



General Assembly

Official Records

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

393rd meeting

Wednesday, 28 November 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

Chair: Mr. Niang (Senegal)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

The Chair (*spoke in French*): Today, we gather for a special meeting, as we have in the past, 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.

At the outset, allow me on behalf of the Committee to welcome Her Excellency Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, President of the General Assembly; His Excellency Mr. Ma Zhaoxu, President of the Security Council; His Excellency Mr. António Guterres, Secretary-General; Ms. Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti, Chef de Cabinet; His Excellency Mr. Shahrul Ikram Yaakob, Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations and Vice-Chair of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and other Arabs of the Occupied Territories; 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; and Mr. Miroslav Jenča, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

I wish also to warmly welcome my fellow representatives of Member States and intergovernmental organizations and all our guests, in particular the representatives of civil society organizations, who have

accepted the invitation of the Committee to participate in this meeting. I wish to mention in particular Mr. Marc Lamont Hill, American citizen, activist, academic, journalist and political contributor to CNN, who kindly agreed to deliver a message on behalf of civil society. Mr. Hill, who will speak during the second part of our meeting, is the embodiment of the saying by Pierre Corneille that the worth of a soul nobly born is not measured in years.

Before giving the floor to the various speakers, I shall now make a statement in my capacity as Chair of the Committee.

On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I would like to warmly thank delegations for their presence at this morning's ceremony. Their presence reflects the international community's continued commitment to reaching a lasting solution to the Palestinian question.

As we gather once again on this International Day to express our solidarity with the Palestinian people, I am reminded of the adoption, exactly 71 years ago, on 29 November 1947, of resolution 181 (II) on the partition of Palestine under mandate into two sovereign and neighbouring States.

While the State of Israel has indeed obtained its independence and been admitted as a full Member of the United Nations, the State of Palestine has obtained neither its independence nor its sovereignty and remains confined to the status of a non-member observer State

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of our Organization. To date, 139 Member States have officially recognized the State of Palestine. Yet the illegal occupation of its territory has persisted for 51 years and the Palestinian people are still pursuing their objective of recovering their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination.

In both the West Bank and Jerusalem, the expansion of settlements continues unabated, in violation of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolution 2334 (2016). In addition, Palestinian-owned infrastructure, houses and buildings are being demolished, while entire villages, such as the Bedouin hamlet of Khan Al-Ahmar, have been threatened with displacement and the livelihoods of their inhabitants put in jeopardy.

Restrictions on the freedom of movement and the wall obstruct the daily lives of millions of Palestinians, as does the disproportionate use of force against the civilian population, which continues to claim victims, including children. In the Gaza Strip, the illegal blockade — in place for 11 years already — continues to isolate civilians and inflict all kinds of deprivation on them, exacerbating their despair and tensions.

The Committee calls on actors to take immediate and appropriate measures to alleviate the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza in order to restore the dignity of the civilian population. Equally important is the need for all parties, in this case Israel and Hamas, to respect the ceasefire. In that regard, the Committee commends the joint efforts of the United Nations and Egypt to restore calm on the ground and promote reconciliation among Palestinian political actors. Furthermore, it reiterates its condemnation of any incitement to hatred, provocation and violence and urges all parties to exercise the utmost restraint.

The budget deficit for humanitarian and development needs is also a matter of serious concern to the members of the Committee. Specifically, the drastic reduction in the resources of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) jeopardizes the continuation of essential programmes for 5.3 million Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the occupied Palestinian territories.

The Committee reiterates its gratitude to all Member States that have reinforced their support for UNRWA and echoes the Secretary-General's call for increased efforts to provide UNRWA with adequate,

predictable and sustainable funding to enable it to properly pursue its mandate for Palestinian refugees and, at the same time, to contribute to the stability of the region.

To achieve independence and create a sovereign State, the Palestinian people need credible political prospects that provide for reconciliation and lead to a genuine climate of peace and development, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. The illegal occupation, which some experts describe as outright annexation, and the blockade of Gaza have resulted in a climate of mistrust between Israelis and Palestinians, pushing them further and further away from the goal of a just and lasting solution — two States living side by side in peace and security within the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine.

Given the primary responsibility of the United Nations for the question of Palestine, it is therefore up to us, as actors of the international community, in particular the Security Council, the Quartet and the countries of the region, to support the parties in reaching a two-State solution that respects the dignity and fundamental rights of both Israelis and Palestinians. That would also ensure the peaceful and harmonious coexistence of the three monotheistic religions while preserving the holy sites of Jerusalem, in accordance with the historical status quo. Beyond these two neighbouring States, the peace, security and prosperity restored in this way would also benefit the entire region, which has suffered so much upheaval.

On 10 December, we will celebrate the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the General Assembly at its third session. That founding text, which enshrined the principles set out in the Charter of the United Nations, was adopted one year after the adoption of resolution 181 (II). Yet the Palestinian people are still in pursuit of their inalienable rights and the promise of an independent and sovereign State set out in that founding text. Faced with this situation, we have no alternative but to fulfil our historical obligations to allow the Palestinian people, like the Israeli people, to take their rightful place in the community of nations.

For its part, the Committee will continue to work, within the mandate given to it by the General Assembly, to maintain the issue of Palestine on the international agenda until Palestinians can fully

exercise their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and independence.

I now have the honour and pleasure to give the floor to the President of the General Assembly, Ms. María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés.

Ms. Espinosa Garcés (President of the General Assembly): I thank all those present for attending this meeting today at a very special moment. We are celebrating the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People at a time when the need for such solidarity has never been greater.

I would like to start by thanking the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for its leadership in organizing this event.

When I consider the concept of solidarity, I am immediately drawn to the theme of the seventy-third session of the General Assembly: “Making the United Nations relevant to all people”. I would like to emphasize this point — relevant to all people. Our solidarity with the Palestinian people must not be rooted in sympathy alone. As worthy as that is, the Palestinian people are entitled to more than that. As we seek to respond to the needs of people everywhere in order not to leave anyone behind, we owe the Palestinian people an obligation to do everything in our power to end their current nightmare. As we stand with the Palestinian people on this day, we must use this opportunity to fight the increasing numbness that occurs when suffering and death become a daily reality and the media does not even report on them in the back pages.

The state of the Palestinian people remains a scar on our collective conscience and we all have a responsibility to press the urgency of the need for an expeditious resolution. I call on world leaders, including religious and other leaders, to make the Palestinian question a priority that deserves our utmost attention. It is not enough to say that we stand with people if we do not exercise the political will needed to make the stand count. I would like to note two areas of concern and one area of opportunity.

My first concern relates to the ongoing humanitarian situation in Palestine. According to the Office of Humanitarian Affairs, 43 per cent of the Palestinian population are refugees, half of them under the age of 18. Furthermore, food insecurity — food security is a basic human right and one of the Sustainable Development Goals — afflicts 47 per cent of the population of the

Gaza Strip. Average water consumption, meanwhile, stands at 79 and 66 litres per person in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, respectively, well below the recommended ratio of 100 litres per person per day. I could go on and on. If we are to stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people, then we must address these challenges even as we push for the implementation of the two-State solution. We cannot leave an entire people and entire generations to suffer.

This brings me to my second concern — funding and resources for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Years of budget cuts have left the Agency with a chronic shortfall, restricting its efforts to reach the Palestinian people. I would like to take this opportunity to thank those Member States that have stepped up and helped fill the gap. The \$122 million that has been received has prevented an immediate shutdown of key UNRWA services, including in areas such as primary education and food security, and that is commendable. At the same time, the current solution is not tenable; a long-term fix for the underfinancing of UNRWA and more support in general to the people of Palestine is necessary, which brings me to my final point and call to action.

