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Official Records

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

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New York

Chair: Mr. Diallo (Senegal)

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

International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

The Chair (*spoke in French*): Today the Committee is holding a special meeting to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, in accordance with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 32/40 B, of 2 December 1977.

It is my honour and pleasure to welcome His Excellency Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, President of the General Assembly; Her Excellency Ms. Asha-Rose Migiro, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations; His Excellency Mr. José Filipe Moraes Cabral, President of the Security Council; and His Excellency Mr. Palitha T. B. Kohona, Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.

I also welcome the representatives of Member States, intergovernmental organizations and civil society organizations, and all those who have accepted the Committee's invitation to participate in this meeting.

Allow me at this point to make a statement on behalf of the Committee.

In 1978, when the Committee met for the first time to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, we were far from imagining that 33 years later the Palestinians would still be

seeking to return to their homeland and live in their own State. While several decades have gone by, little progress has been made towards a comprehensive, just and lasting solution.

Despite their history of oppression, however, the Palestinian people have never relinquished their identity or their attachment to their land, nor have they lost sight of the goal of regaining their right to freedom and independence. The truth is that there is no ambiguity about their right to national self-determination, independence and sovereignty in their own State, and their right as refugees to return to their homes. In fact, the inalienable nature of their right to self-determination is imprescriptible and non-negotiable. For that reason it has never been on the agenda of the Israeli-Palestinian permanent status negotiations. The negotiations are only a means for determining how Palestine's right to self-determination and independence should be exercised — a right that, moreover, in no way contradicts Israel's right to exist, which Palestinians recognized many years ago. We also consider it unacceptable to want to link the negotiations to Palestine's application for admission to the United Nations.

The suffering of the Palestinian people affects all who love peace and justice. Exiled and occupied, the Palestinians are seeing their land despoiled by settlement activity and the construction of the wall of separation. Blockaded in the occupied territory, and trapped in a process that has remained at an impasse for 20 years, they need active solidarity more than ever in order to survive and hold on to their hopes. This

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obligation to show solidarity is all the greater when we consider that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility regarding the question of Palestine until it is resolved in accordance with international legitimacy, derived from the United Nations own resolutions and decisions.

Sixty-four years after the plan for partition was adopted on 29 November 1947 (General Assembly resolution 181 (II)), history is once again knocking at the door of the United Nations. The Organization must remain true to the aims of its Charter, which guarantees freedom, peace and security equally for all peoples. It is clearly high time for the principal organs of the United Nations, and all Member States that support the Palestinians' right to self-determination, to shoulder their responsibilities with regard to Palestine's application for admission to membership in the United Nations. To that end, I invite Member States to demonstrate their will and to show solidarity by voting in the General Assembly in favour of the draft resolutions on Palestine, including the four that I will be introducing this afternoon (A/66/L.15, A/66/L.16, A/66/L.17, A/66/L.18).

The Quartet should once again relaunch a credible negotiation process, while ensuring that the parties refrain from provocative measures, meet their obligations under the road map and international law, and commit in good faith to the timetable and the parameters set out in the Quartet's statement of 23 September (SG/2178). To that end, it is vital that the Gaza blockade be lifted; that the perpetrators of grave human rights abuses be held accountable for them; that the prisoners illegally held by Israel be released; and that the Palestinians be supported in their reconciliation efforts. Furthermore, while I thank donors for their concern, I appeal to them to increase their assistance to the Palestinian Authority, and in particular to its National Development Plan for 2011-2013, and to respond generously to the humanitarian needs of people under occupation. Those needs are all the more urgent in the light of the freeze imposed by the Israeli Government on Palestinian Authority revenues. Civil society, meanwhile, should rally support for peace, justice and accountability, while systematically acknowledging the negative effects of the occupation.

I assure everyone here that the Committee will continue to fulfil the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly until the inalienable rights of the

Palestinian people are fully realized. We will continue to work for a just and lasting final settlement of the conflict through a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and harmony.

I now have the honour to give the floor to the President of the General Assembly, His Excellency Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser.

Mr. Al-Nasser, President of the General Assembly: On behalf of the General Assembly, I would like to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for its dedicated work and for inviting me to speak here today.

We meet to mark the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. We come together to renew our commitment to finding a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine and to achieving comprehensive peace in the Middle East. We are also here to reaffirm our shared responsibility in that regard.

The issue of Palestine has been particularly central during this session of the General Assembly. A number of significant events have already taken place since September. We witnessed a historic development here in New York when the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, transmitted Palestine's application for membership in the United Nations to the Secretary-General on 23 September (see A/66/371, annex). The issue has since been considered by the Security Council (see S/PV.6624). For my part and within the framework of my mandate, I circulated that request to all States Members of the United Nations.

A little more than a month ago, on 18 October, an exchange of prisoners was praised by the whole international community. I expressed my thanks to the States, as well as all other parties that had worked tirelessly over many years to facilitate those releases. That positive development showed the importance of mediation and negotiation to the peaceful settlement of disputes, a subject that I identified as one of the key focus areas during the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly (see A/66/PV.11).

For its part, the Quartet, of which the United Nations is an eminent member, has accelerated its efforts to allow for the relaunch of the negotiations. We all hope that those efforts will be fruitful and will lead to a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine as

soon as possible. Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization must step up their efforts to engage each other in honest negotiations and overcome the deadlock.

Also, everything should be done to alleviate the daily suffering of the Palestinian people. The situation on the ground is a source of great concern. Israeli construction of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory has continued, especially in and around East Jerusalem and in Area C of the West Bank. Properties continue to be demolished, land continues to be confiscated and Palestinians continue to be evacuated from their homes, in violation of international law and in defiance of international efforts to revive negotiations between the two sides.

In that context, I would like to pay tribute to the United Nations system, in particular the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). I would also like to acknowledge non-governmental organizations and civil society at large. All those actors have played a pivotal role in alleviating the suffering of the growing Palestinian refugee population. They have done so under extreme political and financial conditions, and I thank them for their assiduous dedication. I would like to underline that in the current year of 2011, the UNRWA mission on the ground has been challenged by the recurrent global financial crisis. I would urge all Member States to strengthen their valuable contributions to the work of UNRWA.

