including in addressing the critical needs in Gaza. The Council expresses its hope that the international community, including non-traditional donors, will continue to support the Agency at this critical time.

In conclusion, the Security Council will continue to contribute to a just, peaceful and lasting solution in order to achieve the peace and security that the Israeli and the Palestinian people both need and deserve.

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the President of the Security Council for his important statement, which reaffirms that the Council remains fully committed to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

I now give the floor to the Deputy Secretary-General.

The Deputy Secretary-General: I will begin my remarks with a message from the Secretary-General, who would have liked to have been here.

“The question of Palestine is inextricably linked with the history of the United Nations and is one of the longest unresolved issues on the Organization’s agenda. Seventy years after the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II), a sovereign and independent State of Palestine has yet to emerge alongside the State of Israel. I remain convinced that the two-State solution recognized by that resolution is the only premise for a just,

lasting and comprehensive peace between Israelis and Palestinians. The resolution of the conflict would also create momentum for greater stability throughout the region.

“Last August, during my visit to Israel and Palestine, the leaders of both sides restated their commitment to a negotiated peace. I encouraged them to tangibly demonstrate that commitment and to create the conditions for a return to meaningful negotiations. The recent positive developments on intra-Palestinian unity should be harnessed by all to move the process in the right direction.

“I reiterate my readiness to work with all stakeholders, including the Middle East Quartet and countries in the region, to support a serious political process that draws on all relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and agreements in order to realize a two-State solution, end half a century of occupation and resolve all final-status issues. Now is the time to end the conflict by establishing an independent Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security with the State of Israel.”

I shall now move on to my own remarks.

For 40 years, we have gathered every 29 November to express our unwavering support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and independence and for the establishment of a Palestinian State to settle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict once and for all. We must continue to collectively strive to reach that goal. We must focus on reversing the current negative trajectory and promoting confidence among Palestinians and Israelis that a peaceful future is possible and enduring.

Ending illegal Israeli settlement activity and demolitions in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is crucial to the viability of a future Palestinian State and to realizing the legitimate national and historical aspirations of both people. Eliminating violence and incitement is essential to building trust.

Gaza remains pressed by crippling closures and in a state of constant humanitarian emergency, with 2 million Palestinians struggling with crumbling infrastructure, an electricity crisis, a lack of basic services, chronic unemployment and a paralysed economy — all taking place amid an unfolding environmental disaster. That unsustainable reality demands urgent humanitarian,

economic and political measures to support the Palestinian population. We must not leave women, children and young people behind.

The recent headway in advancing Palestinian unity, particularly the full return of the Gaza crossings to the control of the Palestinian Authority on 1 November, is a landmark development in the implementation of the intra-Palestinian agreement signed in Cairo on 12 October. It is vital that all stakeholders work collectively and determinedly to maintain the positive momentum. Reconciliation is a key step in reaching the larger objective of a Palestinian State. The Palestinian Government should provide the Palestinians living in Gaza with the much-needed sense that Palestine is, and must remain, one entity and enable Gazans to uphold their human dignity and to begin rebuilding their lives.

Ending the occupation and achieving a two-State solution is the only path to enduring peace between Israelis and Palestinians. There is no other option. It is the only way to achieve the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. On this International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, let us affirm our commitment to making the vision set out 70 years ago a reality.

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I thank the Deputy Secretary-General for taking the time out of her busy schedule to participate in this special meeting of the Committee. Through you, Madam, I would also like to express the Committee’s sincere appreciation for the important message of the Secretary-General and your own personal message.

I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): It is a great honour to read out the message of President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority to this meeting.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

“Seventy years ago, on this same day, on 29 November 1947, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), unjustly deciding to partition Palestine, without the consent of its people, against their will and in blatant disregard of their right to self-determination. A few months later, Israel forcibly uprooted two thirds of the Palestinian people from their land and destroyed more than 400 towns and villages, violently clearing the way for its forced acquisition of more than three

quarters of Palestine's territory, far beyond what was decided in the partition plan. Then, in 1967, 50 years ago, Israel occupied what remained of Palestine's territory, comprising 22 per cent of historical Palestine, which consists of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip.

"Israel was established in 1948 and joined the United Nations soon thereafter, while the Palestinian people were tragically suffering their catastrophe and the Palestine question remained unresolved. Seventy years later, the Palestinian people are still awaiting their long-overdue freedom and independence and their rightful place among the community of nations.

"As painful as it is, reflecting on the history and those undisputed facts is essential on this anniversary, as our catastrophe persists to this day. The Palestinian people continue to be dispossessed and displaced and their inalienable rights and national aspirations continue to be denied. Resolving the conflict requires rectifying that grave injustice by upholding human rights and international law. That is fundamental to guaranteeing the freedom and rights of the Palestinian people and to achieve a just solution that establishes genuine peace, security and coexistence for both peoples.

"For 70 years, our nation has looked to the international community for redress and support for its just struggle for liberation. Yet, for 70 years too many, the injustice has been ongoing with its daily share of violence, loss of human life, suffering and hardship, oppression, colonization, imprisonment and confinement, and collective punishment. And yet, even as they remain deprived of their most basic rights, including their right to self-determination, our people persevere and remain committed to peace, the rule of law and the United Nations resolutions as the only path to enjoy those rights.

"This year, their perseverance was reflected, inter alia, in the peaceful resistance of our people in Jerusalem, which led to the reversal of the decisions taken by Israel to further its control over Haram Al-Sharif and the hunger strike by heroic Palestinian prisoners. It is also embodied in the daily epic steadfastness of our people, even in the face of that historic injustice and the immense

challenges that they face living under foreign military occupation, a blockade and in exile.

"On this day, every year, we honour the resilience of the Palestinian people and the global solidarity with our just cause — one of the greatest solidarity movements in recent times. That solidarity is rooted in the core principles of justice, freedom, equal rights and dignity enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, international law and the ongoing shared goal of peace.

"The Palestinian people have stood side by side with many nations and supported their struggle for liberation and independence. They have witnessed the attainment of their freedom, as colonialism and apartheid were brought to an end in their countries with the support of international community. We are honoured to see these countries and their peoples stand by the Palestinian people today as they carry on their struggle to end the longest foreign occupation in modern history and finally take their rightful place among the community of free nations.

