



# General Assembly

Official Records

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

**356<sup>th</sup>** meeting

Monday, 25 November 2013, 10 a.m.

New York

*Chair:* Mr. Diallo ..... (Senegal)

*The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.*

### International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

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

It is my honour and pleasure to welcome His Excellency Mr. John Ashe, President of the General Assembly; Mr. Jan Eliasson, Deputy Secretary-General and representative of the Secretary-General; His Excellency Mr. Liu Jieyi, President of the Security Council; His Excellency Mr. Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations and representative of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas at this meeting; Mr. Filippo Grandi, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA); and Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

I would also like to welcome the representatives of Member States, intergovernmental organizations and representatives of civil society organizations and all those who have accepted the Committee's invitation to participate in this special meeting. I would like to welcome to this meeting the Palestinian performers for this evening's cultural event: Ms. Nai Barghouti and her troupe; and Mr. Mohammed Assaf, UNRWA Regional Youth Ambassador and winner of this year's *Arab Idol* contest. I would also like to thank Mr. David Wildman

of the United Methodist Church General Board of Global Ministries, who has kindly agreed to represent civil society organizations, which are numerous and active on the question of Palestine.

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

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to extend my satisfaction and gratitude to delegations for their presence among us today, on the occasion of the commemoration of this important event, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian people. Each year it offers us the happy opportunity not only to renew our fraternal solidarity with the Palestinian people and to review what has been done, but also to look towards the future with regard to what we wish to build for Palestine.

This day also allows us to engage in what we hope will be a fruitful reflection and to exchange views on the various measures that might be adopted by the international community, the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Quartet, the Secretariat, the United Nations bodies on the ground, Member States and civil society in order to realize the vision of a free, independent and prosperous Palestinian State living in peace with Israel.

The entire world still recalls the historic day of 29 November 2012 when, in the presence of the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, the General Assembly recognized Palestine's statehood status through resolution 67/19. Sixty-six years after the United Nations promise to give Palestine the status of

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an independent State, we can agree that this recognition seems to be the fulfilment of an internationally agreed requirement and the correction of an anomaly.

It is time for Palestinian children to no longer be persecuted and be able to breathe the fresh air of freedom, instead of the asphyxiating odours of tear gas. Their right to life must benefit from the greatest protection without being dependent upon the moods of anonymous soldiers. Their parents should be able to fulfil their needs without having to wonder if their homes will still be standing tomorrow. Palestinian farmers should be able to go peacefully to their olive groves and without the risk of seeing their fields destroyed and burned by uncontrolled settlers.

It is time for the people of Gaza to see their peers in the West Bank, from whom they have been unfairly separated by the blockade. As with the faithful of all revealed religions, the Palestinians should also enjoy their freedom of religion without constraint and be able to freely travel to the holy places of Jerusalem. Palestinian refugees should leave the overcrowded camps to permanently return to their homes.

Today, let us all pledge to resolutely work together towards welcoming, in the near future, the President of Palestine, as a fully sovereign Head of State, and a full member of the United Nations family. Let us work together to seize what appears to be one of the last chances to reach a negotiated solution on the coexistence of two States — Palestinian and Israeli. Indeed, time is running out. The negotiation process is dangerously threatened by certain policies, including the continuation of the establishment of settlements.

In that connection, I welcome the concrete and sound steps taken by the European Union to tighten its regulations, especially with regard to products coming from Jewish settlements. All Governments and international organizations should base their actions on and follow that example. Similarly, we should provide support and assistance to the Palestinian Government to enable it to meet its obligations in the difficult situation that it is experiencing. We must also help the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to effectively continue the work it has been doing for many decades. Finally, we must encourage Palestinians to overcome their differences in order to facilitate lasting peace.

In order to respond more effectively to the growing burden of the volume of our Committee's work, our

Bureau has welcomed new members. At the same time, our Working Group to raise the awareness of civil society has resumed its activities.