Alongside all those important developments in the Middle East peace process, it is my conviction that the General Assembly has a role to play. We should continue to work collectively for the attainment of a just and comprehensive negotiated peace settlement in the Middle East that results in two viable, sovereign and independent States — Israeli and Palestinian — living side by side in peace and security within recognized pre-1967 borders. I will not spare any effort to participate in solving a conflict that has beset the region and its people for too long.

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I thank the President of the General Assembly for the important statement that he has just made.

I now have the honour to give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Asha-Rose Migiro, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations.

The Deputy Secretary-General: I am very pleased to join participants today on behalf of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who is currently away from Headquarters on official travel. He has given me the honour of reading out this statement on his behalf.

“Sixty-four years ago on this day, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), proposing the partition of the Mandate territory into two States. The establishment of a Palestinian State, living in peace next to a secure Israel, is long overdue.

“The need to resolve this conflict has taken on greater urgency with the historic transformations taking place across the region. The Israeli and Palestinian leadership must show courage and determination in seeking an agreement for a two-State solution that can open up a brighter future for Palestinian and Israeli children. Such a solution must end the occupation that began in 1967, and meet legitimate security concerns. Jerusalem must emerge from negotiation as the capital of two States, with arrangements for the holy sites acceptable to all. A just and agreed solution must be found for millions of Palestinian refugees scattered around the region.

“While there are many challenges to that goal, let us recognize an important, indeed historic, achievement of the Palestinian Authority during the past year. The Palestinian Authority is now institutionally ready to assume the responsibilities of statehood if a Palestinian State were created. That was affirmed by a wide range of members of the international community at the meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians in September. President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad are to be commended on that remarkable success. Those efforts should continue and be supported.

“In that regard, the current suspension by Israel of customs and tax transfers owed to the Palestinian Authority risks undermining such gains. Those revenues must be transferred without delay.

“Above all, a political horizon is vital. It is a matter of deep concern that Israeli-Palestinian

negotiations are not taking place, while trust between the parties continues to fade. A glimpse of hope comes from their engagement with the Middle East Quartet. Both sides should seek to develop serious proposals on borders and security and to discuss them directly with each other, with active Quartet support, in the context of a shared commitment to reach an agreement by the end of 2012.

“The parties have a particular responsibility to cease provocations and create an environment conducive to meaningful negotiations. Israel’s recently intensified settlement activity in East Jerusalem and the West Bank is a major obstacle.

“Settlement activity is contrary to international law and the road map, and must cease. Unilateral actions on the ground will not be accepted by the international community.

“For its part, the Palestinian Authority should also find ways to help de-escalate the situation and improve the prevailing divisive climate, and to be ready to engage directly in the search for a negotiated solution.

“It is also crucial for the Palestinians to overcome their divisions, based on the commitments of the Palestine Liberation Organization, the positions of the Quartet and the Arab Peace Initiative. President Abbas continues efforts towards a transitional Government that will prepare for presidential and legislative elections in May.

“Palestinian unity that supports a negotiated two-State solution is essential for the creation of a Palestinian State in Gaza and the West Bank.

“The United Nations continues to be strongly committed to the population in Gaza, and to implementing all aspects of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). Israel has taken steps to ease the closure. There is, however, still a need to remove the numerous remaining measures that severely restrict the movement of people and goods and limit the ability of the United Nations to support Gaza’s economic recovery and reconstruction.

“Today we must also remind those in Gaza who fire rockets at Israel, or continue to smuggle

weapons, that such actions are both unacceptable and completely contrary to Palestinian interests.

“Rocket fire from Gaza into Israel must end, and Israel must exercise maximum restraint. Both parties should fully observe calm and respect international humanitarian law. The recent prisoner exchange, which saw the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners and an Israeli soldier, was a significant humanitarian breakthrough that should be followed by further steps to consolidate calm and end the closure of Gaza.

“Amid these many challenges to the realization of their legitimate aspirations for statehood, the Palestinian leadership submitted an application for membership in the United Nations. That is a matter for the Member States to decide.

“Whatever view of this matter is taken, we should not lose sight of the ultimate goal of reaching a negotiated peace agreement on all final status issues, including borders, security, Jerusalem and refugees.

“Let us, on this International Day, reaffirm our commitment to translating solidarity into positive action.

“The international community must help steer the situation towards a historic peace agreement. Failing to overcome mistrust will only condemn further generations of Palestinians and Israelis to conflict and suffering.

“A just and lasting peace in the Middle East based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008), previous agreements, the Madrid framework, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative is critical to avoid this fate. I will continue pursuing my efforts with all the means available to me.”

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I wish to thank the Deputy Secretary-General for taking the time out of her busy schedule to participate in this special meeting of the Committee. Through her, and through her colleague, Mr. Lynn Pascoe, who is here today, I would like to express the Committee’s sincere appreciation for the important message from the Secretary-General and would like to ask her to convey to him our

encouragement for the continuation of his personal efforts aimed at promoting a comprehensive, just and lasting solution of the question of Palestine.

I now have the honour of giving the floor to the President of the Security Council, His Excellency Mr. José Filipe Moraes Cabral.

Mr. Moraes Cabral, President of the Security Council: I would like to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for inviting me to address this meeting in my capacity as President of the Security Council for November. I would also like to acknowledge the presence of the President of the General Assembly, the Deputy Secretary-General, Ambassadors Riyad Mansour and Palitha Kahona, and Under-Secretary-General Lynn Pascoe.

We are here today to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Throughout the past year, the Council has remained seized of the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, and has continued to receive monthly briefings on the situation from the Secretary-General's Special Coordinator and the Department of Political Affairs, and to hold regular open debates.

The past year has witnessed historic developments in the Middle East. The winds of change blowing through the Arab world have emphasized even further the urgency of a peace agreement that ends the Arab-Israeli conflict and resolves all claims. The Security Council has thus called upon Palestinians and Israelis to seize the opportunity to reach a peaceful and final settlement. The Council remains fully committed to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East based on the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security with mutually agreed and recognized borders.

