UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL MEETING IN SUPPORT OF ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE

“The two-State solution: a key pre-requisite for achieving peace and stability in the Middle East”

Moscow, 1 and 2 July 2015

CHAIRMAN’S SUMMARY

The United Nations International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace was convened under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP). The Meeting aimed to mobilize support for a just and comprehensive solution to the Question of Palestine. It explored ways to foster the conditions for a successful political process and reviewed international efforts to achieve the two-State solution – including those made within the framework of the Arab Peace Initiative, the Middle East Quartet, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and other multilateral organizations, as well as within the context of the United Nations.

Invited to the meeting were all United Nations Members and Observers, intergovernmental organizations, UN Agencies, civil society organizations, and the media. Seventy-one Member States, two Observer States and three regional organizations participated. Speakers included internationally renowned experts on the Question of Palestine, Palestinian members of Government, Parliament and civil society, as well as Israeli members of the Knesset, political parties and civil society. The Meeting was open to the public and the media.

In his message to the Meeting at the opening session, the Secretary-General of the United Nations emphasized that Israel’s nearly half a century-long occupation must end and failure to do so could further destabilize the region. The Secretary-General welcomed recent statements by the Prime Minister of Israel in support of the two-State solution and said that he had written the Prime Minister to encourage concrete, credible steps – including a freeze on illegal settlement building and planning – to jumpstart meaningful negotiations. Politicians on all sides should refrain from provocative actions and should build upon existing agreements, including relevant Security Council resolutions, the Roadmap and the Arab Peace Initiative, to advance a final status agreement. He added that the Palestinian Government should be fully empowered to assume responsibility for Gaza’s governance and security, including control of the Gaza Strip border crossings. He also expressed concern over recent rocket attacks on Israel by Palestinian militants in Gaza.
On behalf of the **Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation**, the Director of the Department of International Organizations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that his Government would do its part in international fora, particularly the Quartet, to reach a just and comprehensive settlement in line with all relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, as well as the Arab Peace Initiative. Russia was concerned about the grave humanitarian situation in Gaza and called for an end to Israel’s blockade of the coastal strip, stressing the important role of donor countries in financing reconstruction.

The **Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People** noted that last year’s breakdown of negotiations had culminated in one of the deadliest wars in Gaza. Amidst an almost complete blockade, reconstruction had barely begun and would take years. Settlement construction, land confiscation, housing demolitions and violence were ongoing in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The Israeli Government’s statements before the last elections in March of this year had raised questions over its commitment to the two-State solution. Still, there was a new international awareness that the situation could not continue. The Committee welcomed recent efforts to rescue the two-State solution, notably by the European Union, the League of Arab States’ follow-up committee of foreign ministers and France’s initiative for a Security Council resolution calling for a final status agreement.

The **Foreign Minister of the State of Palestine** recalled that the 1993 Oslo Accords signed by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) were supposed to have led to a comprehensive peace agreement by May 1999 and European States had committed to recognize the State of Palestine. Instead, Israel continued to violate international law. The devastating consequences of the 2014 conflict in Gaza, the forcible transfer of Palestinians and the growth of settlements undermined any peace prospect. He warned against attempts to transform a political conflict into a religious one. Palestine was seeking a “new framework for peace” with clear terms of reference, a timetable for a final status agreement, the end of the occupation and an international monitoring mechanism to ensure implementation and accountability. He welcomed France’s initiative for a Security Council resolution. In parallel, the State of Palestine was seeking accountability through the International Criminal Court (ICC), the Human Rights Council and the Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Conventions.

The **Secretary-General of the League of Arab States** was alarmed at Prime Minister Netanyahu’s statement that the two-State solution was “behind” him. The Security Council must take necessary measures to implement existing resolutions. He also called for supporting France’s initiative setting terms of reference, a mechanism for implementation and a complete halt of settlement activity. The Quartet had to be reviewed because it had not accomplished its objectives. Resorting to the International Court of Justice and the ICC were useful options.
In the ensuing sessions, participants emphasized the need for serious negotiations based on the “land for peace” principle. So long as Israel continued to occupy Palestinian territory, the Middle East would never achieve the peace desired. The parties must refrain from unilateral measures undermining the peace process. Diplomacy must support peace until the Palestinians were given the security, dignity and independent State they deserved, and until they play their rightful role in the Middle East. A one-State reality would be disastrous for the Palestinians and the wider region.