Today we officially inaugurate the United Nations Platform for Palestine, which is an online tool for coordinating the work of our Committee with that of non-governmental organizations. Furthermore, through draft resolutions A/68/L.12, A/68/L.13, A/68/L.14 and A/68/L.15, which I will submit this afternoon to the General Assembly under the agenda item entitled the "Question of Palestine", we will ask, *inter alia*, that 2014 be declared the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. I urge the delegations of the Committee to show their solidarity by voting in favour of the four draft resolutions. The success of the International Year will depend on the mobilization of Governments, civil society and the whole United Nations system.

The Committee will continue to make every effort necessary to effectively fulfil the mandate that the General Assembly has entrusted to it until all the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people have been fully realized. Our commitment and mobilization remain in favour of a permanent, just and lasting settlement of the conflict, based on a two-State solution, enabling Israel and Palestine to live in peace and security.

I now have the honour to give the floor to the President of the General Assembly, His Excellency Mr. John Ashe.

**Mr. Ashe**, President of the General Assembly: I would like to thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for the invitation to address this year's special meeting on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This important Day of Solidarity has been observed annually since 1978, following a decision taken by the General Assembly the previous year.

On behalf of the General Assembly, I would like to thank the Committee for its dedicated work towards the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and for promoting international solidarity with the people of Palestine in their legitimate aspirations for independence and sovereignty.

This year's observation takes place while the renewed round of the Middle East peace negotiations is under way. We all hope that the ongoing talks will

lead to an understanding on all six permanent status issues, and to reaching a just and lasting settlement to the conflict. In that context, I reiterate our appreciation for the ongoing diplomatic efforts that are being complemented by a comprehensive Palestinian economic revival plan.

Following its decision last year to admit the State of Palestine as a non-member observer State, the General Assembly welcomed the President of the State of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas, as a Head of State for his address to the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly during September's general debate segment (see A/68/PV.12). Prior to that, in August of this year, the State of Palestine welcomed the Secretary-General as a State guest when he visited Palestine for the first time after the recognition by the General Assembly. In his presence, a country agreement was signed between the United Nations and the State of Palestine.

Another positive development that took place soon after the resumption of negotiations was the agreement to release 104 Palestinian prisoners who were held in Israeli prisons for more than 20 years. That decision had been repeatedly called for by the General Assembly.

I am also encouraged by the recent commitment of Arab leaders to renew the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, which holds the promise for regional stability and which can indeed become an important part of current peace efforts.

I call on Governments and the peoples of both Israel and Palestine to avoid actions that would undermine the fragile hope created by the renewed round of negotiations and to cease and desist from any actions that are in contravention of international law or that would pose a major impediment to peace in the Middle East and, more importantly, render the two-State solution impossible. In that context, I specifically refer to the issues of settlements and annexation.

Ongoing peace negotiations must be given a chance for peace to take root and flourish, but peace cannot be meaningful and durable without taking fully into account the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, which are key to the solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East. As President of the General Assembly at its sixty-eighth session, I would like to reiterate that the Assembly remains committed to a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, resulting in a two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security within recognized pre-1967 borders.

It remains the General Assembly's resolute position that the United Nations has a permanent responsibility with regard to the question of Palestine until the question is resolved in a satisfactory manner in accordance with international law. In that context, the International Day of Solidarity continues to serve the important purpose of reminding the Member States of that collective international responsibility towards the Palestinian people and their free and prosperous future. I urge Member States to maintain and enhance their support and awareness-raising campaigns for the observance of the Day of Solidarity and for the peaceful resolution of the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In that regard, I welcome the initiative of the Committee to request the General Assembly to proclaim the year 2014 as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Let us use that important initiative to redouble our efforts to create an environment conducive to the successful outcome of the ongoing peace talks. I call upon all Governments, intergovernmental and civil society organizations to make 2014 the decisive year for achieving peace between Israel and Palestine.

**The Chair** (*spoke in French*): The Committee appreciates the eminent role played by Mr. Ashe in conducting the work of the General Assembly on the question of Palestine and the Middle East in general.

I now have the pleasure and honour to give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Jan Eliasson, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations.

**The Deputy Secretary-General:** The Secretary-General offers his best wishes to all participants in this Hall today and his regret that he is unable to join us. He has asked me to convey the following message.