Council members have underscored that the peace agreement between Israelis and Palestinians and the final settlement of all core issues can only be achieved through direct negotiations. Council members have also reiterated their support for an agreed, just and fair solution to the refugee issue and have expressed concern about Israel's continued settlement activity, reiterating their view that settlements undermine peace efforts and a two-State solution. They have also stressed the need for respect for international obligations in that regard.

Council members have also expressed concern regarding the recent decision by Israel to once again withhold Palestinian tax revenues and they recall in that regard the position of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee that clearance of revenue collection by Israel on behalf of the Palestinian Authority should be efficient, transparent and predictable. Those revenues should also be transferred to the Palestinian authority on a regular schedule.

Over the course of the year, Council members have continued to express concern at the firing of rockets from Gaza. Council members also took note of the reconciliation agreement signed by Palestinian factions in Cairo on 27 April.

A number of significant events have taken place in recent months. On 18 September, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee met in New York. There, based on reports and recommendations from the parties, the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and a Quartet representative, the donors reconfirmed their assessment that the institutions of the Palestinian Authority are above the threshold of a functioning State in the key sectors they studied. Council members have welcomed that positive appraisal and commended the Palestinian Authority for its achievements.

On 23 September, President Mahmoud Abbas submitted to the Secretary-General the application of Palestine for admission to membership in the United Nations. That application is now before the Security Council following the adoption of a report by the Council's Committee on the Admission of New Members on 11 November (S/2011/705). On 23 September the Quartet issued a statement, in which it took note of the application submitted by President Abbas, reaffirmed its statement of 20 May, including its strong support for the vision of Israeli-Palestinian peace outlined by United States President Barack Obama, and recalled its previous statements, which provide that negotiations should lead to an agreement that ends the occupation that began in 1967 and results in the emergence of an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its neighbours.

The Quartet affirmed its determination to actively and vigorously seek a comprehensive resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515

(2003) and 1850 (2008), the Madrid principles, including land for peace, the road map, and the agreements previously reached between the parties.

The Quartet also reaffirmed the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative and provided a framework and time frame for the resumption of negotiations without delay or preconditions. The Security Council has recognized the key role of the Quartet in the efforts to relaunch a Middle East peace process. Council members have expressed their full support for the continued efforts of the Quartet and its statement of 23 September.

On 18 October, Israeli Sergeant Gilad Shalit and 477 Palestinian prisoners were released in the first stage of implementing a prisoner exchange agreement. Council members continue to view the situation in Gaza with concern, and repeat their calls for the full implementation of Security Council resolutions 1850 (2008) and 1860 (2009). And in that context, they stress the need for a sustained and regular flow of goods and people into Gaza, as well as unimpeded provision and distribution of humanitarian assistance throughout Gaza.

The Council welcomed the Quartet envoy's meetings with the parties in Jerusalem on 26 October and 14 November, as well as the parties' expressed readiness to engage with the Quartet in resuming direct negotiations. The Council urges the parties to submit to the Quartet the comprehensive proposals on territory and security that each party has committed to presenting within three months, as called for in the 23 September statement.

As the Quartet has stated, unilateral actions by either party cannot prejudice the outcome of negotiations, and will not be recognized by the international community. The Council has echoed the 23 September call by the Quartet for the parties to refrain from provocative actions if negotiations are to be effective. Finally, the Security Council has commended the laudable efforts of humanitarian organizations and agencies on the ground, particularly those of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and its staff. We encourage all members of the international community to support the Agency with financial contributions.

Looking ahead, the Security Council will remain seized of the situation in the Middle East, including the

Palestinian question, and will continue to consider the issue on a regular basis and act to uphold its responsibilities under the Charter, consistent with the relevant Security Council resolutions on the matter.

In conclusion, allow me to assure all Member States of the Security Council's commitment to the ultimate goal of achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, and to the realization of the legitimate and inalienable right of the Palestinian people to an independent and democratic State.

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I thank the President of the Security Council for his important statement. The Committee has always believed that the Security Council should play a decisive role in the resolution of the question of Palestine, and we are therefore encouraged by the President's statement on behalf of the Council.

I now have the pleasure to give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Riyad Mansour, who will read a message from His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I have the honour of reading the statement of His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian National Authority, as we observe this day of solidarity with the Palestinian people.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

"On behalf of the Palestinian people I offer my greetings and abundant thanks to all those here participating in marking this day, whether through personal statements or their attendance at this annual observance, as an expression of their solidarity with the Palestinian people and their aspirations to attaining their legitimate rights to self-determination, ending the Israeli occupation and achieving an independent, sovereign State of Palestine within the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

"We greatly appreciate the efforts of His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and of the Committee on the Exercise of the

Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and its Chair, His Excellency Ambassador Abdou Salam Diallo, aimed at implementing United Nations resolutions and reminding the international community that the question of Palestine was born and evolved in the United Nations in 1947, when a resolution was adopted to partition Palestine into two States, Israel and Palestine (General Assembly resolution 181 (II)). Only one, however, has been established, the State of Israel, in an area larger than that provided for in the partition resolution.

“Israel’s admission to membership in the United Nations in 1949 was based on two conditions: Israel’s commitment, first, to the partition resolution and the establishment of a Palestinian State, and, second, to resolution 194 (III) on the return of Palestinian refugees to their homes and their compensation.

“The war of June 1967 led to the occupation of what remained of historic Palestine, that is, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The Security Council then adopted resolution 242 (1967), which was based on two principles: the inadmissibility of the acquisition of another’s territory by force, and a call for peace in return of withdrawal from that territory.

“The historical injustices inflicted on the Palestinian people are reflected in various ways. We have about 5 million displaced refugees. A colonialist settlement occupation is expanding every day in the West Bank, and East Jerusalem is experiencing a process of judaization through ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian Christian and Muslim presence there. An apartheid wall has been constructed, and there is a cruel blockade of the Gaza Strip. There are other illegal Israeli practices.

“The United Nations has made efforts that are much appreciated to address our people’s tragedy, whether through assistance from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East or the various recommendations and resolutions adopted by the General Assembly and the Security Council. Nevertheless, Israel has continued to reject those efforts as if it were a State above the law.

