



**DIVISION FOR  
PALESTINIAN RIGHTS**

**UNITED NATIONS ROUND TABLE  
ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE**

*“Building bridges with the Palestinian diaspora”*

**Managua, 4 February 2017**

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### **Executive summary**

The United Nations round table on the question of Palestine was organized in Managua by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. It brought together representatives of the Palestinian diaspora in Central America, prominent Palestinians from the Occupied Palestinian Territory and diplomatic representatives of States, including the State of Palestine.

Speakers urged the 7 million Palestinians in the global diaspora to disregard the political differences among them, and between them and the Palestinian Authority, and unite in support of Palestine. The diaspora should strengthen its cultural, intellectual, economic and other ties with Palestine, and organize events to mark the fiftieth year of the Israeli occupation. The economic success of Palestinians in Central America had led to the rediscovery of their cultural identity. Speakers urged the diaspora to invest in Palestine, to visit more often and to lobby the Governments of their home countries on behalf of Palestine. The diaspora youth were particularly adept at building bridges with their peers in other Central American countries and in Palestine. Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories gained strength from the knowledge that there was a powerful movement of people on their side.

The commitment of Nicaragua to Palestine and its ties with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) predated the Sandinista revolution of 1979. More recently, in 2016, Nicaragua had signed a memorandum of understanding with the State of Palestine for collaboration in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Speakers called for the implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016) and denounced the expansion of Israeli settlements. At the same time, there was insufficient awareness in the region of the resolution and of the work of the United Nations in general. Some speakers called for a boycott of goods from the settlements and of companies operating in the settlements, as well as a cultural boycott of Israel. Central American countries were urged to break diplomatic relations and suspend security cooperation with Israel.

Following the success of the Bethlehem Diaspora Convention in 2016, a workshop had been held in Santiago in preparation for the next diaspora convention, which was to be held in Chile in October 2017. The round table in Managua was therefore particularly well timed, as it fitted within that framework, and also served as a stepping stone towards a civil society forum to mark the 50 years of occupation, which was to be held at United Nations Headquarters in New York in June 2017.

Concrete proposals were voiced for the adoption of a United Nations resolution to establish an international remembrance day to mark the occupation of Palestine and a truth and reconciliation commission to acknowledge the *Nakbah*. The establishment of an Arab chamber of commerce was proposed to facilitate investment in Palestine by communities in the diaspora. The representatives of diaspora communities attending the round table adopted the Managua Declaration (see annex I).

## **I. Introduction**

1. The United Nations round table on the question of Palestine was organized by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in Managua on 4 February 2017, in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolutions 71/20 and 71/21. The theme of the round table was “Building bridges with the Palestinian diaspora”.
2. The round table consisted of an opening session, two panels and a closing session. The themes of the panels were: “50 Years of occupation: impact on the lives of Palestinians” (panel I) and “Building bridges with the Palestinian diaspora in Central America to strengthen advocacy to end the occupation and rebuild Palestine” (panel II).
3. Representatives of 10 States and one intergovernmental organization, as well as 30 representatives of the Palestinian diaspora in Central America, took part in the round table (see annex II).
4. The round table concluded with the adoption of the Managua Declaration (see annex I).

## **II. Opening session**

5. The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nicaragua, Denis Ronaldo Moncada Colindres, speaking on behalf of the host Government, welcomed the spirit of solidarity demonstrated by the Bureau of the Committee and all the representatives who had supported the declaration of 2017 as the year to end the occupation of Palestine, which had also been supported by the Heads of State and Government of the Non-Aligned Movement at a summit held on Margarita Island, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, in September 2016. Nicaragua supported the inalienable right of Palestine to exist as a free, independent and sovereign State, in 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The discussion in Managua would provide an opportunity to build bridges with the diaspora in other Latin American countries. He reiterated his country’s commitment to the friendship between Nicaragua and Palestine, forged in the common struggle for freedom of the Sandinistas and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which, in the case of Nicaragua, had culminated in the revolution of 1979. He said that it was just and necessary to end the occupation of Palestine, cease the construction of settlements, lift the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip and release Palestinian prisoners, stressing that it was unacceptable that Israel was permitted to ignore United Nations resolutions and hide behind a Security Council veto, while meting out abuses against Palestinians.
6. Expressing solidarity with refugees, he cited a report by the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, entitled “Gaza: 100,000 hours of isolation”, which documented the impact of the blockade and the war waged by Israel on the enclave over the last decade. Describing such aggression against Gaza as a crime that many international organizations had qualified as a crime against humanity, he urged the international community to ensure funding for United Nations support for refugees in the Middle East, as well as for trade and investment efforts in order to offset the costs to Palestinians suffering under the blockade. In

2016, Nicaragua had signed a memorandum of understanding with the State of Palestine with a view to exploring mutually beneficial actions in connection with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including efforts to foster peace, improve health care and education and open the door for dialogue between the young people of the two nations.