This annual Day of Solidarity is an opportunity to reflect on the critical situation faced by the Palestinian people and consider our collective contributions and responsibilities as Governments, international or civil society organizations towards Israeli-Palestinian peace. I appreciate the efforts of the Committee to keep the international community's attention and focus on the question of Palestine.

This year's observance takes place as Israeli and Palestinian negotiators work together towards the agreed objective of a peaceful, comprehensive settlement on all permanent status issues. I call on all members of the international community to support the parties in that

ambitious endeavour to fulfil the two-State objective, bringing about an end to the conflict. All parties must act in a responsible way and refrain from actions that undermine the prospects for successful negotiations.

I am alarmed by the increasingly dangerous situation on the ground. There has been an escalation of violence and incitement. Although I welcome Israel's release of prisoners as part of the agreement to renew talks, its settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory continues and remains a cause for very grave concern. Announcements of thousands of new housing units cannot be reconciled with the goal of a two-State solution and risks the collapse of negotiations. Settlements are in violation of international law and constitute obstacles to peace. All settlement activity in the West Bank and East Jerusalem must cease. Measures that prejudice final status issues are not to be recognized.

Meanwhile, Palestinians continue to be displaced through house demolitions in Area C of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Of particular concern are developments in East Jerusalem, where this year alone some one hundred structures have been demolished, displacing 300 people. Hundreds more Palestinians are at risk because their homes were built without Israeli-issued building permits. That underscores the importance of Palestinian access to a fair planning and zoning regime. I remind Israel of its obligation to protect the population under occupation.

The situation in Gaza remains a source of serious concern. I reiterate my condemnation of all rocket fire into Israel and of the construction of tunnels into Israel by militants. Following the recent tunnel discovery, Israel suspended the transfer of construction material into Gaza, including for humanitarian projects. While I recognize Israel's legitimate security concerns, I urge Israel to ensure that the needs of the civilian population in Gaza are met.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), a lifeline for millions of Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank and the region, continues to face serious financial difficulties. I call on all donors, including new ones, to make or increase contributions to sustain UNRWA's vital and indispensable operations.

Palestinian unity based on the commitments of the Palestine Liberation Organization and the positions of the Arab Peace Initiative is essential for the two-

State solution. I urge the Palestinians to overcome their divisions without delay in the interest of unity. The goal remains clear — an end to the occupation that started in 1967 and the creation of a sovereign, independent and viable State of Palestine based on the pre-1967 borders, living side by side in peace with a secure State of Israel. Jerusalem is to emerge from negotiations as the capital of two States, with arrangements as to the holy sites that are acceptable to all. An agreed solution must be found for millions of Palestinian refugees around the region.

This past September marked the twentieth anniversary of the Oslo accords. After two decades of talks and far too many adverse developments on the ground, I urge Palestinian and Israeli leaders to take the decisions that will usher in a political solution to the serious and long-standing conflict. The United Nations, through its engagement with all relevant partners, including within the Quartet, stands ready to contribute to that process and to the two-State solution. We cannot afford to lose the current moment of opportunity. I ask everyone in the international community to work together to translate the solidarity expressed here today into positive action for peace and justice.

Let me end on a personal, human note. During my visit last week to the Arab-Africa summit in Kuwait, I met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Palestine, Mr. Riad Malki, who told me about his son. His son had grown up in the West Bank and left to study abroad, in Manchester in the United Kingdom. The son sent his father, the Foreign Minister, an e-mail expressing his great joy, relief and astonishment in not having to identify himself on the streets of Manchester, that he encountered no road blocks, that he felt like a free young man.

The Foreign Minister, who agreed that I could mention this to the Committee today, hoped that his son would eventually return to work for peace and for a solution to this far too longstanding conflict. He hoped that we should all recall that when we talk about this situation, in the end it is all about human beings — the human beings who are affected and the human beings who should be put in the centre. I would say that goes for both Palestinians and Israelis.

**The Chair** (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the Deputy Secretary-General, Mr. Jan Eliasson, for participating in the special meeting of the Committee. I would like to ask Mr. Eliasson to convey to the



Secretary-General our sincere appreciation for his important message and for his continuing personal efforts aimed at promoting a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine.

I now have the honour to give the floor to the President of the Security Council, His Excellency Mr. Liu Jieyi.

