**Mr. Arafat**:

1. Mr. President, it gives me great pleasure to see you presiding over this new session of the General Assembly after your long struggle to gain freedom, along with Sam Nujoma, Nelson Mandela and others who fought to bring an end to the era of colonialism, apartheid and foreign occupation.
2. Your presence here today leading this session of the General Assembly attests to the victory achieved by the people of Namibia in the battle for freedom and independence.
3. **It strengthens the hope of the Palestinian people that the dawn of their freedom and the independence of their homeland, Palestine, is near.**
4. Furthermore, the victory of your friendly country, Namibia, affirms the constructive role played by the United Nations in the eradication of the colonialism that has burdened oppressed peoples and in enabling them to gain their national independence.
5. I call upon the United Nations to continue to undertake this historic role to eliminate all forms of occupation and colonialism and to strengthen the foundations of peace throughout the world.
6. As I congratulate and welcome you, Sir, I would be remiss if I did not extend our gratitude to your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti.
7. It also gives me great pleasure to express our deep appreciation to Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General, for his distinguished role in leading this international Organization and promoting for world peace.
8. I also want to congratulate the three new members of the United Nations: the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga.
9. Their membership is an important step towards the realization of the universality of the Organization.
10. **I address the Assembly today — the representatives of the international community — for the second consecutive year, seeking the continuation of support for the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, particularly at this crucial and sensitive stage that lies between us and the declaration of our independent Palestinian State and sovereignty over our liberated land.**
11. **This requires the strengthening of international efforts in order to really achieve a just solution to the question of Palestine, the crux of the Middle East conflict.**
12. **The coming millennium summit, with all the renewed hope and promising beginning it represents for all people, must be a decisive deadline for the achievement of peace in the Middle East.**
13. **We should work collectively and vigorously to achieve this.**
14. I look forward to the participation of Palestine, as a Member State of the United Nations, in the deliberations of the coming millennium summit,
15. **and I hope for and trust in the Assembly's support for this Palestinian determination to achieve independence so that Palestine can assume the position it deserves within the family of nations.**
16. **As the Assembly is aware, we concluded the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum with Mr. Barak, the new Prime Minister of Israel, on 4 September, under the auspices of President Hosni Mubarak, and in the presence of King Abdullah II, Secretary of State Albright, Mr. Moratinos, representing the European Union, and Mr. Larsen, representing Mr. Kofi Annan.**
17. **The Memorandum is aimed at the implementation of all the obligations of the interim period under the Oslo agreement, the Wye River Memorandum and the Hebron Protocol, and at the resumption of the final status negotiations.**
18. **This was done with the hope of bringing to an end the policy of protraction and freezing that was pursued by the former Israeli Government, which completely paralysed the peace process and almost dashed the ambitious hopes created by this process for all the countries and peoples of the Middle East.**
19. **The Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum serves as a source of new hope for putting the peace process back on the right track, as it reaffirms the implementation of existing agreements and of all the obligations within a specific time-frame.**
20. **In this connection, I extend my gratitude and thanks to all those who contributed to the conclusion of the Memorandum, particularly our host in Sharm el-Sheikh, President Hosni Mubarak, as well as King Abdullah II and Secretary of State Albright, who undertook tangible and concrete efforts as a representative of President Clinton, and the European leaders, their representatives and their envoys to the peace process.**
21. **The continuous involvement of these friends in this process was essential and necessary for pushing the process forward.**
22. **International sponsorship of the Middle East peace process is the guarantee for its definitive and final success.**
23. **The absence of such an international role would send the fragile situation in the region back to square one.**
24. **I therefore call upon the international community to accelerate and strengthen its efforts and participation to push the peace process forward and revitalize it on all tracks.**
25. **A just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East can last only if it is protected by international legitimacy and if efforts are undertaken to implement all of the resolutions pertaining to the Middle East conflict on the Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese tracks.**
26. **We should work hard so that the signing of this Memorandum will succeed in ending the stagnation of the peace process and in opening the door that the former Israeli Government closed in the face of all serious efforts aimed at achieving real peace.**
27. **As we reaffirm once more our commitment to the peace process and the implementation of the signed agreements,**
28. **we hope that this time the Israeli side will implement these agreements scrupulously and honestly, including the phases of redeployment agreed upon in the Wye River and Oslo agreements, the release of prisoners and the other obligations of the transitional period, such as safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the construction of the Gaza seaport.**