7. He denounced the decision by the Government of Israel to build more than 6,000 settler homes in occupied Palestinian territory, describing that decision as a flagrant and systematic violation of international law and Security Council resolutions. He called for the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016), stressing that the settlement policy was illegal under international law and a major stumbling block to securing a two-State solution and a lasting peace and noting that the prevailing Israeli-imposed status quo of recent decades had cemented the occupation and the marginalization of Palestinian people. He recalled the declaration made in November 2016 by the President, Daniel Ortega, reaffirming the solidarity of Nicaragua with the heroic struggle of the Palestinians. He underlined that the round table on the question of Palestine was the first event of its kind in Latin America and expressed the hope that it would serve to strengthen the region's commitment to the Palestinian struggle.

8. A statement was delivered on behalf of the Committee by the Vice-Chair, Dian Triansyah Djani, who noted that 2017 marked the fiftieth year of the Israeli occupation of Palestine, the Palestinian struggle for freedom and unsuccessful international efforts to stabilize the Middle East and revive a vision of a Palestinian State alongside a peaceful and secure Israel. In blatant disregard for Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), Israel had continued to expand its illegal settlements, as evidenced most recently by the approval of an additional 6,000 units. This was further compounded by the unprecedented level of demolitions of Palestinian homes. Plans for the annexation of parts of the West Bank were being discussed openly by the Israeli establishment, which, if realized, would signal the end of the two-State solution. The decade-long blockade of Gaza amounts to the collective punishment of some 1.5 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

9. Turning to positive developments, he took note of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016) and the peace initiative proposed by France. In the resolution, the Council had overwhelmingly reaffirmed its support for a two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 lines and denounced Israeli settlements as violations of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. The Council had called on the international community to distinguish between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967. He called for the full implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). The Committee was looking forward to the forthcoming report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the resolution. He noted that the resolution had been co-sponsored by three members of the Committee: Malaysia, Senegal and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of). Turning to the Palestinian diaspora, he welcomed the fact that it was mobilizing and finding ways to support the Palestinian cause, and cited the example of the recent meeting of delegations from the diaspora in Santiago. He expressed the hope that the round table would help in preparing for a diaspora convention later in 2017.

10. The Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations and Representative of the State of Palestine, Riyad Mansour, in welcoming the participants and expressing gratitude to the organizers of the round table, said that the meeting had been convened at a historical moment when everybody — including countries, members of regional and political groups and community members — had a responsibility to intensify

collective efforts to defend the cause of Palestine and deny victory to those seeking to defeat the Palestinians. Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories gained strength from the knowledge that there was a powerful movement of people on their side. The recent adoption by the Security Council of resolution 2334 (2016) had been spearheaded by the Palestinian people, who had fought for a year to legislate for the text, whose objective was to save the two-State solution and remove obstacles from the path to peace. It was not enough for the Security Council to reiterate its condemnations of settlements and not do anything specific.

11. Noting the “hysteria” within the rightist Government of Israel as it was working to prevent the implementation of the resolution, he emphasized that the Palestinians would not allow those efforts to prevail, and added that it was the responsibility of the Secretary-General to submit a report on the implementation of the resolution. Furthermore, in line with paragraph 5 of the resolution, a distinction must be made by all Governments between Israel and the Occupied Territory, including East Jerusalem, which opened the door for those in the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement to intensify efforts to delegitimize the colonization by Israel. He stressed that civil society must play a strong role in implementing the resolution.

12. For too long Palestinians had been denied their national rights in their ancestral homeland: the occupation had lasted 50 years, and it had been 70 years since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II) in 1947, which had led to the Palestinian exodus in 1948 (also known as the *Nakbah*). He called for redoubled efforts in 2017 in order to end the occupation and allow Palestinians to enjoy a State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, with the two States living side by side in peace. For that reason, a large number of members of the diaspora were participating in the round table. He urged members of the diaspora to visit Palestine more often, to invest more and to redouble their efforts to lobby the countries in which they lived on behalf of the Palestinian cause.

13. He challenged participants to overcome their ideological connections, regardless of whether they were rich or poor, and to focus on their primary duty to Palestine. Palestinians in the diaspora had to match and exceed the efforts of the Jewish community. In some Central American countries, the Palestinian diaspora was large in numbers and its members were wealthy. Diaspora members were obliged to ensure that their countries became more supportive in 2017. He said that the Prime Minister of Israel and the President of the United States of America were mistaken if they believed that they could break the will of the Palestinian people.