**Mr. Liu Jieyi**, President of the Security Council (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to begin by thanking 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 the month of November.

The Security Council has always paid close attention to the question of Palestine. It has supported all efforts to seek its comprehensive settlement through dialogue and negotiation, on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the road map for peace in the Middle East, and the Arab Peace Initiative, so as to realize the vision of two States, Palestine and Israel, living side by side in peace, and to achieve a comprehensive, lasting peace in the Middle East.

The question of Palestine is the crux of the Middle East issue and has therefore remained high on the Council's agenda. In order to achieve a comprehensive solution, the parties should stay on a course that can lead to independent Palestinian statehood and peaceful coexistence for the two States of Palestine and Israel. Negotiation should be the only way to achieve that peace. The principle of land for peace should be firmly upheld, and the international community should provide significant guarantees in order to enable the peace process to move forward. Last year saw Palestine obtain the status of a non-member observer State in the United Nations. At the same time, however, Palestine and Israel still have major differences on a series of key issues. Many difficulties and challenges must be resolved before a two-State solution can be achieved through peace talks.

Throughout the past year, the Council has actively supported the parties' various efforts to reach a resumption of talks between the Palestinians and Israel. It has continued to receive monthly briefings on the situation from the Secretary-General's Special Coordinator for the Middle East and from the Department of Political Affairs, and it has held regular open debates on the Middle East. Council members

commended the Palestinian and Israeli leaders for their enormous political courage and efforts to move the peace process forward. They welcomed the resumption of direct talks between Palestine and Israel in July, and expressed the hope that both sides would take the opportunity to meet each other half way and achieve substantive progress in the talks.

Over the course of the year, Council members have expressed concern about Israel's continuing construction of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, in the belief that such actions undermine peace efforts and the viability of a two-State solution. They have stressed the importance of complete fulfilment of obligations under relevant international law. Any unilateral action, including the construction of settlements, will not be recognized by the international community and cannot prejudice the outcome of peace talks. The Council members have expressed their concern about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Gaza. They have reiterated their calls for the full implementation of Council resolutions 1850 (2008) and 1860 (2009), and stressed the importance of lifting the Gaza blockade completely, ensuring the flow of goods and people into Gaza and allowing the unimpeded distribution of humanitarian assistance throughout Gaza. They have commended the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for its enormous and effective work to alleviate the suffering of Palestinian refugees, and expressed the hope that the international community would continue to increase its support for UNRWA.

The sustained and steady development of the Palestinian economy is crucial to realizing independent Palestinian statehood and regional stability. Council members call on the international community to increase humanitarian assistance to Palestine, provide more support for developing the Palestinian economy and have greater confidence in the Palestinian-Israeli peace process.

The Security Council attaches great importance to the Quartet's efforts to advance the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. It welcomed the Quartet's ministerial meeting in September and its issuance of a statement, and expressed the hope that the Quartet will continue to play its important role. It commends the unremitting efforts of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to work towards realizing the Palestinian people's legitimate

rights, and it supports the convening of international conferences in various countries, including the United Nations International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, held in June in Beijing, aimed at bringing the international community together and maintaining positive momentum for the peace talks.

The Security Council will pursue its efforts to facilitate a just and equitable solution to the question of Palestine and to faithfully shoulder its responsibilities as outlined in the relevant Security Council resolutions. It will remain committed to achieving the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and comprehensive, lasting peace and stability in the Middle East, on the basis of the peaceful coexistence of the two States of Palestine and Israel.

**The Chair** (*spoke in French*): I thank His Excellency Mr. Liu Jieyi, President of the Security Council, for his important statement, once again confirming that the Council remains fully committed to a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on a vision of two States of Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

I now have the honour to give the floor to Mr. Filippo Grandi, the outgoing Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

**Mr. Grandi** (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East): On behalf of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the United Nations body responsible for assisting 5 million Palestinian refugees, I would like to express my pleasure at the honour of being here today with you, Mr. Chair, the President of the General Assembly, the Deputy Secretary-General, the President of the Security Council and the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine. I would also like to thank you, Sir, all the members of the Committee and all the speakers for being here today.