We need to accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the occupied territories to improve the lives and livelihoods of the Palestinian people. With sufficient investment and with support from UNRWA and other United Nations and multilateral partners, we can help to empower women and girls, expand access to education, create jobs and livelihoods, and ensure access to affordable health care. Such efforts not only directly benefit the people themselves but can reduce exclusion and marginalization and further increase the prospects for the peace process.

In the general debate of the General Assembly in September, world leaders declared their firm support for multilateralism and called for a strong United Nations. For the Palestinian people, the paralysis of the peace process may be seen as a reflection of the weak state of multilateralism and the delivery capacity of the United Nations. The only way forward for the Palestinian question is therefore to honour existing resolutions, revitalize dialogue and find a truly lasting political solution.

Let us demonstrate our commitment to the Palestinian people by strengthening multilateralism and making the United Nations work for all people — for human rights, peace and security and sustainable development.

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I thank President Espinosa Garcés for her important statement, which reaffirms the commitment of the General Assembly, under her leadership, towards a political solution to the Palestinian question and beyond that to addressing the challenges faced by the Middle East.

I now have the pleasure to give the floor to the President of the Security Council, Mr. Ma Zhaoxu.

Mr. Ma Zhaoxu (China), President of the Security Council: I would like to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for inviting me, in my capacity as President of the Security Council, to address the Special Commemorative Meeting in observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the conclusion of the Oslo Accords, which reminds us that a lasting solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict can be achieved only by peaceful means through dialogue and negotiations. Bearing in mind its relevant resolutions, the Council remains fully committed to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Over the past year, the Security Council has remained seized of the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. The Security Council has received monthly briefings on the situation from the Secretary-General's Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and the Department of Political Affairs and held open debates on a quarterly basis. Meetings have been convened in response to the situation in the Gaza Strip. The Security Council has also continued to receive the Secretary-General's reports at briefings by the Special Coordinator every three months and received a written report in June (S/2018/614).

The situation in the Middle East remains a concern for the Council. Council members express concerns regarding the deterioration of the situation in the Gaza Strip and call for increased international support to alleviate its humanitarian and economic situation. Council members condemn all violence and

hostilities directed against civilians and all acts of terrorism, and reiterate their call for the resumption of peace negotiations as soon as possible and for intensified efforts.

The Council, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations, remains committed to the achievement of a just, lasting and peaceful solution in order to achieve peace and security, which the Israeli and Palestinian people both need and deserve.

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Ma Zhaoxu, President of the Security Council, for his statement. I need not reaffirm the central role of the Security Council in the search for a comprehensive, fair and sustainable political solution to the Middle East question that provides for two States living side by side in peace and security within safe and internationally recognized and guaranteed borders.

I now have the pleasure to give the floor to the Secretary-General, an untiring advocate of a just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian question.

The Secretary-General: More than 40 years ago, the General Assembly established the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People to remind us of our collective, unfinished task of resolving the question of Palestine. Over the decades, that task has become one of the most intractable challenges for the international community and we know only too well the tragic results.

Demolitions, illegal continued settlement expansion and construction, forced evictions and collective punitive measures will not bring peace. The same goes for violence and incitement and, similarly, unilateral steps will not resolve the final status issues of the conflict. Only constructive negotiations, undertaken in good faith and adhering to the long-established and agreed parameters for a two-State solution, will bring the desired, long-lasting solution.

Containing the situation is not sufficient. I call on all actors, first and foremost the leadership of Israel and the Palestinian Authority, to take bold steps and restore faith in the promise of resolution 181 (II) — two States living side by side in peace and security, fulfilling the legitimate national aspirations of both peoples, with borders based on the 1967 lines and Jerusalem as the capital of both States, East Jerusalem being the capital of the Palestinian State. It is the only way to achieve the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. It is

the only option for a comprehensive and just peace, and I call on the international community to intensify its engagements and reiterate its commitment to assisting Palestinians and Israelis in reaching a two-State solution.

Today in particular, our hearts are heavy with the suffering of the people in Gaza. Approximately 2 million Palestinians remain locked in increasing poverty and unemployment, with limited access to adequate health care, education, water and electricity. Young people see little prospects for a better future. I urge Israel to lift the restrictions on the movement of people and goods, which also hamper the efforts of the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies, without jeopardizing legitimate security concerns. I call on Hamas and other militant groups to halt their military build-up in Gaza, including the indiscriminate launching of rockets and incendiary devices directed at Israel.

The violence during demonstrations at the Gaza fence is a matter of great concern. Palestinians in Gaza have legitimate grievances and the right to demonstrate peacefully. Hamas and the leaders of the demonstrations have a responsibility to prevent violent actions and provocations, but for its part, Israel has a responsibility to exercise maximum restraint and to not use lethal force, except as a last resort against the imminent threat of death or serious injury.

I am encouraged by the recent reduction of violence in Gaza. I commend the efforts of the Government of Egypt and key regional and international partners, together with my Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza, restore calm and support intra-Palestinian reconciliation and the return of the legitimate Palestinian Government in Gaza.

The United Nations will not waver in its commitment to the Palestinian people. On this International Day of Solidarity, let us reaffirm our commitment to upholding the rights of the Palestinian people and to building a future of peace, justice, security and dignity for Palestinians and Israelis alike.

The Chair (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the Committee, I thank the Secretary-General for his tireless efforts, through all the entities under his authority, including the Division for Palestinian Rights, to achieve a two-State solution based on the long-standing parameters set by the international community.

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

Mr. Mansour (State of Palestine): I have the honour to read out the statement of His Excellency President Mahmoud Abbas to this meeting.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

“At the outset, I convey greetings from the State of Palestine and from the Palestinian people to all of our friends around the world who are joining us in commemorating the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. I would like to express our profound appreciation and gratitude to all countries that are extending invaluable support for the cause of our people, including by voting in favour of our annual resolutions on the Palestinian question and their steadfast supportive position based on international law and international legitimacy, despite all of the pressures and attempts to undermine those legal and moral positions. The firm positions of those countries in the international forums reinforce the staunch resolve of our Palestinian people within the country and in the diaspora, promote their belief in world justice and provide them with hope to realize freedom and dignity.

“We also reiterate our gratitude to non-governmental organizations and civil society and to all our brothers and friends and all freedom and peace-loving peoples around the world who maintain their steadfast support for our people. We are grateful for their solidarity and support for the legitimate national aspirations of the Palestinian people, aimed at realizing their freedom, independence, just and lasting peace.

“The United Nations has defended our cause, placing it as a priority item on the agenda of the international community. The United Nations has extended a helping hand to our people and adopted resolutions and recommendations that constitute the essential foundations of efforts to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive solution. We emphasize the permanent responsibility of the United Nations towards the Palestinian question, which must be upheld until it is satisfactorily resolved in all its aspects. In that regard, we express once again our deep appreciation for the efforts made by the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. António Guterres; the Committee on the Exercise of the

Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and its Chair, His Excellency Ambassador Cheikh Niang of Senegal; the Committee Bureau; all members and observers of the Committee; and the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat in promoting the rights of the Palestinian people and ensuring them just and lasting peace.

“The General Assembly, the Security Council, the Human Rights Council and other United Nations organs and bodies, including the International Court of Justice, have adopted strong and principled resolutions in favour of the Palestinian question. In that regard, we reiterate our deep regret about the lack of implementation of those resolutions, which has compounded the conflict over many decades, inflicted grave hardship on the Palestinian people and continues to prevent them from exercising their rights. That unjust situation has deepened the conviction that there is indeed a double standard when it comes to the United Nations resolutions regarding Israel, as those resolutions are not being implemented and Israel is allowed to continue behaving as though it is a State above the law, with complete immunity.