14. The Permanent Observer of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to the United Nations, Agshin Mehdiyev, recalling that OIC had been established on the occasion of the arson at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, said that the round table was an example of the shared spirit needed to promote solidarity, national pride and the involvement of Palestinian expatriates as agents for positive change in Palestine. According to OIC, the Palestinian diaspora should be engaged as a catalyst for social, political and economic progress in Palestine and should be mobilized to address the problems in Palestine because the current reality was characterized by chronic unemployment and slow growth, among other ills, which could be traced to the occupation. He pointed out that OIC had encouraged building knowledge networks and bridges across the Palestinian diaspora.

15. Nation-building in Palestine should be grounded in knowledge and skills absorbed effectively through a demand-driven approach that would foster the development of human

resources, good governance and a strong private sector. The OIC secretariat welcomed the engagement of the diaspora in the State-building process and its advocacy on behalf of Palestine. The Organization had engaged in consultations with a number of Palestinian institutions, as well as, notably, the Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation. Emphasizing the centrality of Al-Quds (Jerusalem) for the Islamic Ummah and the unwavering principled support of OIC for the Palestine cause, as well as for Palestinian rights, independence and national sovereignty based on a two-State solution, he called for an end to the occupation by Israel and a cessation of all settlement activities and Israeli violations in Jerusalem.

16. The former Prime Minister of Belize, Said Musa, gave a keynote presentation entitled “Beyond recognition: the role of Central American Governments in the search for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East”. In that presentation, he noted that 2017 marked 100 years since the issuance of the Balfour Declaration, 70 years since the General Assembly had proposed the plan to partition Palestine into Jewish and Arab States and 50 years of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian homeland. It was also a time when those who had ruthlessly expelled people from their ancestral land were called victims and those who had been driven out and massacred were called terrorists.

17. He claimed that the State of Israel had been built on ethnic cleansing, with over 700,000 Palestinians forcefully evicted and thousands brutally killed. The Palestinian *Nakbah* had continued ever since with the same impunity and disregard for international law. The Israeli State had simply refused to acknowledge the right of return of the Palestinian refugees or its own role in the *Nakbah*, while continuing to paint Israel as the victim.

18. Israel had continued to defy dozens of United Nations resolutions. In its resolution 2334 (2016), the Security Council had stated that the settlement activity of Israel constituted a “flagrant violation” of international law and demanded that Israel cease such activity in the occupied territory. The argument put forward by Israel that the territories were not “occupied” but “disputed” had been rejected by the International Court of Justice in 2004.

19. In its resolution 2334 (2016), the Security Council had also called upon all States “to distinguish [...] between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967”. The reaction of Israel to what he termed a “unanimous” resolution was typical of its lawless behaviour; the following day the Prime Minister of Israel had approved the building of 2,500 units in illegal settlements throughout the occupied West Bank and declared that the resolution was “part of the swan song of the old world that is biased against Israel”. Belize, however, was not part of the “old world”, but a young nation capable of recognizing a flagrant violation of international law.

20. He identified a need to challenge the idea that anyone who denounced the illegal acts of the State of Israel was biased against Jews. The Holocaust was often invoked to justify the “right” to a racially exclusive Jewish State on the land of the Palestinians.

21. One of the most important things that the peoples and Governments of Central America could do to promote peace in the Middle East was to use all available means to make the truth known to the peoples of the region. Since it was established Israel had maintained a strict “apartheid” system for the Palestinians within the pre-1967 borders, while the plight of the people in the occupied territories was even worse, he claimed. The Israeli atrocities committed in Gaza were well known, he said, as he recalled the judgment of the

civil society-based Russell Tribunal on Palestine on the evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity, such as murder, extermination and persecution.

22. He called for a resolution to be passed at the United Nations to create an International Palestine Occupation Remembrance Day. In addition, he called for a boycott of goods produced in the settlements and of companies investing therein, in keeping with resolution 2334 (2016). He also called for an intellectual, artistic and cultural boycott of Israel, as well as the recognition of the State of Palestine, and he encouraged the building of relations with the State. He endorsed the call made by the Palestinian non-governmental organizations for all the leaders of the Palestinian people in Palestine and in the diaspora to create a unified strategy for national liberation. He called for a truth and reconciliation commission, in which the crimes of the *Nakbah* could be acknowledged. He also called for the use of all legal and peaceful means possible to pressure Israel to comply with the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016).

### III. Panels

#### A. Panel I

##### **50 years of occupation: impact on the lives of Palestinians**

23. Panel I, entitled “50 years of occupation: impact on the lives of Palestinians”, was chaired by the Permanent Representative of Nicaragua to the United Nations, María Rubiales de Chamorro.

24. The former Deputy Head of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Maria Torres Macho, gave a presentation on “Access and movement restrictions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory”, in which she highlighted that in 2017, 1.6 million Palestinians were in great need of humanitarian assistance, with many people surviving only through the provision of international support. She said that the crisis had been “politically created” and that it would disappear with a political solution. The entire situation could be described as fragmentation.