I will say only a few words, as much has already been said, before ceding the floor, as part of my slot, to Mr. Mohammed Assaf, whom I will introduce later.

Although solidarity is not a tangible value, it is crucial, and it is important that we continue to express that solidarity with the Palestinian people. Solidarity transcends political and financial support; while that support is still needed, solidarity is crucial to enabling

Palestinians to feel that they are not alone in the many predicaments that have been described this morning.

From the perspective of the organization that I have the honour to lead, we are sadly familiar with that risk of loneliness and with the need for solidarity. We have dealt for more than 60 years throughout the region with Palestinian refugees whose 65 year exile, as has been mentioned, has not yet found the just solution it deserves. Solidarity with Palestinian refugees is especially important to them now as human beings, as was recalled by the Deputy-Secretary-General. This is a very difficult juncture in their history, as I mentioned here a few weeks ago in the Fourth Committee. We must not forget that more than half a million of those refugees are literally at risk of their lives today in Syria, and that more than 1 million Palestinian refugees, together with other Palestinians, continue to live under the blockade and to experience very severe hardship in Gaza.

Of course, a political solution is needed for the Palestinian refugees in Syria, just as it is needed for all other civilians, and the blockade must be lifted for Palestinian refugees and all other Palestinians in Gaza. But in the case of refugees taken comprehensively, I would like to stress that a just solution to their plight and, in particular, redress of the injustice that caused their original exile, are urgently required. We must hope that that will be addressed in the best possible manner in the current direct talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians in a way that is agreed and agreeable to all.

Meanwhile, as has already been addressed several times — and I am grateful to the speakers who have done so — UNWRA also needs financial support at a juncture that is close to desperate. As was recalled in the Security Council a few days ago, if fresh money is not contributed to our core programmes we will not be able to pay our staff of 30,000, either in whole or in part, for the month of December. It is important to support UNWRA because we provide relief to refugees who are under special hardship. We also provide opportunities through educational and other programmes to all refugees and especially to the young.

It is therefore fitting for me to cede the floor at this point to a young Palestinian refugee, Mohammed Assaf. He hails from the Khan Younis refugee camp, in Gaza. Just a few months ago, he won a very important musical competition, the *Arab Idol*, and was appointed the first ever regional ambassador for youth for UNWRA.

**The Chair** (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to Mr. Assaf.

**Mr. Assaf** (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am greatly honoured to be here at United Nations Headquarters to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with my people, the people of Palestine. As a 24-year-old Palestinian refugee from Gaza, and the winner of the *Arab Idol* competition on MBC, it is also a source of great pride to me on this special day to be able to convey the voice of Palestinian youth from the occupied territories, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and the diaspora. I speak today in my capacity as the regional youth ambassador for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the largest agency of the United Nations.

In my home town, Khan Younis in Gaza, we know and rely on UNRWA, whose job is to assist and protect 5 million Palestinian refugees in the Middle East. UNRWA's work includes supporting the neediest Palestinian refugees, including women, children, the elderly and people with disabilities. UNRWA is also working to improve and rehabilitate the 58 Palestinian refugee camps across the region, like Khan Younis, in which many of us still reside.

UNRWA also provides health care. It operates over 130 health centres in the region, which receive 10 million visits a year, including from pregnant women who need prenatal care, young children who need vaccines and checkups, and people with chronic illnesses such as diabetes who need ongoing medical attention and care.

UNRWA also stands for education. Every day, nearly half a million children attend over 700 UNRWA schools. They learn to read, write, add and subtract but they also learn about the responsibility each of them has to work hard to reach his or her full potential. There will be over 1.5 million Palestinian refugee youth by 2020. In recognition of that fact, UNRWA has made a real and meaningful commitment to supporting us by providing vocational training and scholarships, promoting our health and minds, and helping young refugees by giving them limited loans to start new businesses and projects that can in turn generate more opportunities.

In Gaza, young people like me grow up in an incredibly challenging environment. Many of our parents struggle to find jobs or to put food on the

table; continual power outages and fuel shortages make studying difficult. Then there is the violence, the isolation and the blockade. Sometimes it feels as if there is no escape. Gazans do not have real social or economic rights, such as the right to a decent standard of living, adequate housing, clean water, safety or dignity. That is why we count on UNRWA to be there each and every day to defend the rights of Palestinians to those basic human needs. That is all the more important in light of the deteriorating circumstances of Palestinian refugees in Gaza, and indeed throughout the region.