There were calls for inclusive negotiations with all political parties, with the international community’s full support, and for Palestinian parties and factions to form a collective front for negotiations. Statements emphasized that “on-again, off-again negotiations” had not produced anything concrete.

There was consensus about the need to overhaul the peace process initiated in 1991 to transform it into a “meaningful” process with clear terms of reference and with the international community monitoring compliance. To ensure success of the peace process, achievements of previous negotiations must be built upon. Much had been accomplished and a range of legal and diplomatic tools existed; they must be implemented. Most importantly, the parties must not attack each other but instead go the distance to reach compromise on the most burning, seemingly insurmountable problems.

Future negotiations must focus on borders and security for both sides, the establishment of East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine, a just settlement for Palestinian refugees, and water rights. Participants also reaffirmed the principle of accountability and that perpetrators of crimes must be brought to justice. The recent publication of the report of the Commission of Inquiry investigating Israel’s 2014 conflict in Gaza was welcomed; Palestinians were encouraged to use it in international courts to demand that Israel be held accountable.

Reconstruction of Gaza and affirmation of the Palestinian Governments’ control over the enclave was urgent, as was reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas. Israel’s move to conduct indirect talks with Hamas was perceived as intended to undermine Palestinian unity. United Nations efforts to work with the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Government to ensure delivery of much-needed construction materials into Gaza were encouraging. Gaza’s reconstruction must not be followed by another conflict and the Israeli blockade should be lifted. Ideas proposed included the establishment of an international inspection and monitoring mechanism as a way to facilitate the lifting of the naval blockade.

Israel’s occupation would continue as long as it was not “expensive” for the occupier. There must also be a complete settlement freeze in all of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the gradual release of the 6,000 Palestinian prisoners currently in Israeli jails. There were also calls to stop the “Judaization” of Jerusalem. Faits accomplis would only lead to a feeling of injustice among Palestinians. Israel’s continued occupation of Palestine was exploited by terrorist groups – notably the so-called “Islamic State” – to recruit more youth: if there was no
progress in advancing the peace process, the extremists’ influence over Gaza, and the radicalization of the enclave’s youth, would only grow.

Participants from Israeli civil society recalled that while the administration of Yitzak Shamir during the 1980s was considered to be “more extreme” than the current Israeli Government it had nonetheless entered into a peace process with the Palestinians. But the Palestinian Government’s lack of control over Gaza gave excuses to the Israeli Government to claim that “we have no partner for peace”. Prime Minister Netanyahu’s concept of two States – which involved Israeli soldiers stationed within the Palestinian State – was a non-starter.

Concrete steps to advance the two-State solution before a final agreement was reached could include a gradual redeployment of Israeli troops, measures to foster Palestinian State institutions and development of the Palestinian economy, including easing restrictions on Palestinian projects planned for Area “C”, which comprised 60 per cent of the occupied Palestinian territory. One suggestion flagged included transferring some land in Area “C”, currently under Israeli control, to Area “B” under Palestinian control. That transfer could include the removal of some Israeli settlements that most seriously harmed Palestinian livelihoods. In addition, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas should publicly condemn Palestinian attacks against Israeli civilians, because not doing so only deepened Israelis’ doubts over his commitment to peace.

One Israeli speaker said that Hamas’ end to terrorist attacks should be Israel’s main condition for negotiations, but its formal recognition of the State of Israel and its compliance with the PLO’s agreements could wait until a later date. Defeatist attitudes toward the peace process should not be allowed to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. It was important to generate positive self-fulfilling prophecies – not just negative ones.