25. First, the West Bank and Gaza were not contiguous, which created geographical fragmentation, and the split between Hamas and Fatah only added to the complexity. Families were also fragmented, with those in the West Bank able to travel more easily than those in Gaza. Following the completion of the Israel-Gaza wall and the ascension of Hamas to power, the natural way for Gazans to leave had been through Egypt. She recalled, however, that between March and April 2016, no one had been allowed into Gaza through the Rafah crossing with Egypt, which had led to waiting lists of up to 20,000 people. Monthly crossings into Israel through the Erez crossing had fallen from 43,440 in 2004 to 15,027 in 2015, while sea restrictions currently prevented 3,000 Gazan families from fishing, which made them dependent on aid. The number of trucks exiting Gaza via the Kerem Shalom crossing into Israel had fallen from 777 per month in 2005 to 301 per month in December 2016. The humanitarian needs of the people of Gaza remained significant: in 2016, approximately 95,000 people remained displaced following the 2014 conflict, while moderate to severe food insecurity affected 47 per cent of households and 40 per cent were supplied with water for only five to eight hours every three days. In 2015, real gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in Gaza was lower than in the 1990s, while housing, education, health and water infrastructure remained inadequate. In the West Bank, 150



settlements and 100 outposts housed 573,000 Israeli settlers. The settler population had doubled in the last 20 years. In the meantime, between 1988 and 2015, 14,477 orders had been issued for the demolition of Palestinian structures in Area C (over 60 per cent of the West Bank is considered Area C, where Israel retains nearly exclusive control, including over law enforcement, planning and construction): 11,425 of those orders remained outstanding. In 2016, 1,094 structures were demolished — 309 of which had been funded by donors — displacing 1,601 people. In total, 350,000 Palestinians were vulnerable to settler violence. In addition, half of Area C was outside Palestinian control, including control over water and other resources. Palestinians in East Jerusalem frequently had their residency rights revoked by Israel, forcing family members to live apart or “illegally”, that is to say, without permits. The separation barrier and checkpoints severed East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank, creating isolated and dislocated communities.

26. The way forward was to ensure respect for basic rights, which would entail: protecting civilians and ending impunity for violence, including investigating all complaints of violations of rights; bringing displacement to an end, including the cessation of evictions and demolitions; and allowing the safe movement and unhindered access to services and assistance.

27. The Mayor of Bethlehem, Vera Baboun, said that in her role as mayor since 2012 she had gained great insight into life under occupation. Describing the district of Bethlehem as the largest in the West Bank, she said that its population comprised 48,000 Christians and 160,000 Muslims. Half of the population was under the age of 29 years. She displayed a map showing changes in the area, the northern part of which had been annexed to Jerusalem, and much of the district taken up by 19 Israeli settlements built outside the 1967 borders, with a population of 86,000 people. Area C, which was under Israeli control, now covered 66 per cent of Bethlehem District, she said, adding that a further 20 per cent of the district was dedicated to nature reserves. Bypass roads had been built on confiscated land to connect settlements, as had a “horrendous” wall, eight metres high, separating Bethlehem from Jerusalem. There were 29 checkpoints and four gates on the borders of the district of Bethlehem. She said that being walled in was a very critical issue and expressed concern about the psychological damage caused by the acceptance of the presence of the wall. She emphasized that “no nation should undergo such repression”. The wall created two Palestinian nations, one living inside its confines and the other outside.

28. She described the construction by the Israeli military of the wall in the Cremisan Valley, an area measuring 3,000 dunams, located towards the northern border of the district of Bethlehem. In that area, 100 dunams of the land were owned by a Salesian monastery, 150 dunams were owned by a Salesian convent and 2,750 dunams were owned by 58 local Christian families. The construction of the wall had been challenged in the High Court of Justice of Israel, which had requested the military to change the planned route of the wall in April 2015. The military, however, had replied that the route would stay the same, but that it would temporarily exclude 300 metres for the Salesian properties. A new petition had been submitted by the Palestinian authorities to the Israeli court in July 2015, but in January 2016, the court had ruled that the wall was to be built temporarily for security reasons and that the Palestinians could appeal later. The construction of the Cremisan Wall had begun in April 2016.

29. Stressing that peace must be built on equality, she pointed out that the agreements reached under the Oslo Accords of 1993 for the transfer of Area C to Palestinians had not

been respected. She said that Security Council resolution 2334 (2016) was about peoples' lives and their capacity to suffer under repression, stressing that the adoption of the resolution was not anti-Semitic, but rather pro-rights and in favour of a nation that required justice. The Bethlehem Diaspora Convention in 2016 would be followed by another convention, to be held in Santiago, and she declared that: "We need your voices in Latin America to build a bridge to Palestine".