“On this day each year, we recall resolution 181 (II) of 29 November 1947, by which the General Assembly unfairly decided to partition Palestine without the consent of the Palestinian people. It was adopted 30 years after the Balfour Declaration of 1917. Then came the 1948 Nakba, which forcibly uprooted our Palestinian people from their lands that they have continuously possessed and in which they have lived. In 1967, Israel also occupied the rest of the Palestinian lands, including the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza strip.

“Despite signing a peace accord with Israel in 1993, which stipulated that negotiations concerning the final status issues would be concluded by 1999, as well as the establishment of the independent State of Palestine across 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with the State of Israel in security and with good-neighbourly relations according to the two-State solution; despite the Palestinian Liberation Organization’s recognition of the State of Israel in 1993; despite Palestine’s fulfilment of all its obligations under the signed accord and the establishment of modern national institutions that respect the rule of law; despite the bilateral recognition of Palestine as a

State by 139 States and the upgrading of its status to an observer State in the United Nations in 2012, and its accession to more than 100 international treaties and organizations; and despite fostering a culture of peace and combating terrorism, Israel, the occupying Power, still denies the Palestinian people their right to freedom and independence in their own land and refuses to reciprocate recognition. It persists with its colonial schemes, the theft of our land and the transfer of Israeli settlers to it, in grave breach of the Geneva Conventions. The most recent examples of such conduct are its plans to seize the area of Khan Al-Ahmar and to impose the Jewish nation-State law.

“The international community has sought to support the 6 million Palestinian refugees through the establishment of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which plays a vital role. We all must support it until the issue of refugees is resolved, in accordance with resolution 194 (III). On this occasion, we thank the countries that have extended their support to the Agency, as well as those that have extended additional support following the recent punitive United States measures against UNRWA in an attempt to undermine the issue of refugees.

“After more than half a century of Israeli occupation, the horizon for peace remains absent as Israel persists with its military occupation of Palestinian land and continues to impose a racist discrimination regime, by which it still controls Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, and prevents the Palestinian people from exercising self-determination, even as it fails to implement any of the agreements it has signed.

“I must ask: When will Israel be dealt with as a State above the law? When will the international community uphold its obligations? In that regard, I recall that we have not abdicated our obligations under the accord we signed with Israel and we continue to extend our hand for the realization of a just peace based on United Nations resolutions and the two-State solution across 1967 borders.

“I recall that we have never rejected negotiations and that we presented our peace initiative to the Security Council in February. We remain committed to the culture of peace and tolerance,

and we work to combat terrorism in our region and globally. We also remain committed to ensuring that the capital of our State, East Jerusalem, will be open to all believers and adherents of the monotheistic religions. At the same time, we will continue our efforts to unify our land and our people, achieve reconciliation through Egyptian mediation and restore the control and functions of the Government of national consensus in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank with one law, one Government and one legitimate armed force.

“As we face this dangerous situation and political deadlock, I call on the international community to uphold its responsibilities and not permit the continued violation of international law. At the same time, we call on States that believe in the two-State solution and recognize Israel to recognize the State of Palestine as well. That recognition will help to realize justice and give our people hope until one day they realize their freedom and independence.

“We urge members to uphold their obligation not to recognize the illegal situation created by Israel’s policies and measures in the occupied Palestine, including East Jerusalem. We also call on members not to provide support and assistance that could entrench and perpetuate this situation and to distinguish between the territory of the occupying Power and the occupied territory in order to ensure accountability and to contribute to ending this unjust situation.

“We remain fully committed to international law, international legitimacy and the two-State solution with the pre-1967 borders. We remain ready to give every opportunity to regional and international efforts, based on long-standing terms of references, to achieve a just peace. But if efforts should fail to achieve such a solution, the Palestinian people will neither disappear nor accept oppression and injustice as their fate. Our people will continue their legitimate struggle for the realization of their inalienable rights and will strive for equal rights for all, in historic Palestine, without discrimination.

“On this occasion, we emphasize that our struggle is directed not against Judaism as a religion, because we respect all religions, but rather against the colonial occupation of our land and people and

the denial of our inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination. Despite decades of disappointment, we maintain our conviction in the rule of law and international institutions. The State of Palestine will continue to engage in all efforts to further strengthen the rule of international law, including the strengthening of its institutions and the empowerment of its people, especially women and youth.

“Respect for international law is the cornerstone of peace, but neither respect nor peace can be achieved through speeches alone; words and commitments must be matched by practical actions to implement the law. On this International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, we stress that this is a pressing issue and urge that no effort be spared in that regard.

“We remain grateful to all those who resolutely defend international law, the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the goal of peace. We await the day when we can together celebrate the freedom of our people in an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and welcome everyone to the city of Jerusalem, whose original name is the City of Peace.”

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I would ask Ambassador Mansour to convey our sincere thanks and greetings to President Abbas for his important message. I would also like to assure the Palestinian people of the Committee’s firm commitment to pursuing its efforts, as mandated by the General Assembly, to promote the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including its right to self-determination as an independent State of Palestine.

On behalf of the Committee, I reiterate my gratitude to all those attending this morning’s meeting for their messages of solidarity with the Palestinian people.

I shall now briefly suspend the meeting in order to allow our guests to take their leave.

The meeting was suspended at 10.55 a.m. and resumed at 11.05 a.m.

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to my friend Mr. Yaakob, Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations and Vice-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. Yaakob (Malaysia), Vice-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 have the honour to address this special meeting to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on behalf of Mr. 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.

May I take this opportunity to thank Mr. Cheikh Niang, Permanent Representative of Senegal and Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, for the kind invitation extended to the Special Committee to address this special meeting of the Committee in observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Tomorrow, 29 November, will mark the seventy-first anniversary of the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 181 (II) and the fortieth anniversary of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Both are stark and painful reminders of the urgent need to find a just and peaceful solution to the question of Palestine, which continues to elude us.

In July, the Special Committee visited Amman and met with Palestinian and Israeli civil society representatives, victims and witnesses, as well as Palestinian authorities and United Nations officials, who briefed the Special Committee on the deteriorating situation of human rights within the occupied Palestinian territories and the occupied Syrian Golan. Those briefings and testimonies brought to the attention of the Special Committee the daily cycle of violence and hardship suffered by the Palestinian people, whose lives continue to be affected in every respect by the unlawful occupation.

Two weeks ago, the Special Committee presented its fiftieth report (A/73/524) pursuant to resolution 72/84. The Special Committee remains concerned about the continued expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, the blockade and closure of Gaza, the lack of accountability, the detention of children, the use of administrative detention, and the hostile environment faced by civil society, particularly local Palestinian and Israeli organizations working to promote human rights in the occupied territories.

Settlement expansion, the demolition of Palestinian homes and the destruction of their private property were some of the issues of concern most frequently cited during the meetings with the Special Committee — those issues resulted in the displacement of almost 600 Palestinian people, half of them reported to be children, in a one-year period, and they have had a direct impact on the escalation of violence in the occupied territories and have contributed to the increase in the number of civilian casualties, including children. The Special Committee was also informed that the demolitions, which were largely undertaken on the pretext of a lack of building permits, were also undertaken for punitive reasons. Properties granted in the form of humanitarian assistance, such as classrooms for a Bedouin community, have also been demolished.