29. **The Israeli Government is called upon to immediately and decisively cease all measures that violate international resolutions, laws and covenants and thus destroy the chances of peace.**
30. **At the forefront of these are the settlement activities and the confiscation of land, especially in AI-Quds Al-Sharif, and its vicinity, and the siege of the city of Bethlehem and the rest of the Palestinian territories.**
31. **The continuation of these settlement policies and practices will quash the hopes and expectations generated by the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum and destroy prospects for the final settlement negotiations, which began on 13 September.**
32. **The cessation of all such measures is needed in order that we can, together with my new partner, Mr. Barak, continue the march of the peace of the brave that we began with two other partners — the late Yitzhak Rabin, who gave his life for this peace, and Shimon Peres — for a new Middle East.**
33. **Hence, we look forward to seeing new, real and tangible changes in the positions and actions of the Israeli side that will open the door, in word and in deed, for the achievement of a just and comprehensive peace — a peace of the brave that will lead to the realization of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to the establishment of their independent State, with Al-Quds AlSharif as its capital, and the realization of the right of the Palestine refugees to return to their homeland in accordance with resolution 194 which affirms the right of the refugees to return to their homes and the right to compensation for those who do not wish to return.**
34. **The realization of the right of the Palestinian people to establish their independent State with Al-Quds AlSharif as its capital will provide the definitive guarantee for the establishment of a permanent peace in the Middle East.**
35. **It will also be a validation of the Charter of the United Nations and its numerous resolutions over 50 years, beginning with resolution 181 which called for the establishment of two States in Palestine, one Jewish, which is Israel, and one Arab, which is Palestine.**
36. **The rights of peoples do not diminish because of a statute of limitations or under oppression, and our people have proved through the years that they deserve life, freedom and their own independent State.**
37. **The time has come for the international community, represented by the General Assembly, to reaffirm this right and to work for its realization.**
38. **The goal of the current peace process is the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242, 338 and 425 and the application of the principle of land for peace.**
39. **The latter means total Israeli withdrawal from all Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Al-Quds AlSharif — the Holy City of Jerusalem, which is the first of the two *Qiblahs* and the third Holy Sanctuary of Islam, the place from which the Prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven, and the cradle of the birth of Jesus Christ.**
40. **The catastrophe that befell our people 51 years ago, uprooting them from their homeland and dispersing them into exile — thereby stripping them of their dreams and rights as human beings in an attempt to negate their existence — is one of the greatest human tragedies witnessed by the twentieth century.**
41. **The question of the refugees of Palestine is the oldest and greatest refugee question in our contemporary world.**
42. **We must recognize the legitimate right of those refugees to return to their homeland, in accordance with United Nations resolutions.**
43. **Four million Palestinians live in exile and in refugee camps awaiting the time of their return to their homeland, from which they were forcibly expelled.**
44. **There is no way to achieve peace, stability and security in the Middle East without a solution to the question of the refugees of Palestine and the implementation of resolution 194, which declares their right to return to their homeland.**
45. **Two essential things must occur for peace to be complete.**
46. **First, it is necessary to reach a final settlement on all tracks — the Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese — on the basis of the complete and precise implementation of international legitimacy, especially Security Council resolutions 242, 338, and 425 .**
47. **The second is the provision of economic support and assistance by the international community sufficient for the achievement of a better economic situation and for achieving prosperity in the region.**
48. **What is required foremost in this regard is raising the Palestinian economy up from the miserable situation in which it finds itself as a result of the long years of occupation, so that building cooperative economic relations in the region will become possible.**
49. Here I wish to thank the donor countries that have provided and continue to provide important assistance to the Palestinian people and to the Palestinian Authority.
50. **This assistance is necessary to enable us to overcome the immense difficulties that we have been confronting since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, as a result of the closures and sieges imposed by the previous Israeli Government on the Palestinian territory for long periods, which worsened further the total destruction of the Palestinian economy.**
51. **The shadows of poverty and unemployment still threaten our economic abilities and plans to reconstruct, build and develop.**
52. The achievement of all of this necessitates the continuation of the constructive efforts of the United Nations, which has permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine until that issue is resolved in all its aspects.