"On this Day, we would recall the words of the hero Nelson Mandela on the indivisibility of freedom: 'Our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinian people'. Never have we stopped seeking our freedom through all peaceful political, diplomatic and legal means possible. Twenty-four years ago, the Oslo Accords were signed. Other interim agreements that were supposed to lead within five years to the independence of the State of Palestine and a peace treaty resolving the final-status issues have also been signed. At the time we recognized Israel within the 1967 borders. To this very day Israel has refused to reciprocate, not only refusing to recognize the State of Palestine or even the right of its people to self-determination, but also actively pursuing its colonial settlement activities on the territory of the occupied State of Palestine, in grave violation of United Nations resolutions and international law, including humanitarian and criminal law, and obstructing our independence.

"With such illegal policies and actions, all of which have been consistently deplored and rejected by the international community, including, most recently, in Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), Israel is consolidating its occupation rather than

ending it. It is destroying the two-State solution and creating an existential crisis for the Palestinian people and the prospects for peace.

“In the face of Israel’s blatant contempt for the law, United Nations resolutions and the long-standing global consensus on the parameters of a just solution based on two States within the 1967 lines, decisive action is urgently needed. All members of the international community must ask if they have done everything possible to end Palestinian dispossession and Israeli occupation and to bring about peace for all the peoples in the region. We believe that much more can and must be done in this regard.

“Israeli violations cannot remain unchallenged; they constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, and pose an imminent threat to international peace and security. The responsibility of the United Nations towards the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects, and the obligations of all States to respect and ensure respect for international law, must be upheld and translated into concrete, coordinated action.

“We urge all present to uphold their commitment not to recognize the unlawful situation created by Israel’s policies and measures in occupied Palestine, including East Jerusalem. We urge them not to render aid or assistance in maintaining this situation and to distinguish between the territory of the occupying Power and the occupied territory, in order to ensure accountability and bring this unjust situation to an end.

“Only by ending Israeli impunity can we pave the way to peace. In this context, individual and collective action is vital to prevent further violations, secure justice for generations of Palestinian victims and save future generations from oppression, subjugation and forced exile. It is vital to allow them to fulfil the promise of their own existence and their self-determination. Only through such action can we open a new chapter wherein genuine and lasting Palestinian-Israeli peace is possible.

“Peace is the most lofty of purposes, and we will continue to strive to achieve it. Together with Arab States and Organization of Islamic Cooperation member States, we adopted the Arab Peace Initiative, which stipulates that once

Israel ends its occupation and withdraws from the Palestinian and other Arab territories it occupied in 1967, all States in the region will recognize it and normalize their relations with it.

“Moreover, we have fulfilled our commitments under the Quartet road map, endorsed by Security Council resolution 1515 (2003). However, Israel has continued to violate that road map. We have supported all other peace initiatives, including the French initiative, aimed at salvaging the two-State solution and promoting peace. The initiative led to the convening of the Paris Conference. We also supported the initiative of the Russian President and of the Chinese President as well as the efforts of United States President Donald Trump, in the hope that such efforts will lead to a historic peace deal based on the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with Palestine and Israel living side by side in peace and security, with good-neighbourly relations.

“However, Israeli leaders have deliberately undermined all peace efforts. They have preferred to declare and pursue their absolute commitment to colonize our land and dehumanize our people, to the detriment of peace. Israel is attempting to make its colonial and military occupation irreversible. Its relentless aggression, provocations and incitement against the Palestinian people continue today, including in Jerusalem and against Christian and Muslim holy sites, undermining the historic status quo, most notably in Al-Haram Al-Sharif. Israel is therefore threatening to transform a solvable political conflict into a one-State reality of apartheid or a never-ending religious war.

“We are fully committed to international law and legitimacy and to a two-State solution on the pre-1967 borders. We stand ready to give every chance possible to regional and international efforts, based on the longstanding terms of reference, to achieve a just peace. However, if the efforts made to achieve such a solution fail, the Palestinian people will neither disappear nor accept a future of subjugation and oppression. Our people will continue their legitimate struggle to fulfil their inalienable rights. They will be entitled to strive for equal rights for all in historical Palestine, without discrimination. On this occasion, we reiterate that our struggle was never directed against Judaism as a religion, as we respect all faiths, but rather against the colonial

occupation of our land and people and the denial of our inalienable human rights, including our right to self-determination.

“We strongly believe in the law and international institutions, despite decades of disappointment and disillusion. The State of Palestine will therefore continue to engage in all efforts to promote the rule of international law, including by strengthening its institutions and empowering its people, particularly women and youth. In this regard, national reconciliation is a priority and will contribute to our efforts to unify the Palestinian land and people. We will spare no effort to end the division in all its aspects and ensure that the Palestinian Government is able to uphold its responsibilities in the Gaza Strip and to fulfil its duties towards our people. We seize this opportunity to reiterate our deep appreciation for Egypt’s efforts, and once again call on the international community to help us lift the inhumane and illegal Israeli blockade against the Gaza Strip and to offer the necessary support in order to remedy the grave humanitarian situation there.

“On this centennial of the Balfour Declaration, which cannot be ignored, and on this anniversary of resolution 181 (II) and on the eve of 70 years of Al-Nakba, millions of Palestinian refugees continue to suffer in exile, awaiting a just solution for their plight in accordance with resolution 194 (III). After more than 50 years of the foreign occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, we call once again for international protection for our people, for the enforcement of United Nations resolutions and for the adoption of due measures by all States in compliance with their international obligations to help end Israel’s colonization and occupation of our land.

“Respect for international law is the cornerstone for achieving peace, but neither respect nor the goal of peace can be achieved by statements alone; words and commitments must be coupled with practical actions to implement the law. On this International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, we stress that this is a matter of urgency, and urge that no effort be spared to that end. We remain grateful to all those who firmly and nobly stand for international law and the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and peace. We await the day

when we may together celebrate the freedom of our people in the independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We would welcome all members of the international community in Jerusalem which corresponds to its original name, the City of Peace.”