The report this year also covers the situation in Gaza, where the Special Committee is concerned about the excessive use of force by Israeli security forces against demonstrators since the end of March, which continues to date. As of 31 October, the Special Committee was informed that 228 Palestinians have been killed, including 43 children, while more than 24,360 people have been injured. The Special Committee strongly condemns the excessive use of force by Israeli security forces.

The blockade and closure of Gaza, which are entering their twelfth year, remain the most significant obstacle to sustainable recovery and economic development. They have a significant negative impact on the most basic human rights of Gazans, including their rights to health, education and freedom of movement.

The Special Committee heard with concern about the restrictions on imports to Gaza and the current electricity crisis, which have severely threatened critical hospital and health clinics and water and sanitation infrastructure and services that support the needs of nearly 2 million Palestinian residents in Gaza, more than half of whom are children. That situation is further exacerbated by the unprecedented funding crisis of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

We wish to acknowledge our deep appreciation for the work done by UNRWA to continue programmes such as food security support for refugees, despite having to scale down some emergency programmes. The work of UNRWA needs the continuing support and engagement of States through adequate and predictable

resources to ensure that it can effectively discharge its invaluable mandate.

The testimonies that the Special Committee has heard this year indicate that Israeli discriminatory practices are increasing, which has resulted in the rapid deterioration of the human rights and humanitarian situation in the occupied territories. The Special Committee expresses serious concern at the use of arbitrary administrative detention, during which detainees are held without trial or charges, on indefinitely renewable orders, for several months. Of particular concern are reports that the arrests of children are on the rise. The Special Committee has once again heard about the difficulties faced by human rights defenders, journalists and civil society organizations working on human rights issues related to the occupation.

The Special Committee underscores the urgent need to revive the peace process, reiterates support for the two-State solution and joins international calls for a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine and an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people. All parties to the conflict are urged to create the necessary environment to facilitate peace and mutual confidence-building measures to support efforts to resume dialogue and substantive negotiations. Israel must protect the Palestinian civilian population in the occupied territories and desist from actions that are contrary to the established rules of international law and practice.

We reiterate our support for Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 497 (1981) and the end of the occupation of the occupied territories, the ceasing of all settlement activities and the implementation of all other General Assembly resolutions regarding the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to statehood and the attainment of a two-State solution based on the 1967 borders.

The solidarity of spirit with the Palestinian people expressed here today demonstrates that the global community supports a negotiated settlement that would lead to peace. We hope that this solidarity and spirit of goodwill will assist the people of Palestine to work together to preserve national unity as they strive towards a peace settlement for the creation of a fully sovereign and independent Palestine.

We are heartened that despite the decades of struggle and immense difficulties that the Palestinian people have had to endure, their resolute spirit and

strength of purpose to gain their legitimate rights have prevailed. We take this opportunity to stand united with the Palestinian people, and reaffirm our commitment and steadfast support for the Palestinian cause as they strive to gain their legitimate rights and aspirations.

On the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, let the resilience and endurance of the people of Palestine inspire us all to rededicate our collective efforts to forge a peaceful settlement of the question on Palestine.

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Yaakob and his country for their commitment to the promotion and defence of the Palestinian cause. We greatly esteem the ongoing contribution of the Special Committee, which, besides his country, also includes mine, Senegal, and Sri Lanka as the Chair.

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 out 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*): The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has the honour to speak on behalf of the 120 States members of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries (NAM) to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People at this solemn meeting.

Allow us to begin by expressing our deep appreciation to the President of the General Assembly for organizing this special meeting, and thanking the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council for their participation in this solemn occasion as well as for their valuable remarks.

Today is also a good day to renew our appreciation to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for its important work in promoting the just cause and rights of the heroic Palestinian people, as well as to the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat for its valuable assistance and ongoing support.

Similarly, the Movement reaffirms its sincere appreciation to the Commissioner-General and all the staff of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East for

their valuable efforts, often under adverse conditions, to help alleviate the suffering and address the plight and needs of Palestinian refugees, as well as all United Nations bodies and agencies that have special programmes through which they provide assistance and vital support to the noble Palestinian people, consistent with the permanent responsibility of the United Nations and the international community until a just, lasting, comprehensive and peaceful solution is achieved.

NAM fully supports the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which we see as a special occasion to reflect on the continuing injustices and plight that the Palestinian people have faced for decades in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and in the Gaza Strip as a result of the continued denial of their inalienable rights by Israel, the occupying Power.

More than half a century of a foreign occupation has subjected the Palestinian people to grave and systematic human rights violations and indescribable pain and suffering, and more than 71 years after the General Assembly decided to partition Palestine, which led to Al-Nakba — the catastrophe and tragedy that befell the Palestinian people in 1948, through which they lost their homeland and the majority of Palestinians were forced to leave their homes and become displaced persons and refugees, deprivations that they continue to endure today — it is clear that the question of Palestine constitutes one of the root causes of the many other crises and dilemmas in the Middle East.

This International Day of Solidarity therefore provides us with an opportunity to renew our shared commitment to achieving a solution to the question of Palestine and ultimately, lasting peace throughout the Middle East. We hope that one day such solidarity and support will translate into real change for the Palestinian people and the ultimate goal of peace. In that context, given the multiple and complex emerging threats and challenges to international peace and security that we face, we believe that multilateralism is more relevant and important than ever before. The situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, must be resolved through a multilateral process and diplomatic efforts, within the framework of international law and relevant resolutions and by peaceful means. We are all aware that therein lies the solution.

In that vein, it is imperative that immediate collective action be taken to rectify the situation on the

ground, reduce tensions and foster a climate conducive to the attainment of peace, including by preventing the adoption of unilateral, provocative or arbitrary measures that serve only to encourage Israel to continue to implement its illegal policies and practices in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the city of East Jerusalem, with complete impunity.

The question of Palestine has been on our agenda since the United Nations was founded. More than seven decades have passed and the Palestinian people are still being deprived of their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and freedom. Our Palestinian brothers and sisters today continue to count on the effective contributions of the United Nations, in accordance with its relevant resolutions and international law, to fulfil their aspirations to achieve the independence and sovereignty of their State of Palestine.

Despite decades of participation in good faith by the Palestinians in their efforts to achieve peace, their proven commitment to the two-State solution for peace, their adherence to international law and the painful concessions they have made, their suffering has increased in every respect and the situation continues to deteriorate dramatically as a result of Israel's persistent illegal policies and practices, which have had a destabilizing and exacerbating effect, undermining all efforts to obtain peace and obstructing justice, year after year, thereby holding hostage the lives and the future of several generations of Palestinians.

As the Security Council remains silent and paralysed on this issue, despite its duties under the Charter of the United Nations, the international community continues to witness in horror Israel's brutal military occupation in clear 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 collectively punish the defenceless and innocent Palestinian people and to commit serious human rights violations and war crimes.

Those crimes include, *inter alia*, the use of military force against civilians leading to death and injury, including among children; the colonization of Palestinian land through its confiscation; the demolition of homes; the construction of settlements and the wall; the exploitation of natural resources; the transfer of hundreds of thousands of Israeli settlers

to occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem; the unlawful detention and imprisonment and administrative detention of thousands of Palestinian civilians, including women and children; and the more than 11-year inhumane and illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip.

In the light of that continuing illegal and unjust situation, NAM calls once again on the international community to take measures in accordance with international law to prevent violations of the human rights of the Palestinians, including by providing protection to the Palestinian people for as long as the occupation continues.