53. We will also remain in need of our Arab brothers, the Islamic countries and our friends in the Non-Aligned Movement.
54. We will remain in need of the two co-sponsors of the peace process, the United States and the Russian Federation, and also of the European Union, China, Japan, Norway and our other friends around the world.
55. We must heighten all our efforts until the arrival of the new millennium in many areas and spheres, and not only in the Middle East.
56. In this respect, we have observed some positive developments which are quite reassuring.
57. There is tangible improvement in the area of conflict resolution on the African continent and on the path towards achieving better economic and social development in that great continent.
58. There is the international attention given to Kosovo, as well as other measures carried out in the Balkans.
59. There is also the adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court, as well as the additional consideration being given to the four Geneva Conventions on the occasion of their fiftieth anniversary.
60. **We refer here, with appreciation, to the convening of the Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention last July regarding the Israeli occupation of our land.**
61. There are also the follow-ups and reviews of a series of international conferences five years after their convening, in addition to the preparations being made with regard to such important issues as the culture of peace and the dialogue among civilizations.
62. All of these things are important developments, but perhaps not enough for us to be able to begin the new millennium under new circumstances.
63. This is particularly so if we look at some of the events and worrisome developments in different areas.
64. There is the continuation of the state of siege in Iraq and the profound suffering of its brotherly people.
65. There is also the continuation of internal conflicts in many countries, such as Afghanistan and others.
66. Recently there have also been worrisome developments in East Timor.
67. But I would like, in particular, to refer to the rise of extreme poverty and to the widening gap between the haves and the have-nots on the individual, national and regional levels.
68. Perhaps it is we, the poor people of the South, who are most concerned about how to bridge the gap between us and the North, particularly in this era of globalization of the world economy, whose challenges and consequences we must all face.
69. Here we must exert serious efforts and seek creative means beyond hasty and temporary measures.
70. While it is time for the South to be more prepared to realize such an achievement, the North should also be more prepared for partnership and more realistic, effective and just sharing.
71. In addition to economic matters, we must also strive to achieve some needed improvements at the political level, particularly with regard to international political relations.
72. It is imperative in this connection that we all give greater significance to the United Nations.
73. This must be done in order for this body to truly and urgently become the effective center of international and political relations and the source of international legitimacy.
74. It is also necessary to be wholly committed to upholding the principles and provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and of international and humanitarian laws, as well as ensuring that they apply to all.
75. We should apply to others the same moral values as we accept for ourselves.
76. There should be one set of criteria and one standard for all cases and in all places.
77. All of this will lead to a more credible system of international relations, in which the incentive to commit wrongs will be lessened and the collective capability to confront and prevent those wrongs will, in turn, be enhanced.
78. It is with great pride that I would now like to speak of the Bethlehem 2000 celebrations.
79. The Palestinian city of Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus Christ, is the place where we are making preparations to celebrate the end of the second millennium and the beginning of the third.
80. It is also there, in Palestine, that the past, the present and the future will meet in a global vision of hope for all peoples.
81. It is a religious and spiritual occasion of high importance, not only for our people and the other peoples of the region, but also for all the faithful around the world and for the entire international community.
82. I appreciate the unanimous adoption last year of the resolution concerning this great and important matter, and invite the Assembly to continue to grant it its attention and consideration this year.
83. Here, I wish to extend once again the Palestinian people’s invitation to the Assembly and to all the leaders of the world to visit us during this important spiritual and religious occasion in Bethlehem, Jerusalem and the other religious and spiritual places, so that we can proudly live together in peace at this special, historic time.
84. **I should like to extend my gratitude to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to the Committee’s Chairman, Ambassador Ibra Ka of Senegal, to the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and other Arabs of the Occupied Territories and to all the staff members of this international Organization working in programs relating to the question of Palestine.**
85. **They have all provided immeasurable support to the just cause of the Palestinian people and have most certainly contributed to advancing the peace process towards the achievement of a just, permanent and comprehensive peace — a peace of the brave that will secure justice and freedom for the Palestinian people and their sovereignty over their land, along with security, stability and peace for all countries and peoples of this region.**
86. Once again I express my congratulations to you, Mr. President, and my gratitude to all the members of the international community, reiterating to you the appeal of Palestine — an appeal of right, justice and peace.