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I would like to ask Ambassador Mansour to convey our sincere thanks and greetings to President Abbas for his important message. I would also like to assure President Abbas and, through him, the Palestinian people, of the Committee’s firm commitment to continuing its efforts, as mandated by the General Assembly, with a view to promoting a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine and the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including its right to self-determination as an independent State of Palestine and a fully fledged member of the United Nations.

I now give the floor to Mr. Andrew Gilmour, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights and Head of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in New York.

Mr. Gilmour (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights and Head of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in New York): As other speakers have noted, this year marked the fiftieth year of the occupation of Palestinian territories, and during that time, year after year, the reports of the Secretary-General and of the High Commissioner for Human Rights have painted a bleak picture of a conflict in which serious violations of rights have driven an ongoing cycle of violence, with victims on both sides.

These reports set out with depressing regularity violations by Israel as the occupying Power with respect to obligations under both international humanitarian law and international human rights law.. The violations have had a profound impact on the daily lives of Palestinians living in the occupied territory. Over the years, it has become clear that the occupation is the source of many human rights violations and that the atmosphere of impunity that prevails with respect to these violations encourages further violence. Settlements continue to expand, despite repeated declarations of illegality by the United Nations. Freedom of movement is severely restricted, and many Palestinians are subject to frequent arrest and detention, and the rights to development, education and health are stifled.

The blockade of Gaza continues, now in its tenth year. In view of the electricity crisis of recent months, residents of Gaza have lived in an unbearable situation, with very little access to health care and clean water. The deterioration in infrastructure, due to repeated bombardments and restrictions on reconstruction, have further compounded the crisis.

Amid these events, human rights groups are under increasing attack. Palestinian human rights defenders find themselves subject to arrest and detention for participation in peaceful protests, which remain severely restricted under Military Order 101. Israeli human rights groups, many of which have taken principled and courageous stances on the human rights of the Palestinian people have been targeted by legislation, political rhetoric and repeated efforts to undermine their credibility, legitimacy and patriotism.

In this atmosphere, in which many have lost hope for the future, the United Nations is still helping the parties to achieve the long-promised two-State solution. Last June, High Commissioner Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein told the Human Rights Council:

“Compliance with international law, and ensuring its respect, are not optional: they are the sine qua non condition for peace... Human rights violations... are not merely symptoms of the conflict, but further fuel the cycle of violence, which has now persisted for half a century. To break this cycle, the root causes must be addressed. These include bringing the occupation to an end... Respect for human rights is the path which leads out of this conflict.”

To end on a more hopeful note, the latest Cairo-brokered intra-Palestinian reconciliation agreement is an important step towards addressing the energy crisis and its devastating consequences for Gaza. We also hope that it can contribute to moving the process forward, so that the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza can finally see some hope of ending the harsh occupation that translates for them into the sustained and systematic suppression of almost every one of their human rights.

The Chairman (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Andrew Gilmour for his important statement and for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' crucial work in support of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian People.

I shall now suspend the meeting for a few minutes to allow some of our guests to leave the conference room. In addition, on behalf of the Committee, I would like once again to thank His Excellency the President of the General Assembly, His Excellency the President of the Security Council, the Deputy Secretary-General, and the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights for their contribution to this important meeting and for their expressions of solidarity with the Palestinian people.

The meeting was suspended at 11 a.m. and resumed at 11.10 a.m.

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Mr. Amrith Rohan Perera, Chair of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.

Mr. Perera (Sri Lanka), Chair of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories: I am honoured to address today's special meeting to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Fodé Seck, Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, for the kind invitation extended to me to address this special meeting in Sri Lanka's capacity as Chair of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.

The International Day of Solidarity reminds us of the urgent need to find a just and peaceful solution to the question of Palestine and, most important, to address the plight of the Palestinian people and to provide for their humanitarian needs.

Earlier this year in Amman, civil-society representatives, victims and witnesses of Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people, as well as Palestinian and United Nations officials, briefed the Special Committee on the situation of human rights within the occupied Palestinian territories and the occupied Syrian Golan. Those briefings and testimonies once again brought to the attention of the Committee the daily violence and humiliation suffered by Palestinian men, women and children, whose every aspect of life continues to be impacted by the unlawful occupation. Settlement expansion has had a direct impact on the escalation of violence in the occupied territories and

has largely contributed to the increase in the number of civilian casualties, who include infants. That matter has engaged the particular attention of the Special Committee in recent years, as reflected in its reports.

We must remain deeply concerned about reports that dozens of families of Palestinians killed have been denied the right to a proper and dignified closure on the basis of so-called security concerns. While many of the bodies have now reportedly been released, unacceptable conditions have been imposed regarding the release of bodies, such as the prohibition of autopsies and limitations on funeral rites.

According to testimonies before the Special Committee, Israeli practices have also included State-sanctioned land seizures, the retroactive legalization of outposts, the demolition of Palestinian homes and livelihood structures, the denial of building permits, restrictions on movement and access to livelihoods, and a lack of accountability for settler violence. The cumulative impact of such measures on the human rights of the Palestinian people is a matter of serious concern.

Year after year, for the best part of the half-century since the establishment of the Special Committee, the information received by the Committee has affirmed the trends and patterns of human rights violations associated with the occupation and its inextricable link to the so-called settlement enterprise. An emerging issue of particular concern brought to the attention of the Special Committee has been the diminishing democratic space for civil society, particularly local Palestinian and Israeli organizations working to promote human rights in the occupied territories.

This year's report of the Special Committee (A/72/539) also covers the situation in Gaza, where Israel's land closure and naval blockade have now entered their eleventh year. The impact of the electricity crisis on the already strained health and sanitation infrastructure was one of the key issues highlighted to the Committee. At the time of reporting, hospitals had been forced to reduce services and access to essential care was limited as a result of the crisis. The report also highlights the human rights situation in the occupied Syrian Golan and the impact of settlement expansion.