NAM condemns the ongoing military occupation of Palestinian territory by Israel in breach of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. In that regard, we further condemn the illegal Israeli settlement activities through which the occupying Power has continued to colonize occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem and the forcible displacement of Palestinian civilians in flagrant violation of international law and Security Council resolution 2334 (2016). We also condemn the provocations and incitement by groups of extremist settlers, including those directed against the holy sites in occupied East Jerusalem, including Al-Haram Al-Sharif, and the vandalization of mosques and churches, which are fuelling tensions and offending religious sensitivities that, in turn, risk further destabilization on the ground.

Consequently, we demand that Israel, the occupying Power, immediately cease all such violations of international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law, fully comply with its legal obligations in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention, and respect the sanctity of the holy sites and the historic decades-old status quo.

Israel must cease all attempts and measures aimed at altering the demographic composition, legal status, character and geography of occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and at facilitating the de facto annexation of additional Palestinian land. The Security Council and the International Court of Justice have deemed all such measures as illegal and in clear violation of the human rights of the Palestinian people. Such practices undermine the realization of a just and lasting peace, based on the two-State solution within the pre-1967 borders, the viability of which is being destroyed daily by the occupying Power.

NAM also demands the full and immediate lifting of the illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip by Israel, which continues to severely impair all aspects of life of its civilian population, thereby constituting collective punishment on a massive scale. That inhumane blockade continues to impede the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip following the devastation inflicted by the Israeli occupying forces in 2014 and hinders economic recovery and development as a result of the lack of sustained and regular movement of persons and goods between the Gaza Strip and the outside world, including the lack of connections and movement between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

The States members of the Movement believe that a meaningful change in the situation on the ground requires ending and rescinding all of the occupation's illegal measures in order to achieve its termination. It is unacceptable that Israel, the occupying Power, continues to carry out all the aforementioned illegal and deplorable activities with blatant impunity despite the prohibitions against such action under international law.

It is necessary that the international community coordinate and step up efforts, including accountability measures, to compel Israel to immediately cease all of its illegal policies and practices so that it can commit to the path leading towards peace, which has been advocated for many years by the international community. In that regard, we reiterate our deep concern about the lack of accountability for all the violations committed by Israel, which worsens the culture of impunity and destabilizes the situation on the ground, while at the same time diminishing prospects for peace.

We therefore call once again for international action, particularly by the Security Council, to ensure accountability for and the cessation of such violations. Israel must comply with its obligations and responsibilities under international law.

The solidarity of the international community with the just Palestinian cause must also be demonstrated in all relevant efforts to support the independence and sovereignty of the State of Palestine in all the Palestinian territories, which have been occupied by Israel since 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, pursuant to the relevant United Nations resolutions, and to support the admission of Palestine as a full Member State to the United Nations.

Furthermore, given the lack of significant progress in the Middle East peace process, which remains stalled

despite decades of negotiations, at the 18th Mid-Term Ministerial Meeting of the Movement held in Baku this year, the urgent need for advancing a political horizon and credible peace process, firmly based on the relevant Security Council resolutions and the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map, was stressed. In that regard, we support all practical and expeditious efforts to support that goal so as to ultimately achieve a just solution and lasting peace.

In conclusion, on this important day NAM reiterates its firm commitment to reaching a just and comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, with the question of Palestine at its core, and to the immediate restoration of the inalienable rights of the heroic Palestinian people, including their right to self-determination, an independent, contiguous and viable State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the pre-1967 borders, and a just solution for the plight of the Palestine refugees, based on resolution 194 (III).

Such a just solution is the only way to guarantee the peace that the international community and the Palestinian people have long searched for, and must remain committed to, in order to usher in a new era of peace and stability in the region. As we have stressed before on many other occasions, only a comprehensive solution to the question of Palestine will allow us to achieve the longed-for peace in the Middle East and to finally comprehensively resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I thank His Excellency Mr. Henry Suárez Moreno and would ask him to convey the Committee's sincere thanks to His Excellency Mr. Nicolás Maduro Moros, President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, for that important statement.

The Chair (*spoke in French*): 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*): I would like to read out the message of His Excellency 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.

“Today, the United Nations is celebrating the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian

People. This Day was proclaimed by the General Assembly in its resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977. The Day is part of the strong message of the international community reiterating that the Palestinian question is a just question. It also reiterates the historic and national right of the Palestinian people to their land and to return to the homes from which they were displaced, and reaffirms their right to self-determination and to enjoy an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

“This Day restates the commitment of the international community and its free peoples to the constant principles established by the resolutions of the international legitimacy. The entire international community, and especially the United Nations, has the responsibility to uphold those constant principles against the attempts of the occupying Government to undermine them, supported by a number of unjust and biased decisions taken by the current United States Administration, particularly the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, the transfer of the United States Embassy to Jerusalem, the withdrawal of American support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the Palestinian Authority, and the closure of the Palestine Liberation Organization office in Washington, D.C. At consecutive Summit and high-level ministerial meetings, the Arab League has rejected and condemned those decisions, stating that they do not respect Arab rights and United Nations resolutions.

“The International Day is being celebrated this year amid dangerous developments pertaining to the Palestinian question. The Israeli occupying authority continues to implement its policies and plans in order to undermine all hopes and efforts to achieve peace, in gross violation of the international law, international humanitarian law, international human rights law and decisions of the international community. They go further in their racist violations and practices against the Palestinian people and their basic rights to their land and sanctities by imposing their siege and carrying out acts of destruction.

“The Israeli occupying authorities are also planning to Judaize Jerusalem and expel its inhabitants. They are trying to change the historic

memory of the place, deform its reality and undermine the national identity of its people. They promote illegal measures and racist laws, the most recent of which is called the Jewish nation-State law, which ignores the rights of more than 2 million Palestinians living in the country, while giving the right to self-determination to the Jews only.

“The Palestinian people are today in dire need for the international and regional solidarity to be translated into practical steps and executive actions. The international community, and especially the Security Council and the General Assembly, should take a decisive stance not only to put an end to the rejection of the occupying authorities to international legitimacy and resolutions but also to strongly stand up to illegal Israeli colonial settlement plans, which threaten to undermine any chance of achieving a two-State solution and give rise to a new reality characterized by apartheid and racial discrimination. They also go against the provisions of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016).

“We call upon the States Members of the United Nations that have recognized Israel to consider that they did so within the pre-1967 borders. As for those States that have not yet recognized the independent State of Palestine, we call upon them to urgently do so within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. We reiterate the importance of the implementation of the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention, as well as other relevant international legal instruments. The principle of accountability and equality in international jurisdictions against the crimes committed by the occupation authorities must also be upheld. The mechanisms for judicial prosecution of increased Israeli violations must be activated, as well the necessary mechanisms to provide international protection to the unarmed Palestinian people against the occupation authorities until they achieve freedom and independence.

“On this occasion, I reaffirm that peace has always been a noble objective of the Palestinian and Arab peoples as well as all peoples of the world. That is reflected in the international determination to achieve the two-State solution, which is the only solution that can lead to stability in the region, in line with the Arab Peace Initiative’s vision. Since its adoption at the 2002 Beirut summit, the

Initiative has remained an important pillar for the Arab and international position towards the Palestinian question.

“Furthermore, Palestinian reconciliation remains an essential element for managing inter-Palestinian affairs and addressing related challenges and threats as one entity. The League of Arab States hopes that this reconciliation will happen in a permanent and integrated manner in order to put a definitive end to the division between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

“To that end, the League of Arab States, supported by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the majority of countries members of the Non-Aligned Movement will oppose all attempts to exacerbate divisions among Palestinians. We will do so by presenting new draft resolutions in the General Assembly each year or presenting amendments to current resolutions that aim to undermine international support for the Palestinian question. Such resolutions negatively impact the Palestinian people. It is our belief that the international community, represented by the States Members of the United Nations, will reject such attempts and will restate its commitment to international legitimacy.