“For many years we have expressed our readiness to reach a solution to the conflict with Israel that ensures the possibility of justice and complies with international resolutions and initiatives through the establishment of a Palestinian State on only 22 per cent of the historical territory of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and to achieve a just and agreed-on solution to the issue of Palestinian refugees, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

“We have entered into direct and indirect negotiations with Israel for many years since the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, with the aim of achieving a two-State solution and applying the principle of land for peace. However, Israel has continued its settlement activities and has ignored all the international statements and calls that have declared and continue to declare that such activities are illegal and are an obstacle to peace.

“Our decision to apply for membership in the United Nations is our legitimate right, based on the partition resolution adopted on this day, 29 November, in 1947.

“That approach is not a unilateral action. We are calling for recognition of our State on the basis of the 1967 borders and the implementation of the provisions of the relevant United Nations resolutions; the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace; the Arab Peace Initiative; and the Quartet Road Map. That recognition is not a substitute for negotiations; rather, it is an auxiliary factor, in case the Israeli Government decides to negotiate on the basis of the 1967 borders.

“It is not fair that sanctions have been imposed on us because of our accession to membership in UNESCO. Israel does not have the right to impound customs and tax revenues that are the property of the Palestinian people. By seeking membership in the United Nations, we wish to delegitimize not Israel but its settlements and its seizure of our occupied territories, with which it deals as though they were disputed, not occupied, lands.

“It is painful, regrettable and deeply disquieting for us to witness the selective

application of international law and international resolutions and the use of double standards in the implementation of United Nations resolutions, with deep disregard for the law and only the weak paying the price.

“On this Day, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, we affirm that we are a people that is attached to its land and that we will stay there, in the strong belief that anyone in the world with a conscience, anyone who is committed to the Charter of the United Nations, must support and participate in the process of enabling our people to exercise its right to self-determination and achieve its independence as a free and sovereign State.

“The State of Palestine, God willing, will be a pluralistic, democratic State that is free of discrimination on the basis of race or religion; a peaceful State that wishes to live in peace and security, side by side with Israel and the other States of the region; a State whose independence, after 64 years, is long overdue.”

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I should like, on behalf of us all, to thank Mr. Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of Palestine, and to ask him to convey our greetings to Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority, for his important message.

I convey also to President Abbas our solidarity with the Palestinian people and our unwavering support for its aspirations in their quest for self-determination and statehood.

I should also like to assure President Abbas and, through him, the Palestinian people of our Committee's firm commitment to continuing its efforts, as mandated by the General Assembly, with a view to promoting a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine.

I shall now suspend the meeting for a few minutes to allow some of our guests to leave the Conference Room. On behalf of the Committee, I should like once again to thank His Excellency the President of the General Assembly; Her Excellency Ms. Migiro, Deputy Secretary-General; and His Excellency Mr. Moraes Cabral, President of the Security Council, for their important contributions.

The meeting was suspended at 10.55 a.m. and resumed at 11 a.m.

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Palitha Kohona, Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.

Mr. Kohona (Sri Lanka), Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories: I am honoured to address this meeting as the Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, on this occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This day provides a critical reminder to the international community of the urgent need to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian question in a just and equitable manner.

The objective for the occupied Palestinian people remains clear: they must, as they are entitled to, realize their goal of an independent State. However, at the ground level, prospects for the realization by the Palestinians of their fundamental human right to self-determination and an independent State remain distant and elusive.

The policies and practices emanating from the current regime of occupation continue to infringe on a whole spectrum of human rights. Consequently, a significant proportion of Palestinians live in poverty, and many are totally dependent on humanitarian aid provided by United Nations agencies and other aid donors. Levels of poverty are particularly high in the Gaza Strip as a result of the Israeli-imposed blockade and in occupied East Jerusalem and area C of the West Bank due to restrictive access and discriminatory practices.

Earlier this month, the Special Committee presented its forty-third report (see A/66/370) on the human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territory and occupied Syrian Golan. Our report benefited from the Special Committee's first ever visit to the Gaza Strip, where the Committee's overarching observation was that Israel's blockade continues to collectively punish the civilian population. That collective punishment is having a grave impact,

especially on the children of Gaza. Only through a political solution, with human rights at its heart, will the Palestinians and the Israelis enjoy security and peace. On this day, the Committee expresses its very best wishes to the Palestinian efforts to achieve statehood.

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I thank His Excellency Mr. Palitha Kohona, Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, for his important statement.

It is now my pleasure to give the floor to Mr. Maged Abdelaziz, Permanent Representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the United Nations, who will read out a message from the Head of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces of the Arab Republic of Egypt, His Excellency Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the honour to read out the text of a message from His Excellency Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, Head of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces of the Arab Republic of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

“On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I have the pleasure to transmit this message to Ambassador Abdou Salam Diallo, Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to reaffirm the full support of Egypt and all members of the Non-Aligned Movement for the brotherly Palestinian people in their legitimate quest to recover and exercise all of their inalienable rights, primary among which is their inherent right to establish an independent and sovereign State of their own, with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on all relevant terms of reference and in accordance with the established rules and provisions of international law, international humanitarian law, the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council, the principles of the Madrid Conference and the Arab Peace Initiative.

“This year, the establishment of the Palestinian State has acquired special momentum in light of the historic statement made by

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas before the General Assembly on 23 September 2011, and the clearly unanimous agreement on the necessity of establishing the Palestinian State with full international recognition by and membership of the United Nations. That matter has been reaffirmed by the League of Arab States at all recent meetings and occasions and by the Non-Aligned Movement in all of its documents, foremost among which are the Palestine declaration of the Sixteenth Ministerial Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement held in Bali, Indonesia, in May 2011, and the reaffirmation of that same declaration by the Foreign Ministers of the Movement’s Committee on Palestine on 22 September 2011, in New York.

“The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People plays an important role in guaranteeing Security Council support for the Palestinian request for membership in the United Nations, in line with the Movement’s intensive efforts to increase recognition of the State of Palestine, which so far includes 132 States. We look forward to the continued support of the Committee in acquiring further recognition in order to ensure the adoption by the General Assembly of its draft resolution on Palestine’s membership to the United Nations.