### **Round-table discussion**

30. The following points were raised in the subsequent round-table discussion:

- (a) Requests were made for information about the campaigns waged for Palestinian rights by civil society worldwide and the ways that the diaspora could lend support to United Nations activities;
- (b) There was a need for the diaspora to organize itself more systematically in the run-up to the convention in Chile in October 2017;
- (c) The diaspora was invited to attend a United Nations civil society conference to mark 50 years of the Israeli occupation, which would be held in New York in June;
- (d) Migrants and refugees were to be a major focus of the international community in 2017, and Palestinians should take part in the related activities;
- (e) There was a call for Central American countries to break diplomatic relations with Israel;
- (f) There was a call for Central American countries and the Palestinian Authority to suspend security cooperation with Israel;
- (g) There was a call for Palestinians everywhere to request reparations from Israel;
- (h) The diaspora should petition Governments to press for Palestinian prisoners to be released;
- (i) The Christian population had been decreasing dramatically in Palestine owing to hardship and emigration, with nearly 10 times as many Christian Palestinians living in Chile as in the Bethlehem region;
- (j) There was no problem with members of the diaspora being involved in internal Palestinian politics, but they also had an obligation to support Palestine and to put pressure on their home countries to recognize Palestine;
- (k) Diaspora members, whether right-wing or left-wing, needed to overcome their ideological differences and unite in support of Palestine;

- (1) There was a need for the diaspora in different countries to work in coordination.

**B. Panel II**  
**Building bridges with the Palestinian diaspora in Central America**  
**to strengthen advocacy to end the occupation and rebuild Palestine**

31. Panel II, entitled “Building bridges with the Palestinian diaspora in Central America to strengthen advocacy to end the occupation and rebuild Palestine” was chaired by the Permanent Representative of Malta to the United Nations, Carmelo Inguanetz.

32. The Ambassador of the State of Palestine to Nicaragua, El Salvador and Honduras, Muhammad Amro, recalled that, in the 1980s, Yasser Arafat had spoken about the nexus of revolutionary movements around the world and, with regard to those in South America, had underscored in particular, the links between PLO and liberation movements in El Salvador and Nicaragua, which he had visited in 1982. It was in Nicaragua that the flag of Palestine had been raised in Latin America for the first time. Arafat’s adviser on Latin America had helped to establish a study programme in Chile, among other things, thereby marking the beginning of the first tangible connection with the Palestinian diaspora. He recalled a PLO conference, held in Tunis in 1989, to which members of the Palestinian diaspora from Latin America had been invited. During that conference Arafat had said “Liberty, justice and human rights will be served by the creation of a Palestinian State”.

33. Despite the fact that the Palestinian territory had been reduced in size over the years, comprising only 22 per cent of the original territory of Palestine, the struggle to restore the rights of Palestinians to that territory continued. He noted that Palestine enjoyed the support of 53 United Nations resolutions, recognition by more than 138 Member States and diplomatic relations with 90 nations.

34. Emphasizing the support that the diaspora should lend to the population in Palestine, and to one another, as in Latin America, their position was unique, he said it was important for diaspora Palestinians to visit places in Palestine, such as Ramallah and Bethlehem, even though the policies of the Israeli occupation had made such visits difficult. There were 7 million Palestinians in the global diaspora, and while there were differences among them, between them and with the Palestinian Authority itself, he emphasized that “unity is our strength”, stressing that only when it was united could the diaspora awaken the region’s consciousness. He encouraged efforts to build bridges with Palestine and pursue justice, calling on participants to raise the profile of initiatives that focused on creating a Palestinian State; to develop cultural, intellectual, economic and other ties with Palestine; and to convene events to mark the fiftieth year of the Israeli occupation, which were also opportunities to condemn Israeli actions.

35. Speaking on behalf of the Palestinian business community, Ismat Khatib, from Nicaragua, and Ghassan Khatab, from Panama, proposed the creation of a Latin American association to address the question of Palestine, along the lines of a chamber of commerce to help business people to invest in Palestine and bring together not just Palestinians but Arabs in general. Mr. Khatib said that such an initiative would not be a charity because “investing in Palestine is profitable as a business”. Palestinians in the diaspora were reluctant to invest, however, because they had no guarantee that they could travel to their homeland. Such a

venture would help everyone to further the cause of peace and would have the support of Governments.

36. Mr. Khatab added that the diplomatic community was aware of the enormous damage that Israel was causing to Palestine and even to the United Nations facilities and said that the damage was not being condemned. While business people often grew tired of donating, he stated that “we need to have a business model that helps to develop Palestine”. He supported the idea of a chamber of commerce to support well-defined projects. He cited Dubai as a successful example of such an investment pool, which was managed by the Government. The Zionist lobby had done its job and Palestinians must do likewise. He underlined that, from Mexico to Argentina, there was not a single Palestinian who did not wish to invest in his or her country, nor a single Arab unwilling to contribute to that effort, as long as the rights of investors were respected and protected and the investments were used to benefit Palestine. Thousands of Palestinians were graduating from college in friendly countries such as Cuba and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, but found that there were no jobs for them upon their return to Palestine.