“The Palestinian people still maintain the Palestinian question at the top of the international agenda 70 years after Al-Nakba. They will never give in to the politics of a *fait accompli* and of increasing pressure. That pressure cannot break their will. On the contrary, the Palestinian people, as usual, will continue to wage their battle with force and determination, as well as with heroism and resolve to stay on their land. Their struggle for freedom and independence is a just one with the support of the international community, which believes in the values of freedom, justice and peace, so that Palestine and its people can take their rightful place in the international community.

“I hope that next year we will celebrate this day with the establishment of an independent Palestinian State within 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. I hail the fair struggle of the Palestinian people as well as the international support and solidarity for the just Palestinian question.”

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I thank His Excellency Mr. Maged Abdelfattah Abdelaziz 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 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): I am honoured to deliver this statement on behalf of Mr. Yousef Ahmad Al-Othaimen, Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

(*spoke in Arabic*)

“Reaffirming the continued international solidarity with the Palestinian people and the commitment of the international community to shoulder its responsibilities and support their legitimate rights, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted resolution 32/40 B of 1977, designating 29 November of each year as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, three decades after adopting resolution 181 (II), which partitioned historic Palestine into two States. Yet, while the first State was established, the second has yet to be established. The Palestinian people continue to strive to exercise their right to self-determination and establish an independent State within the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, leading to achieve peace in the region.

“Today's meeting provides all of us — as countries, organizations and peoples — with an opportunity to reflect on the colonial settlement practices of the occupying Power and its apartheid, Judaization and forced displacement policies against the Palestinian people. That should make us rethink our positions, our contributions and our individual and collective efforts, in addition to our responsibilities towards ending the Israeli occupation and achieving peace based on the rights and justice to which we all aspire.

“We are commemorating this Day under extremely dangerous conditions for the Palestinian

question in the absence of genuine political horizon, owing to the ongoing violations by Israel, the occupying Power, of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, as well as its continued failure to fulfil its commitments and obligations to date. That coincides with the United States Administration taking positions and making decisions that underscore its bias towards the occupying Power, while acting in breach of internationally recognized resolutions and departing from its previous role of mediator of the peace process.

“Those developments have diminished hopes, exacerbated the current situation and created an environment of instability and tension in the entire region. Those worsening challenges require the international community to act seriously and effectively commensurate with the seriousness of those developments and its political, legal and moral responsibilities. The aim is to strengthen the pillars of peace, security and stability in the region, while ending the continued historic injustice endured by the Palestinian people, based on respect for and implementation United Nations resolutions, the principles of international law and relevant international instruments.

“In that regard, we call on the members of the international community to ensure that their policies, positions, efforts and roles comply with their obligations to uphold the rule of law and justice and to promote peace and security. There is a need for active and resolute engagement within a multilateral sponsorship for implementing the political process, in a specific time frame and in the context of clearly defined international terms of reference. The purpose is to make concrete progress towards the two-State solution and to redress the historical injustice inflicted upon the Palestinian people throughout the ages.

“We highly esteem and appreciate the Palestinian people, who have demonstrated their unlimited sacrifice and belief in their just cause, and who have held steadfast to their land, while standing up for their rights and making more national gains. We call for greater international support and solidarity with the Palestinian people in achieving their legitimate rights. We also reiterate our support for the Palestinian leadership in its efforts to facilitate the exercise of the legitimate right of the State

of Palestine to join international organizations and accede to international instruments, thereby enhancing its political and legal status. In that regard, we note with appreciation resolution 73/5, investing the State of Palestine with additional privileges during its presidency of the Group of 77 and China in 2019, which will further its right to full United Nations membership.

“I should like to conclude by reiterating the OIC’s support for and solidarity with the Palestinian people in their struggle to restore their inalienable national rights, including the right to return, to self-determination and to establish an independent State within the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as reaching a just solution for Palestinian refugees in line with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).”

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I thank the Deputy Permanent Observer of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) for his statement and would like to ask him to convey to the OIC leadership our full appreciation for the frank cooperation that exists between our two organizations.

I now give the floor to my sister Ms. Fatima Kyari Mohammed, Permanent Observer of the Mission of the African Union to the United Nations, who will share with us a message from His Excellency Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission.

Ms. Mohammed (African Union): I am honoured today to deliver the message of His Excellency Mr. Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission.

Today, the African people celebrate with their brothers and sisters in Palestine the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The occasion marks the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 181 (II) on 29 November 1947 on the partition of the territory of Palestine into two States. The African Union closely monitors developments in Palestine and the Middle East region.

The African Union’s support for the Palestinian cause is intrinsically linked with the Africa-Arab partnership. More fundamentally, it is premised on the values of freedom, justice and humanitarian principles that Africa defends in international forums, together with all those striving to ensure that Palestine regains

its right to exist as a key State in a region considered the cradle of humankind, religions and prophets — a region that the world has the obligation to preserve.

The African Union has consistently expressed concerns about the consequences of unilateral policies, actions and provocations, including the illegal construction of settlements and the blockade and isolation of the Gaza Strip from the rest of the Palestinian territories. Those practices represent a real threat to international peace and security in the region and undermine the spirit of the 1982 Arab Peace Initiative for a just and lasting solution to the long-standing conflict.

The African Union continues to call on the international community to assume its full responsibilities vis-à-vis the question of Palestine and the implementation of the relevant United Nations resolutions adopted from 1948 to present in order to compel Israel to comply with international law. Today more than ever before, there is a need for urgent and renewed efforts to find a just and lasting solution to the conflict, based on the existence of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and harmony, within the framework of the relevant African Union and United Nations pronouncements. The current situation calls for urgent action towards ending the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land.

The Palestinian leadership, led by President Mahmoud Abbas, has always emphasized that it will continue to explore political and diplomatic efforts at all levels in order to maintain the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. Therefore, the international community, the Quartet Committee, the Security Council and all regional and international organizations are called upon to request Israel to implement the decisions and declarations taken thus far in order to promote peace and stability, based on the two-State solution. Israel must also stop all violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law and adhere to them.

The occupied Palestinian territories witnessed Israeli escalation in the political, economic and social spheres as Israel hastened to announce the start of the implementation of broader and increased settlement in the occupied West Bank, targeting occupied East Jerusalem and its suburbs in particular.

The Israeli Government continues to violate international norms and standards by increasing the

pace of illegal settlements. Israel's policy of building settlements in occupied territory is one of the core issues of the conflict. Illegal under international law, settlements built on confiscated or stolen Palestinian land are one of the core justifications for the building of the wall and the restriction of Palestinian movement within the West Bank. That contributes to forced displacement, severely limits Palestinian access to basic resources, including land and water, and perpetuates a system of segregation and structural inequality between Palestinians and Israelis.

The African Union reiterates its commitment to supporting all efforts aimed at achieving a final resolution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict based on international legitimacy, and rejects any incomplete and partial solutions, such as temporary borders or the Jewishness of Israel. The African Union Commission will work tirelessly with the international community to ensure the establishment of an independent Palestinian State on the borders of June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I thank Ms. Fatima Kyari Mohammed for conveying the very important message of the African Union, which is a valuable partner of our Committee and is committed to finding a just solution to the Palestinian question.

I now give the floor to Mr. Marc Lamont Hill, American citizen, activist, academic, journalist and political commentator on CNN. He has returned from Palestine this morning to join us and share his perspective as a member of civil society.