“In order to achieve that purpose, we must all work together to put an end to the continued violations of the rights of the Palestinian people; halt the sharp deterioration of their living conditions; ensure Israel’s commitment to its legal obligations as the occupying Power; put an end to Israel’s illegitimate policies, foremost among those its settlement policies; halt its attempts to alter the facts on the ground by confiscating Palestinian land and property and altering the features of East Jerusalem; end the violations of the sanctity of the holy sites and of worshippers, in particular Al-Quds Al-Sharif; halt its continued building of the apartheid wall and stifling siege against the Gaza Strip and all other practices that run counter to its obligations under international and international humanitarian law.

“On another front, efforts must continue towards a return to the negotiating table based on the sound principles. Momentum must be

generated to enable the international Quartet to end the settlement policies and to consider the borders of 4 June 1967 as a basis for negotiations within a defined time frame and with a view to establishing a monitoring mechanism that will guarantee implementation of the obligations necessary to enable the establishment, as soon as possible, of the Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

“I cannot fail to commend the Committee’s intensified efforts this year, particularly its role in organizing international meetings and symposiums in the recent past aimed at mobilizing international support of the brotherly Palestinian people, protecting their rights and promoting the importance of establishing a comprehensive and just peace as soon as possible.

“I also wish to commend the Committee for its increased efforts over the past year, as demonstrated in its joint efforts with national parliaments and regional parties to mobilize the parliamentary role in support of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and to promote the increased use of information technology to raise international awareness of the just cause of the Palestinian people and in order to guarantee their rights.

“I wish the Chairman and all of the members of the Committee every success. Please accept my highest regards.”

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I thank His Excellency Mr. Maged Abdelaziz, Permanent Representative of the Arab Republic of Egypt, for transmitting the message from Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi and I request the Ambassador to kindly convey to His Excellency the sincere thanks of the Committee for his very important message in his capacity as Chair of the Non-Aligned Movement.

I would also like to take the opportunity to congratulate Egypt on the important role it continues to play in the reconciliation of Palestinian factions and in the recent release of Israeli and Palestinian prisoners.

It is now my pleasure to give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Byrganym Aitimova, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the United Nations, who will read out a statement from His Excellency Mr. Yerzhan Kh. Kazykhanov, Minister for

Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, in his capacity as Chair of the thirty-eighth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers.

Mrs. Aitimova (Kazakhstan): I have the honour to read out the welcoming address on behalf of His Excellency Mr. Yerzhan Kazykhanov, Chairman of the thirty-eighth session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

“In my capacity as Chairman of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, I would like to heartily welcome members and express my sincere gratitude to the participants in the meeting for supporting the noble endeavours of the people of Palestine. The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is another good opportunity to reiterate the existing overwhelming international support for an end to the occupation, to address the fundamental security concerns of the region, to find a just solution to the refugee issue and to stop the suffering and hardship of the Palestinians.

“Palestine is at the heart of the OIC. The cause of Palestine and Al-Quds Al-Sharif has been central to the Organization since its very establishment. OIC member States condemn Israel’s continuing illegal and intensified settlement construction campaign and human rights violations against the occupied Palestinian territory. There is no doubt that the Palestinians have the full right and justification to resort to the United Nations to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination and to establish their independent State on Palestinian territory within the lines of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

“The OIC pledges to make all possible efforts to end the Israeli occupation and to extend effective support for the Palestinian people’s right to self-determination and the establishment of their independent State. For that purpose, in accordance with the OIC Charter, the post of an Assistant Secretary-General should be devoted to the cause of Al-Quds Al-Sharif and Palestine and designated to a candidate from the State of Palestine.

“This year has been especially critical to reaffirming the OIC’s solidarity with the people of Palestine. At the thirty-eighth session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the OIC in Astana and the Annual Coordination Meeting of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the OIC in New York, we sent a clear message of support to the bid to recognize the independent and sovereign State of Palestine on the basis of the borders of June 1967. We were consistent in our policy, backing the recent decision of UNESCO to admit Palestine as a full member.

“Being deeply interested in achieving lasting peace and stability in the Middle East, we pledge to remain seized of the matter and to exert all necessary efforts until a peaceful, just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the question of Palestine is achieved in all its aspects, and until all Palestinian people can finally realize their legitimate aspirations and inalienable rights in their independent State of Palestine, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

“I avail myself of this opportunity to wish the people of Palestine every success in their noble aspirations for a safer and prosperous future.”

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I thank Ambassador Aitimova and request her to convey to His Excellency Mr. Yerzhan Kazykhanov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan and Chairman of the thirty-eighth session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the sincere thanks of the Committee for his important message.

I now have the pleasure of giving the floor to His Excellency Mr. Yahya Mahmassani, Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States to the United Nations, who will read out a message from the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, His Excellency Mr. Nabil Elaraby.

Mr. Mahmassani (League of Arab States) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me pleasure to convey to you, Mr. Chair, and to the members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People the highest regards of His Excellency the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, Mr. Nabil Elaraby, and to express his high appreciation for the efforts of your Committee in support of the

Palestinian people and their right to self-determination and the establishment of their independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

“The observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People takes place in tense times that have witnessed grave negative developments as a result of the intransigent position of the Government of Israel and its refusal to put an end to its settlement policies in East Jerusalem and other Palestinian areas in such a way that proves its manipulation and prevarication in order to obstruct international efforts through its practices.

“Despite the international consensus on the two-State solution to achieve a peaceful settlement and to establish a contiguous independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, Israel continues to violate and flout international legitimacy and all human rights conventions. It continues its settlement policies aimed at further engulfing Palestinian lands and at creating new facts on the ground in a way that threatens and undermines the two-State solution to the extent that any real opportunity to establish an independent Palestinian State is removed. Israel continues its illegal unilateral decisions to Judaize East Jerusalem and its surroundings, to change their demography and historic characteristics and to obliterate their Islamic and Christian heritage.

“Israel’s pursuit of its settlement policies and its insistence on a new condition that requires the Palestinian side to recognize Israel as a Jewish State reflect the complete lack of political will on the part of the Israeli Government to enter into serious negotiations that deal with all the various aspects of the situation on the basis of international legitimacy and the provisions of international law within a specified time frame and without partial or gradual solutions.

“Israel’s persistent besiege of the Gaza Strip and all its severe discriminatory and racist measures, which recall racist practices in South Africa in the past, have continued to undermine the lives of 1.5 million Palestinians since 1948. Thereby, Israel persists with its resettlement policy and in preventing Palestinians from returning to their homeland.