While today we pledge our solidarity with the people of Palestine, I wish to acknowledge with deep appreciation the work done by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in

the Near East (UNRWA) to provide care and to deliver vital human development services and emergency assistance to more than 5.2 million Palestinian refugees since 1950. The work of UNRWA needs the continuing support and engagement of States through adequate and predictable resourcing to ensure the effective discharge of its invaluable mandate.

As Chair of the Special Committee, I repeat the call for a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine and an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people. Both parties to the conflict must create the necessary environment to facilitate peace. There is an urgent need for mutual confidence-building measures in support of the efforts to resume dialogue and substantive negotiations. Israel must protect the Palestinian civilian population in the occupied territories and refrain from actions that are contrary to the established rules of international law and practice.

We reiterate our support for Security Council resolution 242 (1967) and General Assembly resolutions 2443(XXIII), of 1968, and 32/40B, of 1977, and the implementation of all other United Nations resolutions regarding the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to statehood and the attainment of a two-State solution based on the 1967 borders.

We are encouraged by the fact that, despite decades of disappointment, the people of Palestine have resolutely sustained their spirit and strength of purpose with a view to gaining their legitimate rights and have prevailed over the considerable challenges facing them. We hope that the Palestinian people will work together to preserve national unity, which is imperative for the creation of a fully sovereign and independent Palestine.

In conclusion, the resilience and endurance of the people of Palestine must inspire us. Surely they must also energize and motivate us to act now. This is not a struggle that they can fight alone. It is a struggle in which we must engage together as a global community.

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Perera for his important statement. The Committee is very appreciative of the continuing contribution of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories to our meeting and of Sri Lanka's participation in the Committee's activities as an active observer.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Abdelaziz, Chargé d'affaires for the League of Arab States to the United Nations.

Mr. Abdelaziz (League of Arab States) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, allow me to read out the message of Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

“In solidarity with the Palestinian people and their legitimate struggle and just cause, the countries of the world and their peoples who uphold peace and believe in causes of justice and freedom celebrate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People every year to reaffirm their support to them and to all their legitimate and inalienable rights, and to express their rejection of all forms of injustices inflicted on the Palestinian people by the Israeli occupation. This day is celebrated in accordance with General Assembly resolution 32/40B, of 1977, which designated the annual observance of 29 November as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People in order to regain their legitimate rights, in particular their right to self-determination and to establish an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

“The month of November is of particular importance to the Palestinian people, since it recalls the extent of the injustice, the suffering and the tragedies that they have been enduring for long decades. Indeed, on 2 November 1917, the evil Balfour Declaration was signed to create a national homeland for the Jews on the historic Palestinian territory. On 29 November 1947, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), dividing Palestine into two States: an Israeli and an Arab State. The State of Israel was created, while an Arab Palestinian State has not yet been established. Without it, there will be no justice or peace in line with the two-State solution that enjoys international and Arab consensus.

“On 29 November 2012, the General Assembly decided to admit Palestine as a non-member observer State with the approval of 138 States. Resolution 67/19 was an important and necessary step towards the acceptance of Palestine as a full Member. The position of Palestine has continued

to be strengthened at the international level, and the Palestinians’ right to an independent State received more recognition at the global level and was translated recently by the State of Palestine being admitted to INTERPOL, with 75 votes in favour. That reflects the international community’s confidence in and support for the Palestinian rights. In this context, the League of Arab States will continue to support all diplomatic and legal Palestinian movements and coordinated joint Arab action on the international stage to consolidate the legal status of Palestine and increase recognition of it, especially its quest to become a full Member of the United Nations.

“Early in October witnessed an important event which has inspired hope — the reconciliation of Palestinians under the auspices of the Arab Republic of Egypt. The end of the division and the long-awaited reconciliation will prevent the Israeli Government from evading the peace process and expose its absurd justifications concerning the absence of a Palestinian partner for peace. It is hoped that the path to reconciliation will continue and that pending issues will be settled soon, whereby the Palestinian position will be strengthened.

“After 50 years of occupation, Israel continues to pursue policies that undermine the two-State solution and any possibility of achieving peace. Israel continues to build settlements and confiscate more Palestinian territories, despite continued and repeated international condemnation. This is a flagrant violation of international law and the relevant international resolutions, in particular Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), of 23 December 2016, which underscores that all Israeli settlements are illegal and illegitimate under international law. Israeli violations continue in all occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, as do attacks against Moslem and Christian holy sites, in particular the Al-Aqsa Mosque, as well as the unjust and illegal siege of the Gaza Strip, which has continued for more than a decade, not to mention field executions, checkpoints and violations of the rights of Palestinian prisoners and detainees in the Israeli occupation prisons.

“Israel has a long history of disregarding the United Nations, its resolutions and bodies. Nevertheless, despite this shameful reputation, Israel is trying to obtain a non-permanent seat

on the Security Council for the term 2019-2020, even though the Security Council's mission is to maintain international peace and security. Israel's success in achieving that and its quest to normalize its status on the international stage are tantamount to rewarding the occupation and encouraging the Jewish State to maintain its policies, which undermine the two-State solution. Peace-loving States of the world should come together to oppose its candidature. The League of Arab States categorically rejects Israel's candidature and calls on all other States to reject it as well.

"The impasse in the peace process does not bode well for the Middle East and the entire world. This is why a serious negotiating process must be launched via a clear mechanism and with a clear timeline in order to put an end to the Israeli occupation and create an independent sovereign Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital. We hope that the United States Administration and other actors will be able to achieve this objective, in cooperation with all international partners, in order to put an end to this long-standing conflict. Furthermore, we still hope that the Quartet will play a constructive role and continue its quest to achieve the desired peace. The League of Arab States is prepared to coordinate with the Quartet in order to ensure that peace is achieved. The enlargement of the Quartet to include the League of Arab States would certainly make it possible for this objective to be reached.

"In conclusion, on this International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, we express our respect and admiration for the heroic Palestinian people, for their legendary steadfastness in the face of injustice, suffering and torture, and for the sacrifices that they continue to make. It is time for the rule of law to prevail over the rule of force and for the Palestinian people to achieve their freedom, independence, rights and motherland."