**Mr. Levy**:

1. The fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly of the United Nations takes place at a time marking humanity's crossing into the next millennium.
2. It emerges as a link in the long chain of tumultuous events that have reshaped the map of the family of nations.
3. The United Nations was born against the backdrop of the destruction and desolation of the Second World War, the most bitter, deadly and inhumane war known to mankind.
4. The descent of the Nazi regime to the depths of evil was like an eclipse in the history of civilization and will be recalled in history as a nightmare in which man created the devil, who wreaked devastation, destruction, terror and annihilation upon the world.
5. The stand taken by the Allied forces against the Nazi monster, and the creation of the United Nations in April 1945, on the verge of the defeat of the forces of destruction, was an act that marked the return of humanity to its senses, to salvage the future of mankind.
6. In this month when we mark 60 years since the outbreak of the most horrible of wars, we are strengthened more than ever in our sense of hope and confidence in the necessity of the United Nations and of its activities throughout the world.
7. The various agencies of the United Nations work to enhance world health and tend the sick; to supply the needy with food and nourishment; to build bridges between cultures; to promote education and overcome ignorance; to instil hope into the lives of refugees and displaced persons; and to assist the victims of disasters, whether natural or man-made.
8. The soldiers of the United Nations forces are the true peacekeepers of our age.
9. In its corps are soldiers from all the nations of the world.
10. At times they risk their lives in areas riddled with conflict and violence around the world, whether their United Nations mandate is to make peace or to be observers that safeguard the peace.
11. These distinctions, important as they may be to the policy makers and shapers of international relations, have no meaning to the individual United Nations soldier, posted far from his country, who brings hope and tranquillity to places fraught with tragedy, suffering and violence.
12. After many centuries of violence and war, of enslavement and destructiveness in the name of murderous ideologies, after decades of cold war and polarized world alliances of the East and the West, the human race is now making great strides down the paths of peace and reconciliation.
13. Before our very eyes, a process is enveloping the world, signalling hope for the future.
14. Mankind is adopting a new path, the path of the prophet Isaiah, who as far back as 2,600 years ago prophesied that the day would come when:
15. “they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”
16. This prophecy — which has been adopted by the United Nations as a source of hope, as the symbol of the victory of the good in human beings over evil — should serve today more than ever as a beacon and a path for all who cherish peace around the world and for their representatives gathered here today.
17. The world has become more open.
18. Satellites, the Internet and telecommunications networks shorten geographical and cultural distances.
19. The political and ideological blocs of the past have disintegrated,
20. and the walls of animosity have fallen along with the tyrants and dictators who built them.
21. **They are being replaced by new blocs, some of which are in the process of being created where development and prosperity reign.**
22. **I hope and believe that these beneficial transformations will also occur in the Middle East.**
23. **In our region, too, the light of hope has been rekindled.**
24. **We are now in the midst of a political process, the objective of which is to reach peace between States and reconciliation between peoples.**
25. **Israel aspires to reach a comprehensive peace with its neighbours, a peace of harmony.**
26. **Israel will not be satisfied with a merely political or strategic peace.**
27. **In our eyes, the absence of war is not the peace we aspire to achieve.**
28. **May I be allowed to emphasize once again that peace means a culture of peace;**
29. **peace means no more threats of violence, whether implied or categorical;**
30. **peace entails the end of boycotts, the end of contempt and defamation, the end of incitement and confrontation.**
31. **peace is also a language of peace: it is the way leaders address their nations, teachers teach their students and religious leaders inspire their followers.**
32. At a time when various kinds of religious extremism are rearing their heads and eroding human wisdom and human freedom, it is essential that inter-faith dialogue be strengthened and that the religions be manifested in their enlightened forms, which sanctify tolerance and coexistence.