“The occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem are occupied territories under international law. All unilateral measures taken by Israel are null and void. The international community, in particular the Security Council, and the Quartet, especially its more powerful parties, such as the United States, should shoulder their responsibilities and put an end to such prevarication and procrastination by Israel in the negotiations and the peace process. The Israeli occupation is in a race against time to lay down new borders for Palestine according to its whims, changing the facts on the ground and the characteristics of the land and undermining the real prospects for a Palestinian State.

“The League of Arab States reasserts its full support for the Palestinian side, as stipulated in the statement (see A/66/PV.19) delivered by His Excellency President Mahmoud Abbas to the General Assembly. In that statement, he requested the establishment of an independent Palestine and reiterated his commitment to resolving the conflict in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy and through serious negotiations based on international law, provided that the settlement policies were ceased. It is unacceptable to continue negotiations, be they direct or indirect, that waste time and effort and that do not lead to any progress on the ground, in the light of the continued Israeli settlement policies.

“Palestinian freedom is the real key to establishing regional and international stability. It is a way to truly contribute to all efforts to establish stability in a region that has suffered a devastating conflict for so long. The establishment of an independent, sovereign State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital will allay the fears and concerns that threaten regional and international peace and security.

“Our movement for peace comes in the midst of all of the efforts that have been made by President Mahmoud Abbas at the current session of the General Assembly by submitting his request for the full membership of Palestine in the United Nations as a political and diplomatic option based on the resolutions of international legitimacy and international law. The time has come for the Palestinian people to achieve their

independence and freedom and to live as other peoples do on this Earth — in a free and independent State. The international community must work towards the realization of that dream and uphold the voices of rights and justice, as enshrined in the Charter of this Organization.”

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I thank Ambassador Yahya Mahmassani for the statement he has just made and would ask him to be kind enough to convey to His Excellency Mr. Nabil El Araby, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, the Committee's sincere gratitude for his important message.

I now have the pleasure to give the floor to Ambassador Tété António, Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations.

Mr. António (African Union) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, Sir, I wish to congratulate you and express our great pleasure at seeing you chair this meeting. You are not only a member of our organization, the African Union (AU), but also a citizen of Senegal, a country whose efforts to free the oppressed peoples of the world — in this case, the Palestinian people — are known to all.

As we mark yet another anniversary, I should like to express, on behalf of the African Union Commission, the solidarity of the African people with the Palestinian people. Africa has substantial historic ties to Palestine. It is a story of struggle and liberation on the African continent and of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination. It is therefore no accident of history that Palestinian leaders are the only ones who have a standing invitation to the summit of the African Union. Nor is it a coincidence that all African Union summits adopt a resolution on the question of Palestine. The African Union firmly believes that all types of injustice committed against the Palestinian people must cease immediately.

(*spoke in English*)

The view of the African Union is that there is no military solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Only a just, comprehensive and peaceful settlement based on international law, the resolutions of international legitimacy and the principle of land for peace can bring an end to the occupation of Arab lands by Israel since 1967 and a lasting solution to the conflict.

We also believe that there are many United Nations resolutions on the question of Palestine that remain valid and that, if implemented, would put an end to the occupation and to the conflict as well. Resolution 242 (1967) remains the basis for achieving peace.

We further believe that the Security Council has a crucial role to play in exerting efforts to implement its resolutions and in achieving a peaceful settlement, including by taking concrete actions and practical measures to implement resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and all other relevant resolutions, and by ensuring Israel's compliance with its legal obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention and the human rights covenants, as well as its full respect for the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

Support for the Palestinian cause has been a central feature of the African Union's foreign policy since the establishment of the Organization of African Unity in 1963. The AU will continue to do everything in its power to assist the people of Palestine in their endeavours to establish peace in their own land. We salute the struggling people of Palestine and express our solidarity with them, as we have already stated.

As we mark this occasion, we should all pledge to make greater efforts to resume the direct negotiations that began in September 2010 with a view to realizing the two-State solution of Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security on the basis of the 1967 borders, securing the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, and ensuring a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

(spoke in French)

We have once again expressed our full solidarity with the Palestinian people. We reiterate our continued support for your able leadership, Sir, and our full solidarity on behalf of all Africans.

The Chair *(spoke in French)*: I sincerely thank Ambassador Tété António, Permanent Observer of the African Union to the United Nations. He was right to recall Africa's solidarity with the Palestinian cause. As he reminded us so well, that ongoing solidarity has been reflected in the adoption, at virtually every African Union summit, of a resolution on the question of Palestine. We thank him for his presence in the Committee.

I now have the pleasure of giving the floor to the President of Americans United for Palestinian Human Rights, Mr. Peter Miller, who will deliver a statement on behalf of civil society organizations that take an active interest in the question of Palestine.

Mr. Miller (Americans United for Palestinian Human Rights): I am honoured to speak here today on this solemn commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. I am but one voice among many in global civil society who are deeply concerned about the plight of Palestinians resulting from Israel's policies of occupation, settlement, siege and denial of Palestinian rights. Many civil society activists around the world have dedicated their lives to seeking a just resolution to the Palestine-Israel conflict. Some have paid a huge price for their efforts. Why must civil society pay such a high price? It is because of the failure of the United Nations and Governments to implement international law.

As an American, I am deeply disturbed, as are many Americans, by the role that my Government plays in preventing Palestinians from achieving their aspirations and their human rights. The United States unconditionally gives Israel \$3 billion every year in military aid and ignores Israel's many systematic and continuing human rights violations. Those include the illegal use of military weapons against civilian populations, the ever expanding Israeli settlements, the expansion of its separation wall on Palestinian lands, the treatment of its Palestinian citizens as second-class human beings and the denial of the rights of Palestinian refugees.

One of the challenges to the United Nations and the international community, if they truly are committed to upholding the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, is to confront the deeply negative role of the United States in perpetuating injustice and enabling Israel to continue to violate international law and destroy the possibility of realizing Palestinian aspirations.