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I thank His Excellency Mr. Abdelaziz Enani for his statement. I request him to kindly convey to His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, the sincere appreciation of the Committee for his important message and for its strong support of our Committee's activities.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Shaher Awawdeh, Deputy Permanent Observer of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to the United Nations.

Mr. Awawdeh (Organization of Islamic Cooperation): Allow me to read out the message of Mr. Yousef Ahmad Al-Othaimeen, Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

"It is an honour for the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to address this important meeting in observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. On this occasion, I am pleased to express the profound appreciation of the OIC for the United Nations and its various committees and organs for their unwavering efforts to promote international solidarity with the Palestinian people and support their legitimate national rights.

"We meet to observe this occasion, which coincides this year with the first centenary of the ill-fated Balfour Declaration, which represents the beginning of the historical injustice whose ramifications continue to be felt by the Palestinian people who, for decades, have suffered occupation, oppression, expulsion and ethnic cleansing. This occasion also comes 70 years after the General Assembly adopted its resolution 181 (II), on the partition plan of Palestine. However, the State of Palestine is yet to achieve its independence, and the Palestinian people remain deprived of exercising their legitimate national rights.

"On this occasion, the OIC reaffirms the historical, legal, political and moral responsibility that the international community bears to find a just solution to all aspects of the Palestinian question in accordance with international law and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations. That responsibility, *inter alia*, involves the need to end the Israeli occupation, full recognition of the State of Palestine, ensuring justice for the Palestinian people, enabling them to exercise their right to self-determination and to establish a sovereign independent State on the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and finding a just solution to the issue of Palestinian refugees, in line with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

“While we assert that East Jerusalem is an integral part of the Palestinian territory occupied in 1967 and the capital of the State of Palestine, we equally underscore the religious status of Al-Quds and the eternal link of Muslims throughout the world to the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Muslim shrines in that city. We also reiterate our call on the international community to take practical and effective measures that will put an end to Israeli violations and illegal practices aimed at changing the geographical and demographic status in and around East Jerusalem. Those measures are null and void under international law and threaten to transform the political conflict into a religious war, the consequences of which no one can predict.

“The OIC is following with deep concern the continuation of the policy of building and expanding Israeli settlements on the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem. In many international forums we have warned against the failure of the international community to hold Israel, the occupying Power, to account for its non-compliance with the principles of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. That may undermine international efforts to find a just and comprehensive solution based on the vision of the two-State solution. In that regard, we call for translating the international condemnation of the Israeli policy of settlement building into practical and effective measures in implementation of international resolutions, in particular Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), as part of supporting the efforts to achieve peace.

“While we welcome the positive developments related to Palestinian national reconciliation, including the assumption by the Palestinian National Unity Government of its responsibilities in the Gaza Strip, we call on the international community to continue to support the Palestinian reconciliation. At the same time, we affirm our stance that the continued illegal Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip is tantamount to collective punishment and a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law, resulting in grave humanitarian consequences for the Palestinian people. It must come to an end.

“The OIC also reiterates its commitment to the message of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli detention centres, including its support for their resilience.

We call for effective action to defend their rights, internationalize their cause and compel Israel, the occupying Power, to respect the provisions of international humanitarian law and the relevant human rights instruments.

“The OIC reaffirms its solidarity with the Palestinian people and renews its commitment to supporting international efforts aimed at achieving just and comprehensive peace, pursuant to the relevant resolutions of the United Nations and the Arab Peace Initiative. It also calls on the international community to shoulder its responsibility to provide international protection for the Palestinian people and mechanisms for implementing the relevant international legitimacy resolutions. The international community must launch a political process with multilateral international sponsorship, in accordance with the specified time frame, as a real contribution to consolidating and implementing the two-State vision, to which we renew our commitment.”

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Shaher Awawdeh for his important statement on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which is an active partner of the Committee.

I now give the floor to Mrs. Louise Sharene Bailey, *chargé d'affaires* of the Permanent Observer Mission of the African Union to the United Nations, who will read out a message from His Excellency Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission.

Mrs. Bailey (African Union): We have gathered today, as we have done for the past 40 years, to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People in support of the just struggle of the Palestinian people and the State of Palestine in their quest for the restoration of their legitimate right to establish an independent State of Palestine, coexisting peacefully within the borders of June 1967 and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

On behalf of the African Union Commission, I wish to commend the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for organizing the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people — a unique opportunity to raise awareness about the unresolved question of Palestine and to reiterate our solidarity with the Palestinian people. I also wish to pay tribute to His Excellency

Ambassador Fodé Seck, Permanent Representative of Senegal, for his sterling leadership of the Committee.

I bring warm greetings of solidarity and support from His Excellency Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission.

Our continental organization has consistently defended the cause of Palestine by placing it as a priority on the agendas of all summit meetings and by adopting relevant decisions, resolutions and declarations as a clear demonstration of the African Union's solidarity with and support for the cause of the Palestinian people. The African Union further commends and welcomes the reconciliation deal reached in Moscow earlier this year, in January, between Palestinian organizations to form a unity Government, including the recent signing of the intra-Palestinian agreement on 12 October.

The African Union expresses grave concern over the critical situation of Palestinian refugees. According to recent reports, the Israeli occupation in Palestine continues to adversely determine every aspect of the daily lives of young people and camp residents, affecting everything from security and freedom of movement to livelihoods and employment. For the past two years in particular, Palestinian refugees have continued to face serious protection challenges due to the ongoing occupation, armed conflict and displacement, sinking deeper into poverty and desperation.

Clearly, conditions on the ground remain volatile, and the situation in East Jerusalem and the West Bank continues to be a source of serious concern. We reiterate the African Union's condemnation of the illegal settlements in the West Bank, Jerusalem and the occupied territory of the Syrian Golan Heights, the continued occupation of Palestinian lands and the Judaization campaign aimed at changing all Islamic and Christian features of the Holy City and at reducing the Palestinian population to the fullest extent through the confiscation of their lands and the destruction of their homes. We further echo the demand of the African Union for the immediate lifting of the land and sea blockade imposed by Israel on the Gaza Strip and of all other restrictions.