I faced many great difficulties in my journey outside Palestine in order to take part in *Arab Idol*, a programme that was followed by more than 120 million Arabs, which God helped me to accomplish and also to win. I would like to note the positive role of the television station MBC, which has stood by me before, during and after I secured my title, which not only made me popular but made it possible for me to be here today as regional youth ambassador. That is the best example of the constructive role that information and media can play in helping the youth of our region.

Just think of Syria, where hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees have been displaced, many for the second or third time. Tens of thousands have been forced to flee the country, seeking safety in Lebanon, Jordan or other countries. Since 2011, eight UNRWA staff members have lost their lives as a result of the conflict in Syria. Many of them were teachers. A few days ago, UNRWA Commissioner-General Filippo Grandi said that UNRWA contributes to the resilience and steadfastness of the Palestinian refugees every day in a very simple, practical and concrete manner, in the classrooms, clinics and homes of those too poor to stand alone and in the endeavours of those who are strong enough to build a better future. Palestinian refugees have witnessed great steadfastness on the part of UNRWA itself, too.

I would like to conclude by appealing to all the supporters of and donors to UNRWA present here today to guarantee that the Agency, which this year is facing a financial deficit of over \$30 million, be provided with enough money to maintain its services to the Palestinian refugees. If such funds are not provided in the coming weeks, UNRWA will not be able to pay the salaries of its staff in December. That is not acceptable. I appeal to participants to support UNRWA, just as UNRWA supported me and many other refugees by giving us the strength to work for a better future.

**The Chair** (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Filippo Grandi, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), for his statement. We fully appreciate the severity of the financial crisis facing UNRWA and hope that current and new donors will respond generously to allow its critical humanitarian work to continue. I would like to thank Mr. Grandi in particular for his three years of outstanding leadership as Commissioner-General of UNRWA and his exceptional dedication to the cause of Palestine refugees. I wish him all the best in his future endeavours.

I would also like to thank Mohammed Assaf for his statement and his presence here in the Committee's for this International Day of Solidarity.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations, who will read out a message from His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the State of Palestine.

**Mr. Mansour** (Palestine): I am delighted to see my good friend, the Foreign Minister of Brazil, and his representative among us, and to see Mr. Lewis, who is just walking across the room to join us on this very important occasion. I am also honoured that two Palestinians from a refugee background, my brother Mohammed Assaf and myself, are addressing the Committee today. One of us, Mohammed Assaf, is on a shining trajectory as a Palestinian who we are so proud of, demonstrating a wonderful dimension of the attributes of the Palestinian people, and the other, myself, Riyad Mansour, is the son of a Palestinian refugee family and is representing the State of Palestine. I am so proud to serve in that capacity and to be sharing the rostrum with Mohammed Assaf, the winner of *Arab Idol*. I hope all participants and many others will be in this same room tonight to enjoy his singing, since we will be celebrating the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People tonight in a very appropriate and delightful way. Mohammed Assaf has agreed, with another Palestinian performer, to entertain us tonight.

I am also honoured to read out to the Committee the statement of President Mahmoud Abbas addressed to the Committee.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

"At the outset, I wish to convey to the Committee the greetings of the State of Palestine

and the Palestinian people, and to all our friends participating in the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People around the world. We are commemorating this occasion one year after the adoption by the General Assembly, on 29 November 2012, of the historic resolution 67/19, raising the status of Palestine to that of a non-member observer State at the United Nations. Of course, our objective and endeavour remain full membership in the United Nations, which is our people's legitimate and legal right.

"We underscore, in that regard, the call in resolution 181 (II), by which historic Palestine was partitioned, for consideration to be given to the application for membership in the United Nations by either State. We recall further that Israel's admission to the United Nations in 1949 was accompanied by two conditions: its commitment to the partition resolution 181 (II) and the establishment of the Palestinian State; and its commitment to resolution 194 (III), which was reaffirmed in the Arab Peace Initiative, with regard to reaching a just and agreed solution to the plight of Palestine refugees.