The admission of Palestine into the United Nations agency UNESCO is a great victory for the United Nations and the voice of people around the world. In all, 107 countries, representing over 75 per cent of the world's population, voted to include Palestine — a true expression of "We the peoples of the United Nations." Unfortunately, the Obama Administration was eager to enforce archaic United

States laws and cut off United States dues to UNESCO. Also unfortunate is the fact that the Obama and earlier United States Administrations have failed to uphold other United States laws that stipulate conditions on military aid to countries such as Israel that use weapons supplied by the United States against civilian populations.

The United Nations is challenged to uphold its Charter in the face of all the various anti-democratic pressures the United States brings to bear, whether it is by spying on United Nations officials, pressuring independent countries economically and politically or threatening the United Nations itself with economic sanctions. The United Nations must defend its founding principles despite those pressures, and the global community must be ready to increase economic and diplomatic support for the United Nations and UNESCO.

One of the great advancements of civilization has been the development of the concept of the rule of law — that human beings have universal rights and that there should be international institutions that work to safeguard those rights, especially in times of conflict and military occupation. The principles embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and other laws lay out that framework.

The challenge for the United Nations is not to develop new laws or to express new sentiments but to implement those existing universal principles and its existing resolutions to protect Palestinian human rights. The whole concept of universal rights and protection of civilians is endangered when powerful nations can pick and choose, in defiance of international bodies and global opinion, to whom the laws apply and for whom they are ignored. The law should be universal.

For Palestinians, the United Nations and other established institutions have failed to implement those universal principles and have been unable to hold the powerful accountable for their oppression of the weak. So it has become necessary for global civil society to step into the void. That is what is happening around the world, including in the United States, on behalf of human rights of Palestinians. That is why there is a growing movement of boycott, divestment and

sanctions to bring non-violent pressure on the State of Israel to end its systematic violations.

The Russell Tribunal is yet another expression of global civil society responding to the failure of the United Nations and Governments to uphold the law. One of Bertrand Russell's last accomplishments was the establishment, with French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, of the Russell Tribunal to investigate the role of the United States in the war in Viet Nam. The Tribunal was established as a means for civil society to bring to light evidence of war crimes ignored by the United States Government and by other nations and international institutions. Russell declared, "May this Tribunal prevent the crime of silence."

A new Russell Tribunal, on Palestine, has been convened, with three sessions to date, to examine Israel's treatment of the Palestinians. The most recent session was held November in South Africa, with judges including Nobel Peace Laureate Mairead Corrigan Maguire, emeritus Judge of Spain's Supreme Court José Antonio Martín Pallín, African-American poet Alice Walker and South African writer and activist Ronald Kasrils. They examined the question of whether Israel is engaged in the crime of apartheid. Israeli human rights activist Jeff Halper, director of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, said,

"States, along with the United Nations, are obligated to enforce international law and human rights conventions. When they do not, as in their failure to apply to Israel and its occupation the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid, the people themselves must rise up and demand that they do. Civil society forums such as the Russell Tribunal may not carry formal authority, but they represent millions of people the world over who believe that simply leaving Governments free to pursue their narrow agendas driven by power, sectarian ideology, militarism and the profits of a few is to doom us all to continued war, bloodshed and injustice."

The Tribunal concluded that Israel does indeed engage in the crime of apartheid:

"Israel subjects the Palestinian people to an institutionalized regime of domination amounting to apartheid as defined under international law The Palestinians living under colonial military rule in the occupied Palestinian territory are

subject to a particularly aggravated form of apartheid. Palestinian citizens of Israel, while entitled to vote, are not part of the Jewish nation as defined by Israeli law and are therefore excluded from the benefits of Jewish nationality and subject to systematic discrimination across the broad spectrum of recognized human rights. Irrespective of such differences, the Tribunal concludes that Israel's rule over the Palestinian people, wherever they reside, collectively amounts to a single integrated regime of apartheid."

The Russell Tribunal is not the first time Israeli apartheid has been identified. In 1961 Hendrik Verwoerd, then Prime Minister of South Africa and considered the architect of the system of apartheid, stated, "Israel, like South Africa, is an apartheid State." Both Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela have expressed concerns that Israel's behaviour was similar to what they experienced under South African apartheid. Mandela remarked,

"The United Nations took a strong stand against apartheid and, over the years, an international consensus was built, which helped to bring an end to this iniquitous system. But we know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians."

In 2009, the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa issued a report concluding that Israel practices both apartheid and colonialism. In 2010, Henry Siegman, former Executive Director of the American Jewish Congress, said, "Israel has crossed the threshold from the only democracy in the Middle East to the only apartheid regime in the Western world." Now in 2011, we can add the conclusions of the Russell Tribunal on Palestine.

Palestinian rights must no longer be held hostage to the domestic politics of the United States. Israel should not escape United Nations censure simply because it refuses to cooperate with international institutions. International law demands condemnation of Israel's violations and, crucially, decisive action to reverse them.

Palestinian dignity is assaulted on a daily basis. Both the Palestinian and Israeli people are diminished each passing day as the international diplomatic community allows the Israeli policies to continue. Every day, a tree is destroyed or a home is demolished.

Every day, a Bedouin village inside Israel is ground down by bulldozers, or Palestinians in the West Bank are attacked by settler pogroms that turn their lives into lives of fear. Every day, critical medicines go lacking in Gaza, and Gazans are forced to drink brackish water unfit for human consumption.

The so-called Quartet has failed. But while many question whether the United Nations should have ever agreed to participate in such sham diplomacy, diplomats can still play a constructive role by moving quickly to implement the necessary preconditions for serious and honest negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians based on the enforcement of international law.

It is essential that Israel's legitimate security concerns be separated from its illegitimate political agenda. The International Court of Justice ruling on the illegality of Israel's wall made just this sort of distinction, determining that Israel may build its wall on Israeli land but Israel cannot build its wall on Palestinian land, destroying Palestinian farms and homes and separating Palestinian villages and towns from each other.

It is illegal, not simply unhelpful, for Israel to build settlements on Palestinian lands. Israel violates international law when it imposes collective punishment on the people of Gaza.

United Nations-based solutions must be found to mitigate all of those issues. The international community must demand that Israel end its assaults on Gaza, which kill and injure civilians and destroy civilian infrastructure in an endless cycle of repeated destruction of international development assistance by Israel's United States-supplied bombs and missiles and Israel's United States-supplied Caterpillar bulldozers. All that is lacking is the will of the diplomatic community to impose solutions rooted in international law.