Regrettably, as we meet today, the path towards durable peace still remains unclear. The peace process now hangs by a thread, and the process of rapprochement seems to be slipping away. The lack of progress against the backdrop of renewed tension requires sustained collective attention. The international community

should continue to support the parties to overcome their differences and return to the peace talks on the basis of the two-State solution. The United Nations and the Quartet for Middle East peace have a pivotal role to play in that regard.

As we commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, we call on the international community and all stakeholders to strengthen their support and assistance to the Palestinian people to ensure the realization of their inalienable rights and the establishment of their own viable State, including achieving durable peace within the region. The African Union remains resolute in its commitment to continuing to support the just cause of the people of Palestine.

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I thank Mrs. Sharene Bailey for conveying the important message of the African Union, which is a valuable partner of our Committee.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Henry Suárez Moreno, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United Nations, who will read a message from His Excellency Mr. Nicolás Maduro Moros, President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

Mr. Suárez Moreno (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I note that I am delivering an abbreviated version of my written statement.

It is an honour for Venezuela to take the floor on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (NAM) at this solemn meeting to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, particularly today on a date that marks another solemn anniversary for the Palestinian people. It is the seventieth anniversary of the General Assembly meeting on the Palestine Plan of Partition through the adoption of resolution 181 (II) (*see A/PV.128*).

NAM firmly supports the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which provides a crucial opportunity to reflect on the ongoing injustice and grave situation endured by the people in the occupied Palestinian territories, including the West Bank, due in particular to the blockade of the Gaza Strip. After decades of the denial of their inalienable rights by Israel, the occupying

Power; after almost half a century of foreign occupation, which has left the Palestinian people subject to flagrant and systematic violations of their human rights, in addition to indescribable suffering; and almost 70 years after the General Assembly adopted the Palestine Plan of Partition, which led to Al-Nakba in 1948 and the conflict that we continue to face today, it is clear that the Palestinian question is at the heart, and a root cause, of so many other crises and dilemmas facing us in the Middle East today. This International Day of Solidarity is an opportunity to renew our shared commitment to achieving a fair and definitive solution to the question of Palestine that, ultimately, leads to lasting peace in the Middle East as a whole.

The question of Palestine has been on the agenda of the United Nations since its inception. Seven decades have passed. However, the Palestinian people still continue to be deprived of their inalienable rights, including their rights to self-determination and freedom. They continue to count on the effective contribution of the United Nations to fulfil their aspirations to achieve the independence and sovereignty of the State of Palestine. Despite decades of participation in peace efforts in good faith, their proven commitments to the two-State solution for peace, their adherence to international law and the dreadful compromises made, the situation of the Palestinian people has worsened on all fronts. The situation on the ground is also deteriorating greatly owing to Israel's continued illegal policies and practices, which have further destabilized and exacerbated the situation on the ground, undermining all peace efforts and obstructing justice over these years.

As the Security Council remains silent and paralysed on the issue despite its obligations under the Charter of the United Nations, the international community continues to witness with horror the brutal Israeli military occupation in all its manifestations, in breach of international law and the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. Under the umbrella of that unjust occupation, the occupying Power continues to oppress and to collectively punish the defenceless Palestinian people and to commit serious violations of human rights, including reported war crimes. In the light of that continuing unjust illegal situation, NAM once again calls for measures to be taken to prevent violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people, including for protection to the Palestinian people while the occupation continues.

NAM condemns the ongoing military occupation of Palestinian territory by Israel in breach of international law and United Nations resolutions. In that regard, we condemn the illegal Israeli settlement activities, through which the occupying Power has continued its colonization of the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and the forcible displacement of Palestinian civilians in flagrant violation of international law and the provisions of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016).

Israel must end its attempts and measures to colonize the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and the forcible displacement of thousands of Palestinian civilians with a view to altering the demographic composition, legal status, character and geographic nature of those territories in order to facilitate the de facto annexation of more Palestinian lands. All those illegal measures violate the human rights of the Palestinian people and undermine the chances of achieving a lasting peace based on the two-State solution, the viability of which is undermined daily by the occupying Power.

The solidarity of the international community for the just Palestinian cause should also be directed at all relevant efforts to support the independence and sovereignty of the Palestinian people throughout the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel since 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital and in accordance with the relevant resolutions. The international community should also support Palestine's entry as a full Member of the United Nations.

In conclusion, on this important day NAM reaffirms its unstinting commitment to ensuring a fair and comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, with the Palestinian issue as a key element; to immediately restoring the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to self-determination; and to ensuring an independent, contiguous and viable Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and a fair solution to the difficult situation of the Palestinian refugees on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III). That will guarantee the peace that the international community and the Palestinian people have sought and to which they have long committed and will mark a new era of peace and stability in the region.

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I thank His Excellency Mr. Suárez Moreno and ask him to convey to His Excellency Mr. Nicolás Maduro Moros,

President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the sincere thanks of the Committee for his very important statement in his capacity as Chair of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

(spoke in English)

I now have the pleasure to give the floor to Mr. Ahmad Tibi, Deputy Speaker of the Israeli Knesset.

Mr. Tibi *(spoke in Arabic)*: We are gathered here to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which is still subject to occupation as it struggles for independence and to put an end to one of the longest-running occupations. It is in fact the only occupation that is still standing to this very day.

Yesterday, the Vice-President of the United States of America came to this building, only a few metres from here, to commemorate the establishment of the State of Israel. Yesterday, Ninet Tayeb sang the song “Jerusalem of Gold”. The lyrics state that Jerusalem is made of gold, copper and light. However, Al-Quds today is made of iron and steel, bullets and occupation, the darkness of oppression instead of the gold and light to be enjoyed by all through a just peace that puts an end to the occupation of the Palestinian territories so that occupied Jerusalem could become a capital of hope and light for the free State of Palestine.

Once again, I come here to the United Nations from the city of Al-Quds and Taybeh village, from Galilee, Almuthallath and the Negev to convey the voice of my people, who call for just peace, freedom and full equality instead of the occupation and policy of racial discrimination to which 20 per cent of the Arab citizens in Israel are subject. These are the inland Palestinians who are suffering from incomplete citizenship and discrimination in all aspects of life — land, housing, employment, education, industry, infrastructure, as well as the violation of mosques and churches.