37. Ambassador Amro added that Palestinian ambassadors to Latin America had met in Cuba in 2016 to discuss the idea of establishing a Palestinian chamber of commerce as a way to get around the difficulties that diaspora members encountered regarding entry to Palestine. Related discussions were under way with the diaspora communities in El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua.

38. The Professor of the School of International Affairs of the University of Costa Rica, Sergio Moya, said that the diaspora had played a decisive role in the process of diplomatic change in Central America regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and promoting the diplomatic recognition of Palestine. Migration from Palestine to the region had begun at the end of the nineteenth century, bringing in several waves of economic immigrants who later established prosperous communities. Chile, El Salvador and Honduras were the countries that had been the most strongly influenced by the predominantly Christian Palestinian immigrants, many of whom had come from Bethlehem, Beit Sahour, Ramallah and Jerusalem.

39. However, Central American countries had not always been enthusiastic supporters of Palestine. Their position had begun to change at the beginning of the decade as they had thrown their support behind Palestine becoming an observer State of the United Nations. In 1947, Central American countries had played an instrumental role in the adoption by the General Assembly of the resolution 181 (II) on the partition plan for Palestine (decisive votes were cast by Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Panama). Later, as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had become an element in the Cold War, Central American countries had continued to reaffirm their support for the Zionist project. Furthermore, the relationship between Central America and Israel was based on the arms trade, in particular in the cases of Guatemala and Nicaragua. The Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua had relied on Israel for 98 per cent of its arms imports. Many of the right-wing paramilitaries known as “Contras” had been trained by Israel. Costa Rica, El Salvador and Honduras had transferred their embassies from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, in violation of many resolutions adopted by the Security Council and the General Assembly, generating anger among a number of Arab countries, some of which had subsequently broken off diplomatic relations with those countries.

40. It was important to discuss the relationship between the diaspora and civil society in Central America, and not only the positions of the States. There were many groups that could sympathize with the Palestinian cause. The Palestinian struggle had been linked to the Latin American left-wing guerrilla movements, such as the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front in El Salvador. Palestinian families in El Salvador and Honduras had become influential in the fields of finance, energy and the media, including ownership of the newspaper *La Prensa*. In Honduras, Palestinians had become influential in the financial, media, trade, energy, tourism and investment sectors and also in the political arena.

41. Costa Rica had a small but very dynamic Palestinian community, which was well connected to local civil society organizations. As a result of lobbying, Costa Rica had moved its embassy in Israel from Jerusalem back to Tel Aviv. This had led to a domino effect as El Salvador and Honduras also decided to move their embassies from Jerusalem. The reaction of the State of Israel was one of anger and resentment. Israel closed its embassy in El Salvador for financial, but also political, reasons.

42. The Palestinian diaspora in Central American countries presented a unique case of economic progress and success that had led to the rediscovery of its cultural identity. He encouraged people in the diaspora to take the diplomatic initiative away from the pro-Israeli lobby as a way to foster its global isolation. Panama was not yet active in that regard, a matter that needed to be addressed. Meanwhile, a new player defending the cause of Israel was emerging in the region: the Zionist Protestant sector.

43. The former country representative of the Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation for Guatemala, Salwa Massis, said that she had been born to Palestinian parents in Guatemala, her father having immigrated from Ramallah at the age of 9 years and her mother from Jerusalem at the age of 24 years. As in many other Central American countries, her parents' generation had built communities, and the children born into those communities had been able to maintain and preserve their cultural values and traditions from Palestine; connections had also been forged with Palestinian communities elsewhere in Central America. Young people of the Palestinian diaspora, in particular, had been able to build unity with their peers from different backgrounds in other countries.

44. Guatemala had one of the largest Palestinian communities in the region, made up mainly of Palestinians who had come from Beit Jala, Bethlehem and Ramallah. Describing the Know Thy Heritage programme, which allowed Palestinians to understand their homeland, she said that members of the diaspora could learn to forge their own links with Palestine. As a member of the first generation born in Central America she reflected a mixed culture of two worlds, one Guatemalan and the other Palestinian. In Guatemala, she had enjoyed endless opportunities to study and travel. By contrast, she highlighted the daily challenges faced by her peers in Palestine. When she had travelled to Jordan to cross the border into Palestine, the crossing took eight hours, during which time she had been stranded with no information and no documents. Describing an emotional experience of rediscovering her Palestinian roots and meeting relatives, she said that the powerful image of the separation wall had remained with her as a reminder of the physical fragmentation of the territory.