One of the privileges of working within civil society for Palestinian justice is witnessing the coming together of people from many origins to work together for justice. In my own small group, we have Jewish Americans, Palestinian Americans, Christians, Muslims and secular people who recognize in each other our common humanity. That is replicated around the world.

We in global civil society seek to rise above narrow national and tribal self-interest and truly

believe that peace is possible when our common humanity is recognized and justice is implemented. We honour the efforts of those Israelis who recognize that peace for Israel comes through justice for Palestinians. We honour the efforts of activists and United Nations workers from around the world, many of whom have risked their comfort and sometimes their lives in the name of justice. Though there are wide ranges of opinion about what the various solutions may be, we are united in the recognition of our common humanity and in our dreams of living together, as equals, on this small blue planet.

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Peter Miller for his statement. I would also like to thank, through him, all civil society organizations around the world who are involved in the question of Palestine for their work and solidarity with the Palestinian people.

It is my honour now to announce that our Committee has received messages of support and solidarity from many heads of State and government, from ministers for foreign affairs, Governments and organizations. I would like to recall that the texts of the messages will be published in a special bulletin of the Division for Palestinian Rights, but I would like to read out the list of those who sent them, in the order in which they were received.

We have received messages from the following Heads of State: His Excellency the President of the Republic of Senegal, His Excellency the President of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, His Excellency the President of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, His Excellency the President of the Russian Federation, Her Excellency the President of the Argentine Republic, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Belarus, His Excellency the President of the Federative Republic of Brazil, His Majesty the Sultan of Brunei Darussalam, His Excellency the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Indonesia, His Excellency the President of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Turkey, His Majesty the King of Bahrain, His Majesty the King of Morocco, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Guinea, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Namibia, His Excellency the President of the United Arab Emirates, His Excellency the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, His Excellency the

President of the Republic of South Africa, and His Majesty the King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

We have also received messages from the following Heads of Government: His Excellency the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, His Excellency the Prime Minister of Malaysia, and His Excellency the Premier of the State Council of the People's Republic of China.

The Committee has also received messages from the following Ministers for Foreign Affairs: His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Cuba, His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Madagascar, His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, and His Royal Majesty the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. We have also received a message from the Government of the Sultanate of Oman.

From intergovernmental organizations, the Committee has received messages from His Excellency the Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and from the European Union. We have also received a message from the civil society entity the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to the heads of State and government, ministers for foreign affairs, Governments and organizations that I have just mentioned, and to all participants in today's meeting, for their persistent efforts to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, and for their steadfast support for the Committee's mandated tasks.

The statements that we have heard today and the messages of solidarity that we have received demonstrate once again the unwavering support of the international community for the establishment of peace in the Middle East and the exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights, on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and international law. I can assure everyone here that our Committee — the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People — will spare no effort in its quest to attain those objectives.

I now have the pleasure to give the floor to the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, His Excellency Mr. Riyad Mansour.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): We are grateful to you, Mr. Chair, and to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for organizing this commemoration. We are also grateful to the Division for Palestinian Rights at the United Nations for collaborating in making this commemoration a reality. We are very grateful to everyone present, representing Governments and representing civil society. We are also very grateful to the leaders in all corners of the globe who have expressed solidarity with the Palestinian people. The messages and letters, whether read to us in this meeting or received by the Chairman of the Committee, make us very grateful for the very strong message of support from the peoples and leaders of the world on this very important day, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Through the collective effort of all here today, together with the struggle of our people, the Palestinian people, we were able to create the moment that led to our President submitting our application to join the community of nations as a Member of the United Nations on 23 September. We are grateful for that collective effort.

Through the collective effort of all here today, together with the struggle of our Palestinian people, we were succeeded in acquiring admission to UNESCO — an historic development in which, for the first time in the history of the Palestinian people and the question of Palestine, the State of Palestine was recognized by a major United Nations agency as a member, thereby opening the door for us, the Palestinian State, not to be an issue under debate but to be a reality, to exist. We exist as a nation, we exist as a people and we exist as a State. UNESCO accepted us as such. We understand that according to international law, we are therefore an accepted reality as a State in the United Nations system. We are grateful for that.

With the collective effort of all here today, together with the struggle of the Palestinian people, we will succeed — and hopefully soon — in ending the Israeli occupation of our Palestinian land, including East Jerusalem. We will succeed in achieving independence and full membership in the United Nations. We hope that next year around this time our commemoration will be of a different nature — not only expressing solidarity with the Palestinian people, but perhaps celebrating the victory of the Palestinian people in ending occupation and becoming a full

Member of the United Nations. Maybe all of us, with thousands of others, will be lined up in front of this building to raise the flag of Palestine at the United Nations.

Once more, I wish to thank you, Sir, on behalf of the Palestinian people and their leadership. We will never forget the work of the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Division for Palestinian Rights and all of our friends who are helping us to attain the objectives of the Palestinian people.

The Chair (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank Ambassador Riyad Mansour for his statement. I should once again like to express the Committee's determination to pursue its work until a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine is reached.

I am pleased to announce that the Division for Palestinian Rights has received additional messages, from His Excellency the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran and His Excellency the President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The Secretariat also informs me that we have just received messages from the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic and the Republic of Tunisia.

Before adjourning this special meeting, I would like to thank all those who helped to organize it — in particular the staff of the Division for Palestinian Rights, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the Department of Public Information and the Office of Central Support Services — and all those who work behind the scenes.

Immediately after the conclusion of this meeting, we will be showing a film here in this conference room on the history of the occupied Palestinian territory, entitled *La terre parle arabe*. I invite everyone who would like to show solidarity with the Palestinian people to remain and see the film. I also invite everyone to the opening this evening of an exhibit entitled "A Palestinian Vista — Uprooted from our homeland ... we rooted the homeland in ourselves". This will take place at 6 p.m. in the Northeast Gallery of the public lobby of the General Assembly Building. It will be followed by a musical performance by Simon Shaheen and a reception to which everyone here is invited. We would be grateful for your participation.

The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.