Mr. Lamont Hill: It is with great honour and humility that I accept the opportunity to speak before the Committee. As a scholar, as an activist and as a citizen, I am profoundly interested in the plight of the Palestinian people, as well as the broader ethical, moral and political implications of their struggle for freedom and justice, as well as equality. As such, this annual convening represents a critical intervention. It also represents a site of possibility.

On the other hand, it shows considerable irony. As the Committee is aware, this year marks the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Declaration was produced out of the rubble and contradictions of the Second World War, and it was intended to offer a clear ethical and moral outline of the basic rights and freedoms to which all human

beings — irrespective of race, religion, class, gender or geography — are entitled.

The Declaration, of course, is far from perfect, both in design and in execution. Too often, we have framed human rights through the lens of the West. We have viewed them through the gaze of colonialism and we have assessed them through the limited prism of our own experiences. Simply put, the powerful have too often attempted to universalize their own particular and local values.

Still, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has offered us a flawed but functional starting point from which to articulate basic moral and ethical ambitions as global citizens. Those ambitions have been particularly helpful when attempting to keep track of the vulnerable against the backdrop of imperialism, exploitative economic arrangements, white supremacy, patriarchy and all the other entanglements of the modern nation State.

For that reason, it is indeed ironic and sad that this year also marks the seventieth anniversary of Al-Nakba, the great catastrophe in May 1948 that resulted in the expulsion, murder and — to date — permanent dislocation of more than a million Palestinians. For every minute that the global community has articulated a clear and lucid framework for human rights, the Palestinian people have been deprived of the most fundamental of them.

While the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says that all people are “born free and equal in dignity and rights”, the Israeli nation State continues to restrict freedom and undermine equality for Palestinian citizens of Israel, as well as those in the West Bank and Gaza. At the current moment, there are more than 60 Israeli laws that deny Palestinians access to full citizenship rights simply because they are not Jewish. From housing to education to family reunification, it is clear that any freedoms naturally endowed to all human beings are actively being stripped away from Palestinians through Israeli statecraft.

While human rights promise the right to life, liberty and security of person, Palestinians continue to live under the threat of random violence by Israeli military and police — disproportionate violence within the West Bank and Gaza, unprompted violence in the face of peaceful protest, and misdirected violence by an Israeli State that systematically fails to distinguish between civilians and combatants. While the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights protects us against torture and cruel and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Palestinians continue to be physically and psychologically tortured by the Israeli criminal justice system — a term I can only use with irony.

As human rights groups around the world have noted, the use of solitary confinement constitutes a clear and indisputable form of torture, yet in the West Bank Palestinians are routinely subjected to solitary confinement and indefinite detention, often without any formal charges being filed. Last year, the Israeli Supreme Court ruled that physical torture in “exceptional cases”, including ticking-time-bomb situations, constitutes acceptable means by which to engage in torture.

Although those exceptions are themselves a violation of the absolute human right not to be tortured, in practice Israeli security operates in such a way that nearly all Palestinian cases are viewed as exceptional. Nearly every Palestinian is understood to be a potential terrorist, thereby making him or her susceptible to ticking-time-bomb investigation tactics at all times. As such, Israel’s practices are routinely in clear violation of the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, which Israel signed in 1986 and ratified in 1991.

While the Declaration of Human Rights insists that no one be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile, Palestinians are routinely denied due process of law. West Bank Palestinians are regularly placed under administrative detention, a framework that allows them to be incarcerated for up to six months, and can be extended after judicial review, without being charged with a crime. The only thing needed for such outcomes is the ambiguous claim of a security threat — a claim used by the Israeli State at all times, at all costs and for all reasons. Through that vagueness, Palestinians are routinely punished for their political views rather than any actual threat of violence.

The Declaration of Human Rights insists that all humans are entitled to a “fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal”. Israeli military courts, generally the exclusive adjudicator for West Bank residents and, in some cases, Palestinian citizens of Israel, have a conviction rate of more than 99 per cent. That suggests that Palestinians are either more guilty than any other group in human history, or that

the Israeli Government is unwilling or incapable of offering fair and impartial trials for Palestinians.

The Declaration of Human Rights promises the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State, as well as the right to leave any country, including “his [sic] own” and to return to said country. It is impossible to travel throughout historic Palestine and not see the blatant restriction of movement between cities in the occupied Palestinian territories, as well as inside the State of Israel. Standing checkpoints, temporary or flying checkpoints, annexation walls and other security barriers prevent Palestinians from moving freely, not only within areas legally designated by the Israeli Government and co-signed by the Palestinian Authority under the terms of Oslo, but also in Gaza, where restriction of movement is so severe that it literally defines life in the area.

I promise the Committee that I will not exhaust all of my time by enumerating every human rights violation perpetrated by the Israeli Government. Those are well known and have been well documented by every credible human rights organization in the world. Rather, I would like to speak to the Committee about the urgency of the current moment.

As we speak, conditions on the ground for Palestinian people are worsening. In recent decades, the Israeli Government has moved further and further to the right, normalizing settler colonialism and its accompanying logics of denial, destruction, displacement and death. Despite international condemnation, settlement expansion has continued. At the same time, home demolitions and State-enforced displacement continue to uproot Palestinian communities. For Gazans, the 11-year Israeli and Egyptian blockade by land, air and sea has created the largest open-air prison in the world.

With only 4 per cent potable water, electricity access that is limited to four hours per day, 50 per cent unemployment and the looming threat of Israeli bombs, Gaza continues to constitute one of the most pressing humanitarian crises of the current moment. In the West Bank, conditions are not much better. Unemployment is generally around 18 per cent, with frequent loss of income due to Israeli military closures, which make it impossible for Palestinian workers to get access to jobs. Settlements and the extra land allocated for them, as well as closed military zones and other restrictions, make it impossible for Palestinian towns to grow.

In the midst of it all, Prime Minister Netanyahu's Administration has become increasingly indifferent to critique, censure and even scorn from the international community for its practices. Perhaps the most glaring example of that indifference, as well as the urgency of the current moment, is the recently passed nation-State law. Through that basic law, the Israeli State has officially rejected Arabic as an official State language. It has described settlement expansion both inside and outside of the Green Line as a national value, and it has reinforced the fact that Israel is not a State of all its citizens.

As an American, I am embarrassed that my tax dollars contribute to that reality. I am frustrated that no American President since the start of the occupation has taken a principled and actionable position in defence of Palestinian rights, and I am saddened, although not surprised, that President Trump's Administration has further emboldened Israel's behaviour through its recent actions.

In May, President Trump officially moved the United States Embassy to Jerusalem, which he recognized as the undivided capital of Israel. That choice not only flew in the face of international law and precedent, but also constituted a powerful provocation and a diplomatic deathblow. In late August, President Trump then permanently reneged on America's commitment to funding the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) — a move that now leaves millions of Palestinian refugees in medical, economic and educational peril. Moreover, the move serves as a political strong-arm tactic, whereby the United States is unilaterally attempting to resolve, through the Trump Administration, the final status of Palestinian refugees.

