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COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE OF THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 250th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Thursday, 3 February 2000, at 3 p.m.

Temporary Chairman: Mr. Kofi Annan
(Secretary-General of the United Nations)

Chairman: Mr. KA (Senegal)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

1. The agenda was adopted.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

2. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN invited the Committee to consider nominations for the posts of Chairman, Vice-Chairmen and Rapporteur of the Committee.
3. Mr. YEL'CHENKO (Ukraine) said that the year 2000 was a special one, both for the Committee and for the cause of the Palestinian people. Ukraine hoped that the year would bring about a final settlement of the question of Palestine, in accordance with the agreed timetable. The Committee, which was commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of its establishment, planned to participate in the series of events which had been launched the previous December as part of the Bethlehem 2000 celebrations.
4. In the light of the commendable efforts made in 1999 by the Chairman and Bureau to implement the Committee's mandate, the current composition of the Bureau should be maintained in order to ensure the same level of implementation of the Committee's programme of work in 2000 and the continuity of experienced leadership. He therefore wished to nominate Mr. Ka (Senegal) for re-election to the office of Chairman, Mr. Rodríguez Parrilla (Cuba) and Mr. Farhâdi (Afghanistan) for re-election to the offices of Vice-Chairmen and Mr. Balzan (Malta) to the office of Rapporteur.
5. Mr. BEN MUSTAPHA (Tunisia) seconded the nominations.
6. Mr. Ka (Senegal), Mr. Rodríguez Parrilla (Cuba) and Mr. Farhâdi (Afghanistan) and Mr. Balzan (Malta) were elected by acclamation.
7. Mr. Ka (Senegal) took the Chair.

STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

8. The SECRETARY-GENERAL congratulated the Chairman on his unanimous re-election to the leadership of the Committee, which was a clear recognition of the unstinting commitment that he and his country had shown in the search for a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.
9. The Committee was opening its first session of the year that marked the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ, a momentous event for the world and one of particular significance in the Middle East. The General Assembly had recognized the anniversary by adopting a resolution on Bethlehem 2000, and the Committee had helped to promote international support for the restoration and renewal of Bethlehem and other Palestinian cities and communities.

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10. At the outset of the millennium, the international community was experiencing renewed hope in the Middle East peace process, and there were real reasons for optimism. The negotiations between Israel and Palestine were back on track and in a crucial phase, with the prospect of further progress in the months ahead. Already, following the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum the previous September, there had been a further redeployment of troops from the West Bank, an agreement on prisoners, the opening up of a safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and the resumption of negotiations on permanent status issues. The trilateral summit held at Oslo the previous November had helped the parties set up additional negotiating mechanisms and a timetable for the framework and final settlement agreements that were due to be concluded in 2000.

11. He therefore wished to commend Mr. Yasser Arafat, President of the Palestinian Authority, and Mr. Ehud Barak, Prime Minister of Israel, for their courage and commitment to the cause of peace and reconciliation. Their work had rekindled hopes that peace, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), might be within reach at last.

12. The situation on the ground was not without problems, however. There was much anxiety among Palestinians over the construction and expansion of settlements and roads and their possible impact on the permanent status negotiations. He had called on the parties to preserve and build instead on the fragile accomplishments of the peace process and to refrain from actions that might prejudice the outcome of the negotiations. The parties should also not lose sight of the need for a just solution to the refugee question, without which peace and stability could not take hold.

13. Nor could there be peace and stability without improved economic and social conditions. Some progress had been made in health and education, employment opportunities, industrial development and Palestinian institution-building. Much remained to be done, however, and the Organization would continue to contribute to those efforts through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other entities.

14. He wished to emphasize, in particular, the key role which UNRWA had been playing for 50 years in providing much-needed assistance to Palestinian refugees. Despite chronic financial constraints, the Agency remained a vital source of humanitarian assistance to more than three million refugees. He therefore hoped that it would obtain the resources it needed to continue its crucial mission on behalf of those three million men, women and children, whose basic needs constituted a humanitarian imperative beyond other considerations.

15. It was all the more crucial at the current stage to ensure that United Nations support for the peace process was well prepared and coordinated and that United Nations development assistance played an effective part in that support. He was therefore glad to have secured the services of Mr. Terje Rod-Larsen of Norway, who had been closely involved in the peace process since the early stages of the Oslo negotiations, as the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and his Personal Representative to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority. He was confident that

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Mr. Larsen would spare no effort in the critical transitional period ahead to ensure that the assistance provided by the United Nations was more effective and focused.

16. For a quarter of a century, the Committee had worked steadfastly to bring closer the day when Palestinians would be able to exercise their inalienable national rights. As the world entered the new millennium, he hoped that the parties would overcome the remaining hurdles on the road to peace and that the international community would do all it could to help them on that journey. The United Nations would spare no effort in that regard. He wished the Committee a most productive session.

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

17. The CHAIRMAN, speaking as the representative of Senegal, said that, since its establishment, the Committee had never been as active nor its composition as broad as it currently was. It had strengthened and expanded its cooperation with Governments and with intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations; moreover, its activities, which it now conducted in all the regions of the world, were receiving increased press coverage by the major international media. Throughout the years, however, the Committee had remained faithful to the mandate given to it by the General Assembly and to the universal principles on which the Organization had been founded. It would continue to do so in the current critical phase of the peace negotiations.