Last time I was here, I spoke of Khair Hamdan, the martyr who was killed by Israeli police in Cana, in the Galilee. The father of that martyr asked me to remind the Committee that the police officer who killed his son is still free. The killer of the martyr Yaqub Al-Qiyan in the town of Um Al-Hiran — killed in cold blood — is also still free. The houses of this town in the Negev are being demolished to build another city called Hiran. The killer of another martyr in Kfar Kasim, Mohamad Taha, is still free. Instead of trying to establish peace, tolerance, equality and acceptance of the other, the

Government of Israel — and I have just come from there — is working today to enact a national bill that would provide the right for self-determination in our country only to Jews. It would also affect the status of the Arabic language and Arab nationals, and seeks democracy without any equality. It dangerously and for the first time seeks to establish towns solely for Jews, clear of Arabs. That is Israel in 2017.

We, in addition to the parties of the left and progressive Jews, oppose that law and other racist laws enacted by the Knesset, since racism has become a central trend in Israel. We have heard directly and through mediators about United States proposals for a peace process. However, I would like to underscore that the solution cannot be viable unless it is based on an independent and sovereign State of Palestine and an end to the occupation and settlements. There can be no moral sovereignty or a country without borders, or a Palestine without Jerusalem as its capital, with its mosques and churches, Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. It seems that Netanyahu has succeeded in obstructing the two-State solution, so it may be necessary now to negotiate a one-State solution including guarantees of equal rights to everybody, Jews and Arabs, and the rejection of occupation, which would not cost the occupying Power a lot. Either the two-State solution or the one-State solution. There are no other alternatives but apartheid, which the international community rejects.

Since Al-Nakba, the Palestinian people have suffered a great deal from injustice because the United Nations resolutions on the Palestinian people have never been implemented. It is high time to move to the implementation phase and compel Israel to abide by international law and resolutions of international legitimacy. It is high time also for the United Nations to have a more vital role that has a real impact on granting the Palestinian people the right to freedom and self-determination, just like all the other peoples in the world, and the right to establish an independent and sovereign State of Palestine, in the West Bank and Gaza, with Jerusalem as its capital. The international community and this international Organization must also stop Israel from passing racial and undemocratic laws, and recognize the Arab citizens as a national minority in order to establish the State of Palestine, so that everyone — Palestinians and Israelis — and the region at large can enjoy peace and development, free of war and its scourges.

We listened to the song “Jerusalem of Gold”, which claimed that the City Square in front of Bab Al-Amoud was empty, despite the fact that Palestinians were filling the Square and all other squares at that very moment, just as they did recently when the gates of the Al-Aqsa Mosque were closed. We prayed in Salah El-Din and Bab Al-Asfad streets. Yes, we prayed there. The gates of the Al-Aqsa Mosque were closed for 90 years during foreign campaigns. The campaigns are over, but the Al-Aqsa Mosque still stands. The great poet Tamim Al-Bargouti has described Al-Quds in a way that the Israeli poet Naomi Shemer never has. In Al-Quds, we have prayed on the asphalt.

The Chair: I thank Mr. Ahmad Tibi, Deputy Speaker of the Israeli Knesset, for his important declaration.

(spoke in French)

I now have the pleasure of giving the floor to Mr. Salil Shetty, Secretary General of Amnesty International, who will make a statement in his capacity as a representative of civil society active on the question of Palestine.

Mr. Shetty (Amnesty International): I am very grateful for this opportunity to speak not only on behalf of Amnesty International, a global movement of more than 7 million people worldwide, but also as a humble and partial reflection of the voice from the street, not just in the Arab world but the entire planet. Moreover, I would say that I am largely representative of civil society. Nobody in this room needs convincing regarding the urgency of this discussion.

The neglect of the serious human rights abuses against the Palestinian people is among the deepest and ugliest scars on the world’s conscience. As if we needed reminding of the unique and grave situation facing Palestinians, three significant anniversaries converged this year. The first is 100 years since the Balfour Declaration, which has become a symbol of the international failure to ensure the human rights of Palestinians, including millions of refugees.

The second is 50 years since Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian territories and the Golan Heights, with no end in sight. Millions of Palestinians face brutal consequences every day in the occupied territories, including the destruction of their homes and properties on a vast scale — 50,000 since 1967 — and the plundering of their land and natural resources for the benefit of 600,000 Israeli settlers. Israel’s policy

of constructing and expanding settlements on stolen Palestinian land is illegal, discriminatory and unjust. It is a key driver of the massive human rights violations resulting from the occupation. As we stand here today, tens of Palestinian villages in the West Bank are at risk of destruction to make way for settlement expansion.

And then there are the daily abuses that Palestinians suffer: the hundreds of checkpoints and closures that restrict movement for nearly 5 million people; the detention of tens of thousands of women, men and children for months, sometimes years, without charge or trial; the beatings; the torture; and the 10,200 killings, often unlawful, since 1987; and virtually no accountability.

It is also the third anniversary of 10 years since the inhumane and illegal blockade on Gaza began — a decade of collective punishment and complete air, sea and land closure of Gaza devastated the economy and cut off Palestinians from each other and the world. During that time, three separate wars have killed thousands of civilians, including children, and destroyed essential civilian infrastructure. The man-made humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza has made life barely tolerable. Ninety-six per cent of the water is contaminated and unfit for consumption. Eighty per cent of the population rely on humanitarian food aid. The situation is compounding massive inequalities between Israelis and Palestinians. It simply cannot be accepted.

And of course, it is necessary to acknowledge that it is not only Palestinians who have suffered. Since 1987, more than 1,400 Israelis have been killed by Palestinians — hundreds of them civilians killed by armed groups.

But to merely condemn 50 years of settlements and 50 years of war crimes is not enough. We must confront the double standards of some western Powers, or the so-called international community, particularly the United States, for turning a blind eye to the war crimes of Israel. The United States has repeatedly and cynically abused its veto power as a permanent member of the Security Council. In addition, the United States and European Union member States have been transferring arms and munitions to Israel, which may very likely be used to commit serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

Yet, despair is not an option. Amnesty International is based on the belief that when people come together, change is possible. And we believe there is a way forward.