33. On the way to achieving peace in our region, we often find ourselves confronted with contradictory realities.
34. **Parallel to the political process, our negotiating partners are conducting a constant political war against Israel in various international forums, including from the podium of this Assembly.**
35. **This dualism is inconsistent with the peace process and is intolerable, as are the extreme decisions taken by the Arab League against Israel.**
36. **These decisions are not in keeping with the spirit of peace, as expressed in the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum.**
37. **We hoped for and expected a different atmosphere, one that would complement the impetus initiated by the new Government in Israel.**
38. **We have been saddened to witness events that undermine the essence of peace.**
39. **These events can be defined only as anti-peace resolutions.**
40. **Engaging in a peace process, on the one hand, and maintaining anti-Israel declarations and resolutions, on the other, raises some serious concerns about our negotiating partners and their concept of peace.**
41. **Is it a peace of normalization with open borders, or is it only one of temporary initial recognition?**
42. **Will our relations with the Gulf and Maghreb countries, such as Morocco, Tunisia, Mauritania, Qatar and Oman, be allowed to expand and develop?**
43. **Or will these relations remain hostage to mood swings after each and every difficulty in the negotiations or whenever there is disagreement?**
44. **Continued doubts about these cardinal questions cannot be tolerated in the light of the heavy price and grave risks that Israel is taking upon itself in this process.**
45. **Three weeks ago, on 4 September, Israel and the Palestinian Authority signed the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, which for the first time creates a direct, chronological, political and conceptual link between the Interim Agreements and the final status agreement.**
46. **On 13 September, the final status talks were renewed between Israelis and Palestinians.**
47. **We are determined to reach a framework agreement that will form the basis of the final status agreement by February 2000, as stated and agreed upon in the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum.**
48. **In this framework we will select the issues and set an agenda for the final status agreement.**
49. **The topics at hand are known, as are the differing vantage points and positions of each side.**
50. **The differences can be resolved only by direct negotiations.**
51. **Regarding the final status, I wish to affirm from this podium that when we refer to political separation as one of the prime concepts of the permanent settlement, we are also saying that, for the benefit of both sides, we should not necessarily sever ties that are vital to coexistence in the various spheres of living.**
52. **From Israel’s perspective, there is no competition and never has been any between the different negotiating tracks.**
53. Israel also aspires to reach peace with Syria, our neighbour to the north.
54. This is, after all, in the higher common interests of both Israel and Syria.
55. However , along with these common interests, the following point must be made clear:
56. A democratic country like Israel cannot accept a precondition to beginning the talks that requires a prior acceptance of the final outcome as dictated by the extreme and dogged formulas of the opposing side.
57. We must maintain the momentum of good will so that we can face our children, Syrian and Israeli alike, with a clear conscience and say to them in all honesty:
58. We tried everything and did our utmost.
59. I call upon the leaders of Syria, in view of what we have gone through together, to cease hesitating.
60. It is time to talk.
61. Meetings and discussion are not political sacrifices — they are basic necessities.
62. On the road to a comprehensive peace, we wish to see Lebanon join the camp of peacemakers.
63. The anomaly which has developed in its territory must come to an end.
64. We have never had nor do we have now any territorial claims or disputes with Lebanon.
65. Our one and only interest is to guarantee the safety and security of our citizens.
66. I must say that, regrettably, the Government of Lebanon has for many years failed to enforce its sovereignty in the southern part of Lebanon and to disarm Hezbollah.
67. I hope that this situation will improve and that Israel, within the framework of an agreement, will be able to leave the southern part of Lebanon.
68. Nevertheless, with that as our ambition, I wish to emphasize that we will not be held hostage much longer on this track to a stubborn and defiant attitude.
69. We will make our own independent decisions, as we see fit, in order to ensure our protection and our vital interests, taking all options under consideration.
70. A reconciliation between Israel and its neighbours must extend the promise that all the peoples of the region may reap the benefits of peace.
71. Normalization must not be viewed as a one-sided gesture.
72. As a natural outcome of peaceful coexistence, normalization is not in the service of one particular party.
73. It is in the interests of all the nations of the region.
74. **We hope to renew the multilateral tracks as early as this year.**
75. There is a need for close cooperation in regional multilateral projects.
76. Our region has tremendous potential.
77. In order to fully realize this potential, we must establish a mechanism of true cooperation among the States of the region.