While President Trump's policies have been the most dramatic, it is important that I stress and reiterate that they are not wildly out of step with American policy. Cuts to UNRWA are an idea that has been raised in Washington, D.C., for years, dating back at least to the George W. Bush Administration. President Trump's decision to move the United States Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem caused enormous controversy, but he was merely implementing a bipartisan law that Congress passed in 1995, and in so doing he executed what has already been official United States policy and fulfilled a promise made by every United States President and presidential candidate, Democrat and Republican, for a very long time. With

regard to the question of Palestine, Donald Trump is not an exception to American policy; rather, Donald Trump is a more transparent and aggressive iteration of it.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks, the words offered today by everyone in this Chamber are a necessary component of our resistance efforts. We need powerful, counterintuitive, dangerous and courageous words. But we must also offer more than just words. Words will not stop the village of Khan Al-Ahmar, with its makeshift schools created by local Bedouin villagers, from being demolished in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Words will not stop poets like Dareen Tatour from being caged in Israeli jails for having the audacity to speak the truth about the conditions of struggle on her own personal Facebook page. Words will not stop peaceful protesters in Gaza from being killed as they fight for freedom against Israel's still-undeclared borders.

Regarding the question of Palestine, and beyond words, we must ask the question: What does justice require? To truly engage in acts of solidarity, we must make our words flesh. Our solidarity must be more than a noun. Our solidarity must become a verb.

As a black American, my understanding of action — and solidarity action — is rooted in our own tradition of struggle. As black Americans resisted slavery, as well as Jim Crow laws that transformed us from a slave State to an apartheid State, we did so through multiple tactics and strategies. It is that array of tactics that I appeal to as I advocate for concrete action from all of us in this Chamber.

Solidarity from the international community demands that we embrace boycott, divestment and sanctions as a critical means by which to hold Israel accountable for its treatment of Palestinian people. That movement, which emerged out of the overwhelming majority of Palestinian civil society, offers a non-violent means by which to demand a return to the pre-1967 borders, full rights for Palestinian citizens and the right of return, as dictated by international law. Solidarity demands that we no longer allow politicians or political parties to remain silent on the question of Palestine. We can no longer, in particular, allow the political left to remain radical or even progressive on every issue, from the environment to war to the economy — to remain progressive on every issue except for Palestine.

Contrary to Western mythology, black resistance to American apartheid did not come purely through

Gandhian non-violence. Rather, slave revolts, self-defence and tactics otherwise divergent from Dr. King or Mahatma Gandhi were equally important to preserving safety and attaining freedom. If we are to operate in true solidarity with the Palestinian people, we must allow the Palestinian people the same range of opportunity and political possibility. If we are standing in solidarity with the Palestinian people, we must recognize the right of an occupied people to defend itself. We must prioritize peace, but we must not romanticize or fetishize it. We must advocate and promote non-violence at every opportunity, but we cannot endorse a narrow politics of respectability that shames Palestinians for resisting and refusing to do nothing in the face of State violence and ethnic cleansing.

At the current moment, there is little reason for optimism. Optimism, of course, is the belief that good will inevitably prevail over evil and that justice will inevitably win out. In the course of human history, and certainly even in the course of the United Nations, there is no evidence of such a proposition. Optimism is unsophisticated. Optimism is immature. Optimism is what my students have when they take examinations that they did not study for. Some become quite religious at that time.

But regardless of their strategies of optimism, the outcome is far from guaranteed or even likely. What I am challenging us to do in the spirit of solidarity is not to embrace optimism, but to embrace radical hope. Radical hope is a belief that, despite the odds, the considerable measures against justice and peace, the legacy of hatred, imperialism, white supremacy, the patriarchy and homophobia, and systems and structures of power that have normalized settler colonialism, we can still win. We can still prevail.

One motivation for my hope in the liberation and ultimate self-determination of the Palestinian people came in August 2014. Black Americans were in Ferguson, Missouri, in the middle-west of the United States, protesting the death of a young man named Michael Brown, an unarmed African-American male who had been killed by a law-enforcement agent. As we protested, I saw two things that provided hope for the Palestinian struggle. One was that, for the first time in my entire life of activism, I saw a sea of Palestinian people. I saw a sea of Palestinian flags in the crowd saying that we must form a solidarity project. We must struggle together in order to resist because State violence in the United States, State violence in Brazil,

State violence in Syria, State violence in Egypt, State violence in South Africa and State violence in Palestine are all of the same sort. We finally understood that we must work together and not turn on each other, but instead turn to each other.

Later that night when the police began to use tear gas on us, Mariam Barghouti tweeted us from Ramallah. Along with other Palestinian youth activists, she told us that the effects of the tear gas that we were experiencing were only temporary. They gave us tips on how to wash our eyes out. They told us how to make gas masks out of t-shirts. They gave us permission to think and dream beyond our local conditions by giving us a transnational or global solidarity project.

From those tweets and social-media messages, we began then to organize together. We brought a delegation of black activists to Palestine, and we saw the connections between the police in New York City, who are being trained by Israeli soldiers, and the type of policing we were experiencing in New York City. We began to see relationships of resistance, and we began to build, struggle and organize together. That spirit of solidarity — a solidarity that is bound up not just in ideology, but in action — is the way out.

As we stand here on the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the tragic commemoration of the Nakba, we have an opportunity not just to offer solidarity in words, but to commit to political action, grass-roots action, local action and international action that will give us what justice requires, namely, a free Palestine, from the river to the sea.

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I sincerely thank Mr. Lamont for the force and eloquence of his statement, which expresses his fervent commitment to advocating and defending the Palestinian cause, and for providing us with an outside perspective that has further enriched our discussion. Moreover, I take this occasion to welcome the work of the civil-society organizations that continue their endeavours throughout the world to achieve a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine.

Before concluding our meeting with the announcement of several practical matters, 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, Governments and organizations. I would like

to read out the list of senior officials who have sent such messages, in the order in which they were received.

We have received messages from the Heads of State of the following countries: Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Laos, Senegal, Iraq, Mali, Jordan, Qatar, Morocco, Turkey, Brunei Darussalam, China, Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates, Iran, Nicaragua, the Sudan, Burkina Faso, the Russian Federation, Viet Nam, Indonesia and Zimbabwe.

We have received messages from the Heads of Government of the following countries: Malta, Bangladesh, India, Thailand, Mauritius and Malaysia.

The Committee has also received messages from the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the following countries: Argentina, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Japan, Ecuador, Cuba, Kazakhstan, Namibia and Bahrain.

We have also received a message from the Government of Guyana.

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

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 sincerely thank the Heads of State and Government, Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Governments and the organizations that I have just mentioned for their tireless efforts to end the ongoing 50-year occupation of the Palestinian territory, and to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine.

Before closing, I would like to thank everyone who helped make this meeting a success, 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 and security services.

Tomorrow, 29 November, at 3 p.m., the General Assembly will begin its debate on the question of Palestine, during which, in my capacity as Chair of the Committee, I will introduce draft resolutions on this agenda item, and our Rapporteur, my friend Ambassador Carmelo Inguanez, Permanent Representative of Malta, will introduce the annual report of the Committee (A/73/35). I take this occasion to urge Member States to actively participate in tomorrow's meeting and reiterate their support for Palestine by voting overwhelmingly in favour of the draft resolutions to be adopted on 30 November.

Within the framework of our activities in support for the Palestinian people, I would also like to invite representatives to tomorrow afternoon's inauguration of a photography exhibit, entitled "Unrealized right, unfulfilled promises: 70 years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of the Palestinian Nakba". While the photographs provide witness to the ruthless reality lived by the Palestinians, they also attest to their resilience from all the trials they have faced, in particular by preserving their rich Palestinian cultural heritage. I therefore hope to see many of those present here at the opening of the exhibit scheduled for 6.30 p.m., in the Public Lobby of the General Assembly building, which will be followed by a reception.

I would be remiss if were to conclude without acknowledging the presence of many representatives of Palestinian civil society who participate actively in our activities, including in the consultations that will take place at 3 p.m. in Conference Room 8.

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.