We can end mass violations against Palestinians while ensuring the rights of both Palestinians and Israelis to live in dignity. I want to propose three ways forward.

First, the States Members of the United Nations took an important step with Security Council resolution 2334 (2016). Its strong language, reaffirming the illegality of Israeli settlements was welcome. But that strong language has not been translated into action. Since the resolution was adopted, the settlement project has increased rapidly. Israel introduced laws that approved grabs of private Palestinian land retroactively and allowed for thousands of new settlement units in future. Implementing resolution 2334 (2016) is imperative for ending mass violations. Amnesty International urges States to ensure its implementation and to mandate progress reports to that end. Critically, States must distinguish between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967. We urge States to take action to ensure that they do not recognize or assist settlements and their expansion.

That leads me to my second point. Hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of goods produced in settlements are exported each year. It is high time for States to back up condemnation with real action. Over the past 50 years, Israel has deprived Palestinians of the use of their own natural resources — fertile land, water, quarries and minerals. Meanwhile, it has unlawfully seized control of those resources and diverted them to benefit settlement industries and to produce goods that are often exported.

Amnesty International is calling on States to ban settlement goods from entering their markets. States should also prevent corporations domiciled in their territory from operating in settlements or trading in settlement products. Our call is based on States' existing obligations not to recognize or assist in the illegal situation created by Israel's settlements. It is fully in the power of States to do that.

Thirdly, many Palestinian and Israeli human rights defenders are standing up for those who are oppressed. They are calling for justice and an end to the occupation, but they are suffering toxic consequences: smear campaigns against them, some of whose victims are in the room here today, and their families; surveillance; and threats to their lives and livelihoods. Palestinian defenders are facing charges, judicial attack and detention; those in Israel are labelled as foreign agents and traitors; and human rights defenders from abroad

are being denied entry into the country. Our solidarity with the Palestinian people means solidarity with these human rights defenders as well. We can perpetuate their plight with silence and inertia or we can choose to support them and call for justice.

Today, Amnesty International launches its fifteenth global letter-writing campaign, Write for Rights. People across the world will write millions of messages for those whose rights are under attack. Among the brave people featured in the campaign are Palestinians Issa Amro and Farid al-Atrash, both of whom are facing baseless charges before an Israeli military court for organizing a protest against settlements. We, Amnesty International and our millions of members, stand in solidarity with Issa and Farid, and demand that Israel drop charges against them and stop silencing people who are defending their rights.

In conclusion, we have been speaking about the mass violations of Palestinians' rights for 50 years. In a world where the demonization of whole groups of people based on their identity is becoming more mainstream every day, it is time for fresh resolve. In the face of these injustices, we are not helpless. Let us stand together to make a real difference in the lives of millions of Palestinians who have endured decades of injustice, indignity and discrimination.

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Shetty for his important statement.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all civil-society organizations worldwide that have taken on the Palestinian question for their work in support of the Palestinian people and for their solidarity with the Palestinian people.

I have the honour to announce that the Committee has received messages of support and solidarity from a great many Heads of State and Government, Ministers for Foreign Affairs and organizations. I would like to read out the list of officials who have sent such messages, in the order in which they were received.

We have received messages from the following Heads of State: Brunei Darussalam, the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Jordan, Bahrain, Sri Lanka, Laos, Tunisia, Namibia, Iran, Indonesia, Turkey, Viet Nam, Senegal, Mali, Iraq, the Russian Federation, China, Afghanistan, Algeria and Brazil.

We have received messages from the following Heads of Government: the Prime Minister of Pakistan,

the Prime Minister of India, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh and the Prime Minister of Thailand.

The Committee has also received messages from the following Ministers for Foreign Affairs: the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Cuba, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Argentina and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan.

We have received messages from the following Governments: the Government of Ecuador, the Government of Zimbabwe, the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the Government of Malta and the Government of South Africa.

Lastly, the Committee has also received messages from the following organizations: the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, the League of Arab States and the European Union.

All the messages of solidarity received will be posted on the website on the question of Palestine maintained by the Division for Palestinian Rights, unispal.un.org.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to express our sincere appreciation to the Heads of State and Government, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs, the Governments and the organizations I have just mentioned, and to all participants for their persistent efforts since the beginning of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory 50 years ago aimed at achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, and for the support they have always given to the mandated activities of the Committee.

I would also like to take this opportunity to note the presence here today of a number of Palestinian journalists who have just completed their training

through the good offices of the Department of Information of the Secretariat, which means that to date 200 Palestinian journalists have been trained through the capacity-building programme for the State of Palestine.

I would like to thank everyone who has made this meeting possible, in particular the staff members of the Division for Palestinian Rights, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the Department of Public Information, the Office of Central Support Services, the interpreters and everyone who has worked behind the scenes.

At 3 p.m. today the General Assembly will begin its debate on the question of Palestine, during which I will introduce draft resolutions A/72/L.13, A/72/L.13/Add.1, A/72/L.14, A/72/L.14/Add.1, A/72/L.15, A/72/L.15/Add.1, A/72/L.16 and A/72/L.16/Add.1 under that agenda item, and the Committee's Vice-Chair, Ambassador Gertze of Namibia, will introduce the report of the Committee (A/72/35). We strongly encourage delegations to attend and support the adoption of the draft resolutions.

I would also like to invite representatives this evening to the inauguration of a photo exhibit entitled "The Palestinian People: Everlasting Roots, Infinite Horizons", which tells of the positive contribution of Palestinians to the fields of politics, culture and art. We have with us today Ms. Mary Nazzal-Batayneh, Ms. Nathalie Handal and Mr. Mohammad Sabaaneh, who are featured in the exhibit and have traveled from Palestine to be here. The opening of the exhibit will be at 6.30 p.m. in the Public Lobby of the General Assembly building and will be followed by a reception. I look forward to seeing everyone this evening.

The meeting rose at 12.15 p.m.