45. The trip had made it clear to her that Palestinian culture was broader than something experienced at home; it bound Palestinians around the world. Her trip had made her aware that she was not simply someone living in Guatemala with "parents who had a strange accent and a great cuisine", but rather, a Palestinian who wished to join the struggle for the

homeland and to maintain the cultural traditions. Members of the diaspora had a responsibility to tell their children and grandchildren their story, to help them understand where they had come from and to explain the situation in Palestine so that they would continue the fight for their homeland. Young people in Central America should remain in touch with the young people who lived in Palestine. She concluded by exhorting everyone to “go to Palestine!”

### **Round-table discussion**

46. In the round table discussion that followed, the following points were raised:

- (a) Quakers in Costa Rica provided peace education in Palestine to promote the coexistence of Christians, Jews, Muslims and other communities;
- (b) In the Central American Integration System, there were significant differences between the “northern triangle” comprising Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, where Nicaragua had a significant influence, and Costa Rica and Panama; injecting the Palestinian issue into the political discussion might exacerbate that division;
- (c) The Palestinian diaspora was working with Code Pink, a group of feminists and pacifists in the United States, to try to import goods from Gaza and send goods by sea to Gaza;
- (d) There was a need for tangible initiatives in support of Palestine, such as a chamber of commerce, an Arab investment bank or charities;
- (e) Without an end to the occupation, economic development initiatives were unlikely to bear fruit;
- (f) Palestinians had made diplomatic gains in terms of recognition in Central America, but those achievements could be reversed and needed to be safeguarded;
- (g) There were some 500,000 Palestinians in Chile, and many institutions, political and financial, social and cultural, as well as youth and women’s organizations, were directly helping Palestine without intermediaries;
- (h) Palestinian diaspora organizations were promoting the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement on campuses in Chile;
- (i) The Palestinian cause was supported by all parties across the political spectrum in Chile;
- (j) The Palestinian community was focusing on preventing the signing of a free trade agreement between Israel and Chile;

- (k) The Zionist community in Chile was promoting a law against incitement and hatred that would criminalize criticism of Israel; the Palestinian community was fighting against the law;
- (l) The Federation of Arab Entities in the Americas was planning to hold its next meeting in Panama to send a message to the Government that it was pursuing the wrong policy vis-à-vis Palestine;
- (m) Israel was becoming more isolated at the United Nations, not only in the General Assembly but also in the Security Council, as exemplified by the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016);
- (n) Israel had launched an aggressive campaign against Ecuador, following principled statements made by Ecuador at the United Nations; the Permanent Representative had received threats;
- (o) Ecuador would continue to support Palestine despite pressure from the United States to restore diplomatic relations with Israel.

#### **IV. Closing session**

47. The Vice-Chair of the Committee, María Rubiales de Chamorro, read out the Managua Declaration (see annex I), which was adopted by acclamation.

48. The Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine declared the round table to have been a success. Thanking the host country, the Mayors of Bethlehem and Beit Jala, the other participants, the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights, he said that such events gave strength to Palestinians in Palestine and in the diaspora. He expressed the hope that many of the participants would travel to the United Nations civil society conference, to be held in New York in June 2017, and to the diaspora conference, to be held in Santiago in October 2017. The Committee would do everything possible in every corner of the globe during the year, under the banner of 2017 as the international year to end the occupation. Governments and civil society had a responsibility to ensure the implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016).

49. The Vice-Chair of the Committee, Dian Triansyah Djani, said that he had been sincerely moved by the stories of the parents and grandparents of the diaspora Palestinians who wanted to be buried in their ancestral land of Palestine, which was nearly impossible for a people who had lost their land. The Committee would continue to fight for the land of Palestine. It was important to hear about what was happening on the ground, which amounted to an emergency situation. He said that “50 years of occupation was 50 years too long”. Looking ahead, a Committee delegation was going to visit Mexico and, in cooperation with OIC, would organize a conference on Jerusalem, to be held in April. The Committee would use all the means at its disposal, including Facebook and Twitter, to disseminate the message about Palestine.

## **Annex I**

### **Managua Declaration**

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, invited by the Government of Nicaragua and in accordance with the mandate received from the General Assembly, organized on 4 February in Managua a round table to build bridges between Palestine and the Central American diaspora. Round table participants representing Palestinian diaspora communities in Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica, Panama, Chile, Cuba and Nicaragua, and with the participation of the Mayors of Bethlehem and Beit Jala, agreed:

- To strengthen cooperation and join forces to put an end to the occupation and defend the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and to work to ensure maximum participation of the diaspora in the upcoming Diaspora Convention scheduled to take place in Santiago de Chile in October 2017;
- To participate in June 2017 in the civil society meeting in New York under the auspices of the Committee to mark 50 years of occupation;
- To join forces as a Central American diaspora community to build a regional bloc that can advocate with governments and civil society for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people;
- To preserve the Palestinian identity in younger generations by intensifying visits by members of the community, particularly youth, to Palestine.