18. The previous week had brought signs of hope that the peace process would be resumed. As the deadline for the signing of a framework agreement on the final status of the territories approached, however, it was becoming clear that progress towards peace would not be easy and that every effort should be made to regain the momentum that had been created by the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum and other earlier agreements between the parties. He therefore appealed to the sponsors of the peace process and to all persons of goodwill to continue and intensify their efforts so that the still slender thread of dialogue might never be broken and the commitments given after difficult negotiations fully implemented.

19. Though extremely complex, the issues that remained to be settled were crucial to the survival of the peace process. They included the question of Palestinian refugees, the borders of the future Palestinian State, the status of Al-Quds Al-Sharif, illegal Jewish settlements and arrangements for security and the sharing of water resources. Far from being an obstacle to the success of the peace process and to bilateral negotiations, the involvement of the United Nations in close cooperation with the co-sponsors of the peace process and the principal parties could help significantly to strengthen the process. For its part, the Committee would continue to study and to recommend to the Assembly a constructive programme for promoting the inalienable and sacred rights of the Palestinian people.

STATEMENT BY THE PERMANENT OBSERVER FOR PALESTINE

20. Mr. JILANI (Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine) said that the year 2000 must be the year of an independent Palestine. In 1999, which had marked

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the end of the transitional period set out in the Oslo Agreement, a firm international consensus had emerged that a one-year extension should be sufficient to permit the parties to conclude a final settlement. An additional and natural deadline for achieving a final settlement was the Millennium Summit of the United Nations. He was confident that Palestine would participate in that Summit as a State Member of the Organization. That was the main goal for the year 2000, and he had no doubt that the Committee would provide all the support that Palestine needed to achieve it.

21. The meeting was suspended at 3.50 p.m. and resumed at 3.55 p.m.

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN ON EVENTS ATTENDED IN HIS CAPACITY AS CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE

22. The CHAIRMAN, reporting on the World Peace Globe Lighting Ceremony, held on 7 December 1999 at the Church Center of the United Nations and organized by the United Methodist Office of the United Nations, the Project Coordinator for Bethlehem 2000 of the Anglican Communion and the artist Rebecca Nova, creator of the World Peace Globe, said that he had made some remarks at the Ceremony on the Committee's initiatives in relation to Bethlehem 2000.

23. From 13 to 15 December, at the invitation of the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALESCO), he had participated in the International Conference on Jerusalem held in London. London had been selected for three symbolic reasons: the United Kingdom had been the Mandatory Power of Palestine, it was a permanent member of the Security Council and it was an influential partner within the European Union.

24. The Conference had been attended by a large number of eminent personalities, including representatives of various religious denominations, as well as international experts on the issue. The speakers had included Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi, head of the Political Department of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and Palestine, and the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem.

25. Since the peace process was now passing through a critical phase, all aspects of the question of Jerusalem should be given special consideration. The organization by ALESCO of the London Conference was therefore timely. The future of the Holy City of Jerusalem remained at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict and of the struggle of the Palestinian people to regain their legitimate rights to Jerusalem. The solution of the problem of Jerusalem was one of the keys to overall peace in the Middle East.

26. He took it that the Committee wished to take note of the information he had presented.

27. It was so decided.

DRAFT PROGRAMME OF WORK OF THE COMMITTEE (A/AC.183/2000/CRP.1)

28. The CHAIRMAN, introducing the draft programme of work of the Committee for 2000 (A/AC.183/2000/CRP.1), said that it reflected the ongoing concerns and

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objectives of the Committee. Section I was largely procedural and summarized the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session containing the respective mandates of the Committee, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information. Section II outlined the priority issues in the Committee's programme of work for 2000, including the need for continued support of the Bethlehem 2000 Project of the Palestinian Authority. Section III dealt with the proposed activities of the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights. Sub-section A focused on the review of the situation relating to the question of Palestine. Sub-section B covered the calendar of meetings to be held by the Committee in 2000, while sub-section C, on collaboration with civil society, referred to the need for sustained public awareness-raising campaigns and emphasized the importance that the Committee attached to the role of national and supranational parliaments and inter-parliamentary bodies in shaping public opinion. Sub-section D dealt with work towards the development of the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL), while sub-section E described the various elements of the programme of work of the Division for Palestinian Rights. Lastly, the Committee recommended that the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People should be observed on 29 November 2000, and that the usual programme of activities, including a Palestinian cultural exhibit, should be envisaged.

29. The draft programme of work of the Committee for 2000 (A/AC.183/2000/CRP.1) was adopted.

UNITED NATIONS ASIAN MEETING ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

30. The CHAIRMAN informed the Committee that the United Nations Asian Meeting on the Question of Palestine would be held in Hanoi from 1 to 3 March 2000. He expressed gratitude to the Government of Viet Nam for agreeing to host the Meeting and assisting in its preparation. The provisional agenda was contained in Working Paper No. 1.

31. The provisional agenda for the United Nations Asian Meeting on the Question of Palestine, as contained in Working Paper No. 1, was adopted.

32. The CHAIRMAN said that the Committee's delegation to the Hanoi Conference would be composed of Mr. Balzan (Malta), Rapporteur, Mr. Pham Binh Minh (Viet Nam), Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) and himself.

The meeting rose at 4.10 p.m.