With the Arab Peace Initiative, the Arab world had declared with one voice its commitment to live with Israel in peace. Against a difficult backdrop in the region – including concerns over Iran’s nuclear programme and civil wars in Syria and Yemen – the initiative had taken on greater meaning. The OIC had, since its founding in 1969, adopted several proposals and annual resolutions stating its Member States’ unanimous support for the rights of the Palestinian people and the two-State solution. The peace initiative launched in Fez, Morocco, in 1982 by the League of Arab States had been an important milestone, as it was the first time that recognition of Israel was proposed and that Arab States declared their acceptance of an independent State of Palestine along the 1967 borders. The fourth Islamic Summit Conference in 1984 had endorsed that initiative, and OIC members have pledged to employ all means to implement it.

According to Israeli participants, there is little or no understanding of the Arab Peace Initiative among Israelis. Seventy-five per cent of Israelis were born after 1967 and considered the occupation as “normal”. While they lived in freedom and democracy, millions of Palestinians were subjected to all forms of harassment, and restrictions on their movement and voting rights. At the same time, each side perceived the other as a
threat to its very existence. A new commitment by both sides was essential as the one-State solution was not feasible.

The *Israeli Government had made security its top priority*, but its actions were in fact endangering Israel. The Government was building barriers and destroying any advances in the peace process. The Israeli electorate voted for hawkish Governments in part due to fear of being left exposed to the dangers of total international isolation. A prominent Arab leader could visit Israel as a gesture to promote the aims of the Arab Peace Initiative.

The plight of *Arabs living inside Israel* was harsh, as they struggle against Israeli policies that exclude their rights in the economic, social and political spheres. Recent decisions to forcibly transfer Bedouin communities were another example of the Israeli Government’s policies of exclusion.

Experts called for expanding the *Middle East Quartet*, implementing the Arab Peace Initiative and fostering greater awareness of it in Israel. The *Quartet* in its present form was deemed no longer adequate to address current realities. There were suggestions that the Quartet work closely with representatives of the League of Arab States and other regional players, as well as China and India.

There were calls for France to “officially recognize the State of Palestine”. In December 2014 the French Senate had adopted a resolution calling on the French Government to do so. Soon after, the French National Assembly adopted a similar draft. The French Parliament’s resolutions were a first step toward creating an equal relationship between Israel and Palestine, and making the latter’s recognition a prerequisite for genuine negotiations. France’s initiative for a Security Council resolution should not wait until the draft had the support of both parties before presenting it to the Council. If the resolution is not adopted in the Security Council, an international conference should be organized in Paris, establishing a framework to oversee negotiations and set deadline for negotiations, under the supervision of the League of Arab States, the European Union and the “G5” comprising Germany, the United States, France, Japan and the United Kingdom.

In closing remarks, the Permanent Representative of the Observer State of Palestine, reminding Member States of their responsibility under the General Assembly’s 1948 partition plan, said that Palestine needed everyone’s help to complete the pending part of the plan – the establishment of an independent State of Palestine. He applauded the French initiative in the Security Council and informed that the Palestinian and other Arab Governments had set up a special ministerial committee to work with the French Government to facilitate the text’s adoption. Palestinians were also ready for a serious conference in order to accomplish the same objective. But if neither plan came to fruition Palestinians would resort to other peaceful tools to achieve the two-State solution. Palestine would also resort to the Human Rights Council and the ICC to seek justice for the victims in Gaza and continued settlement building – both of which were war crimes.
It was just a matter of time before Israel and the United States accepted the existence of Palestine as a State.

The Committee Chair acknowledged the fruitful exchange during the meeting. The large and diverse participation and keen interest of Russian and international media was proof of the high priority the international community attached to the issue. Achieving a just solution to the Question of Palestine in a region marred by conflict and increasing instability was of utmost priority. He called on the meeting’s participants to keep the focus on the strategic goal: the end of the Israeli occupation, the emergence of a sovereign and independent State of Palestine with the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and the return of the refugees.

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***Note: This Summary attempts to provide an overall picture of the deliberations of the Roundtable. A detailed report will be published by the Division for Palestinian Rights in due course.***