78. This cooperation would clearly be to the benefit of all of us in the region.
79. The scarcity of water in our region, which will only get worse, may impose a new way of life on the inhabitants of the Middle East in the coming years.
80. Israel is anticipating this problem and preparing for it,
81. but in this case, as in others, cooperation in the region is essential and will benefit all sides.
82. The working groups of the multilateral tracks undertook various assignments of primary importance.
83. Unfortunately, their activities have been frozen for irrelevant reasons.
84. This is the time to resurrect them.
85. **Any delay or imposed condition is liable to undermine the peace process and delay the aid packages so essential to the peoples of the region.**
86. Throughout this important process, on the bilateral and the multilateral tracks alike, we are accompanied by the international community.
87. First and foremost was the United States of America, along with the Russian Federation, the European Union, Canada, Norway, Japan, China and other countries and organizations that have assisted and continue to do so.
88. Their key contributions earn them special commendation from this rostrum.
89. Egypt and Jordan were our first partners in breaking down the walls of enmity and in thawing relations in our region.
90. Improving our relations with Egypt, as well as renewing the multilateral tracks, are essential to furthering the common objectives of the nations in our region.
91. The relations between Israel and Jordan are an example of appropriate and favourable relations between neighbouring countries.
92. We intend to strengthen and broaden the relations between the two nations in the economic, social and political realms.
93. As we march further along the difficult path of making peace, we look back with sorrow and sadness as we remember the pioneers who broke new ground and are no longer with us today: the late Menachem Begin, Anwar Saddat, Yitzhak Rabin, King Hussein and King Hassan II of Morocco.
94. Their vision and their work inspire us to continue to work towards completing their enterprise of peacemaking.
95. We cannot afford to be disillusioned.
96. Our region is neither North America nor Benelux.
97. Even as we negotiate the peace process, we remain aware of the threats and dangers directed against us, threatening the stability of the entire region.
98. The mix of extreme fundamentalism, on the one hand, and of the potential use of weapons of mass destruction, on the other, threatens the peace, stability and future of the entire region.
99. This threat is not just an element of academic debates in the study of international relations, but a harsh reality which we must all face.
100. From this international platform, I call for a halt to all technological, scientific and other kinds of assistance to countries looking to obtain unconventional weapons, while threatening the existence of the State of Israel and the region as a whole.
101. The Persian Gulf War demonstrated that leadership lacking reason and stability poses a threat to all the countries in the region and to the world at large.
102. The monitoring groups and machinery in Iraq must be immediately resumed.
103. That is the obligation of the international community so long as the Iraqi regime seeks non-conventional weapons and threatens the region.
104. The United Nations is the largest, most authoritative and most recognized international body.
105. It should therefore be the one to take the initiative and the responsibility in curbing this danger.
106. Terrorism is an additional strategic enemy and we cannot come to terms with its existence.
107. It is a threat not only to Israel, but to many other nations across the world as well.
108. Terror knows no borders or civilized rules.
109. There can be no coexistence with terror, either in the context of the negotiations conducted by Israel with its neighbours, or in the broader regional context.
110. Anyone who believes that terror is a nuisance which can be tolerated is mistaken.
111. Terror is in essence a strategic threat.
112. A synthesized, coordinated and unrelenting approach must be adopted against it.
113. Here, in this building of stone and glass, reflecting the current image of our world today with its points of light and shadows of darkness, counterparts and enemies meet as friends and allies in the creation of a forum for discussion and coexistence.
114. Discussion is the way to resolve conflict.
115. It is also the way of tomorrow.
116. Dialogue and common language are the tools of diplomacy, the raw material for the creation of a new reality and the foundation for a stable and safer society.
117. It was here in the General Assembly, at the beginning of the decade, that I first met with my Chinese counterpart.
118. After 40 years of total dissociation between our two countries, we endeavoured to re-establish diplomatic relations between Israel and China.
119. It was also here that we laid the groundwork for establishing ties with the former Soviet Union, as well as with India, Nigeria and other States.
120. These are only a few examples demonstrating the possibility in this arena for building a bridge between nations and States.
