

UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL MEETING ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

*African solidarity with the Palestinian people for the achievement of its inalienable rights,
including the sovereignty and independence of the State of Palestine*

**United Nations Conference Centre Addis Ababa
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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

OPENING STATEMENT

by

H.E. Mr. Abdou Salam Diallo

Chairman

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

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I would like to once again welcome all of you to this Meeting. We are very pleased to be able to convene this event in Addis Ababa, the political heart of Africa where the Commission of the African Union is headquartered. African States play an important role in support of the Palestinian people, as shown in the recent voting on the historic General Assembly resolution 67/19, which granted Palestine non-Member Observer State status at the United Nations.

The Committee is of the view that the raising of the status of Palestine as well as its admission to UNESCO as a Member State constitute an important step towards the realization of the ultimate goal of a two-State solution. It shall result in a contiguous and economically viable State of Palestine, existing side by side in peace with Israel, on the basis of pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. It shall be based on the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet Road Map. We urge all States, particularly those which already extended recognition to the State of Palestine at the United Nations, but have yet to do so bilaterally, to establish full diplomatic relations.

Today we are gathered here to discuss African solidarity with the Palestinian people to achieve their inalienable rights, including the sovereignty and independence of the State of Palestine. We would especially like to learn from the experience of African States in their quest for decolonization, independence and sovereignty, as well as their experience on the path to economic independence and sustainable development. We have learned a lot from South Africa's experience in ending apartheid and we will further explore the issue during this Meeting. The long struggle against apartheid and its successful conclusion in 1994 has been an inspiration for those working for justice around the globe. Many peace advocates in South Africa and elsewhere have redirected their work since then, fighting injustices still suffered in other parts of the world.

Tactics and initiatives based on the South African experience employed by civil society organizations have been producing tangible results. Obviously, however, we need to do more, considering that an end to the Israeli occupation is nowhere in sight.

Israel, the occupying Power, continues to expand settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in violation of international law. While the whole international community condemns this act and calls for its cessation, Israel behaves as if this does not concern it. Verbal criticism by Governments and intergovernmental organizations did not result in stopping the settlement expansion. Our Committee continues to call upon the Security Council, entrusted with guarding international peace and security, to ensure Israel's compliance with international law. We also call upon the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to ensure respect for its provisions. Non-action by the Security Council and the State-Parties to the Geneva Conventions puts into question the credibility of the international legal system.

In defiance of international criticism, the occupying Power continues its discriminatory policies. It applies arbitrary military law to the Palestinian residents, which falls far short of minimum international legal standards. It controls the water resources in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, providing settlers with an abundance of water from these sources, while the Palestinian residents constantly face shortages of fresh water. Settlements are connected with a matrix of Israeli-only highways, isolating Palestinian towns and villages from one another.

Also, the separation wall constructed by Israel in large parts of Palestinian land severs many Palestinians from their farmland, hampers access to schools and hospitals. Palestinians entering Israel for work now have to use a separate bus line. Gaza is virtually an open air prison, as Israel controls every aspect of the Palestinians' life, including the total control over Gaza's air and sea space.

The international community has to put an end to the colonial policies and practices of the State of Israel with a view to encourage a new dynamic between the two adversaries in the conflict.

We welcome to our Meeting distinguished experts who will share with us their knowledge on the issues I've raised. I hope that the deliberations will be fruitful and action-oriented in order to halt the occupation and colonisation of Palestinian land causing an untenable situation for the Palestinian people.

Thank you very much.

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