## **Annex II**

### **List of participants**

#### **Speakers**

H.E. Mr. Muhammad Amro	Ambassador of the State of Palestine to Nicaragua, El Salvador and Honduras Managua
Ms. Vera Baboun	Mayor of Bethlehem State of Palestine
Ms. Salwa Massis	Former Country Representative of the Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation Guatemala
Mr. Sergio Iván Moya Mena	Professor, School of International Affairs University of Costa Rica San José, Costa Rica
H.E. Mr. Said Musa	Former Prime Minister of Belize
Ms. María José Torres Macho	Former Deputy Head United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Jerusalem

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

H.E. Ms. María Rubiales de Chamorro	Permanent Representative of Nicaragua to the United Nations Vice-Chair of the Committee
H.E. Mr. Dian Triansyah Djani	Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations Vice-Chair of the Committee
H.E. Mr. Carmelo Inguanez	Permanent Representative of Malta to the United Nations Rapporteur of the Committee
H.E. Mr. Horacio Hernán Sevilla Borja	Permanent Representative of Ecuador to the United Nations

Ms. Linda Scott	Deputy Permanent Representative of Namibia to the United Nations
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H.E. Mr. Riyad Mansour	Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations
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### **Delegation of the Government of Nicaragua**

H.E. Mr. Denis Ronaldo Moncada Colindres	Minister for Foreign Affairs
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H.E. Mr. Jaime Hermida Castillo	Ambassador, Deputy Permanent Representative of Nicaragua to the United Nations
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### **Governments**

Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	H.E. Mr. José Percy Paredes, Ambassador Embassy in Nicaragua
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Cuba	H.E. Mr. Juan Carlos Hernández Padrón, Ambassador Embassy in Nicaragua
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Saudi Arabia	Ms. Manal Hassan S. Radwan, Third Secretary, Permanent Mission to the United Nations New York
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Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	H.E. Mr. José Francisco Javier Arrúe, Ambassador, Embassy in Nicaragua
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### **Non-member States having received a standing invitation to participate as observers in the sessions and the work of the General Assembly and maintaining permanent observer missions at Headquarters**

State of Palestine	H.E. Mr. Muhammad Amro Ambassador of the State of Palestine to Nicaragua, El Salvador and Honduras Managua
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H.E. Mr. Riyad Mansour Permanent Observer to the United Nations New York
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### **Intergovernmental organizations**

Organization of Islamic Cooperation	H.E. Mr. Agshin Mehdiyev Permanent Observer to the United Nations New York
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### **Civil society organizations**

Asociación Árabe, Guatemala	Mr. Antonio Massis
Asociación Palestina, Honduras	Mr. Atala Jaar, President Ms. Nawal Canahuati, Member Ms. Siham Burhara, Member Mr. Imad Larach Larach Ms. Mary Khamis Larach
Centro Cultural Musulmán de Costa Rica	Mr. Abdulfatah Sasa Mahmoud
Comité Salvadoreño de Solidaridad con Palestina	Ms. Suhair Barake Bandak Ms. Therese de Safie
Palestinian Community, Nicaragua	Mr. Joudeh Fayez Joudeh Mr. Ismat Khatib Mr. Yacoub Shalom Ms. Nadia Nabhan Ms. Marisol Dar Ali Rothschuh Ms. Sapjha Hamad Espinoza Mr. Ehab Efraig Hasan Hamdallah Mr. Fadi Jumah Zahran
Palestinian Community, Panama	Mr. Khaleb Salama Mr. Ghassan Salama
Federación Palestina de Chile	Mr. Diego Khamis
Red de Solidaridad con Palestina, Costa Rica y Representante del Meeting Cuáquero, San José	Mr. Francisco Cordero Gené
Organización Continental Latinonamericana y Caribeña de Estudiantes	Mr. Calixtro French Naar Executive Secretary
Unión Árabe de Cuba	Mr. Alfredo Deriche Gutiérrez President

Federation of Arab Entities in the Americas (FEARAB-America)

Mr. Alexis Aquilino Valdés Hamadi

**Special guests**

Mr. Nicola Khamis

Mayor of Beit Jala, State of Palestine and  
Honorary Consul of Honduras to the State of Palestine

Mr. Nidal Hanna Alhadweh

Honorary Consul of the State of Palestine to Guatemala

Mr. Elías Kharoufeh

Honorary Consul of the State of Palestine to Honduras

Ms. Wajiha Sasa Marín

Honorary Consul of the State of Palestine to Costa Rica

Mr. Jorge Schafik Handal

Honorary Consul of the State of Palestine to El Salvador

Mr. Sueilima Tieb Ahmed Salem

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