121. As a nation that experienced great difficulties, overcome only by accelerated development efforts, the State of Israel takes part in the international effort to aid others and share knowledge, experience and technology, experience which it has accumulated in various fields.
122. The nation of Israel is proud of its ancient tradition of sharing and identifying with the world at large.
123. Through the Division for International Cooperation within the Israeli Foreign Ministry, Israel maintains ongoing projects and a broad range of training courses in Israel.
124. We have demonstration units and we are conducting research.
125. For example, a special medical centre was recently established in Mauritania and serves the many citizens of that State who suffer from chronic eye problems.
126. Similarly, Israel invests great efforts and resources in training professionals to acquire the skills and abilities necessary for meeting the various challenges that engage many parts of the world.
127. In the more than 40 years since its inception, the Division for International Cooperation has trained more than 70,000 trainees from more than 120 countries, who have come to Israel and attended its training courses in the areas of agriculture, water resources, health and medicine, science, education and others.
128. In 1998 alone, some 155 courses were held in Israel on a variety of topics, with the participation of more than 4,000 trainees.
129. Gladly, I can report that many of the trainees were from Middle Eastern countries.
130. **Fully 820 Palestinians participated in these courses over the past year, thereby helping to strengthen the bridges of peace which have been built between Israelis and Palestinians.**
131. In the same year, Israel ran more than 150 courses in over 60 different countries, with the participation of over 7,000 trainees
132. I am proud to point out that in many of the countries to which we sent Israeli experts, the local personnel managed to translate our goodwill into positive results on the ground, to the benefit of their people and their land.
133. Because of the reputation it has acquired, the Division for International Cooperation is also one of the central addresses in Israel to which people can turn in times of disaster around the world.
134. We have recently witnessed just how essential such assistance can be in times of natural disasters.
135. Israel has always responded favourably to requests for aid and relief, regardless of the political context or the state of diplomatic relations.
136. We wish to support and commend the United States of America, our friend and ally, an inspiration to us all in its efforts to promote the values of cooperation among nations.
137. This is also the time to express our appreciation to the United States for its intensive efforts to bring true peace to the Middle East.
138. Even today in the United States we have witnessed again a new resort to the threat of boycott.
139. The case at hand is the threat to declare a boycott against the American company Disney, because the company dared to allow Jerusalem to be portrayed in an exhibition celebrating the millennium.
140. We condemn these threats and the use by certain Arab States of this anachronistic device.
141. It has no place here or anywhere else in the world.
142. Over thousands of years, since the time of biblical King David, the builder of Jerusalem, until the present day, Jerusalem has not served as the capital of any other nation in the world besides the nation of Israel, the Jewish people.
143. Even after our forced exile from the land of Israel, we continued, generation after generation, to stay faithful to Jerusalem.
144. The flame of Jerusalem was carried in our hearts as a hidden source of faith and hope.
145. In our wanderings, in the East and in the West, in the African deserts and on the outskirts of Siberia, from the golden age of Spain through the dark Inquisition, during the prosperous Europe of the romantic era to the charred ashes of the Holocaust, throughout all the above the eyes of the Jews and their prayers have been directed toward Jerusalem.
146. Year after year, from father to son, the anthem of the Jewish nation has constantly been “Next Year in Jerusalem”.
147. With the passing of those previous generations and exiles, we have had the privilege of being deemed worthy to return to Jerusalem, to rebuild the ruins, to rededicate the city as a centre radiating with beauty, open to all followers of all religions, as the poet has said, where freedom of all religions is a fact of life.
148. It is so upsetting then that even today, 51 years since the independence of the State of Israel, there are still those who would deny our natural right to decide the location of our capital, a natural right given to every nation in the world.
149. From Jerusalem, the city of David, I will quote from the original song of David on Jerusalem, in words which transcends the limits of time and retains their meaning in every generation:
150. “Our feet shall stand within thy gates, oh Jerusalem.
151. Jerusalem is built as a city that is bound firmly together.”
152. Today, as before, from this podium we declare to the entire world, to our friends and people and those who are distant from us:
153. Jerusalem, unified under Israeli sovereignty, is and will remain forever the capital of Israel.