"On this day, we reiterate our deep gratitude to all Member States, non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations, our brothers, sisters, friends and freedom- and peace-loving peoples around the world who continue to stand steadfastly by our people. We are grateful for their solidarity with and support for the Palestinian people's legitimate national aspirations for the achievement of their freedom and independence and a just and lasting peace.

"Despite all the challenges, hardships and setbacks, we continue to have faith that a just peace can be achieved in our region and that right will prevail. Therefore, we appeal to participants to continue to stand firmly for peace, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the right to self-determination, which the Palestinian people have too long been denied. It is high time to find the political will to act decisively for the realization of the inalienable rights of our people, including the right to independence in their State of Palestine, on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

"Since its inception, the United Nations has defended our cause, keeping it a priority on the



agenda of the international community, extended a helping hand to our people and adopted resolutions and recommendations that constitute a foundation that cannot be bypassed in the search for a just, lasting and comprehensive solution. The permanent responsibility of the United Nations for the question of Palestine must be upheld until the issue, in all its aspects, is satisfactorily resolved. In that regard, we express our deep appreciation for the efforts of His Excellency the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, and of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, its Chair, His Excellency Ambassador Abdou Salam Diallo of Senegal, and other members of the Bureau, as well as all members and observers of the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat, aimed at promoting the realization of the rights of the Palestinian people and at ensuring the achievement of a just and lasting peace.

“Today, we also reaffirm our gratitude for the strong and principled resolutions adopted by the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Human Rights Council and other organs and bodies of the United Nations, including the International Court of Justice, all of which have contributed to safeguarding the rights of our people over many decades. Those resolutions have addressed all facets of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, including, inter alia, the core issues of the Palestine refugees, the right to self-determination, the status of Jerusalem, the illegal Israeli settlement campaign, the unjust blockade against our people in the Gaza Strip and the issue of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

“We regret the fact that the countless resolutions on the question of Palestine have not been implemented, which has clearly compounded the conflict over many decades, inflicting grave hardships on the Palestinian people and the continued denial of their rights. That regrettable reality confirms the widespread conviction that there is, indeed, a double standard when it comes to United Nations resolutions regarding Israel that are not implemented, allowing it to continue behaving as if it were a State above the law.

“This year marks the passage of 46 years since the June 1967 war, when Israel forcibly occupied the remaining territory of historical Palestine: the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza

Strip. We stress that this unjust situation and the military occupation of our land and our people must end. We reiterate our urgent calls on the international community to act forthwith to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to comply with its legal obligations, the relevant United Nations resolutions and its international commitments and to cease its violations of international law and its illegal, aggressive and destructive policies and practices.

“The insidious Israeli settlement campaign and the confiscation of Palestinian lands in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, the capital of our State, must be completely halted. The demolition of Palestinian homes and the expulsion of Palestinians from their homes and properties must stop. The construction of the apartheid annexation wall must cease. The Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails must be released. The unjust and inhumane blockade imposed on the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip must be lifted. The illegal actions and measures to Judaize East Jerusalem and alter or erase the Christian and Muslim Palestinian presence and identity in the Holy City must come to an end. All acts of violence and terrorism perpetrated by Israeli settlers against the Palestinian civilian population must stop.

“The State of Palestine continues to act with the utmost responsibility to serve its people and to uphold its legal obligations and international commitments. It has consistently acted in good faith for the sake of peace, repeatedly reaffirming its adherence to the long-standing parameters of the peace process, which are embodied in Security Council resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet road map, and to the two-State solution for the realization of an independent, sovereign, democratic, viable and contiguous State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and security on the basis of the pre-1967 borders.

“For decades, we have expressed our readiness to reach a solution to the conflict with Israel that conforms with international resolutions and initiatives through the establishment of our Palestinian State on only 22 per cent of the territory of historical Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and to reach a just and agreed solution to the plight of the Palestine refugees, in accordance with resolution 194 (III).

“We reaffirm those commitments and that readiness once again today. Despite diminishing hopes and the critical situation on the ground due to Israeli violations, we remain committed to the two-State solution and the resumed negotiations, with full recognition for the vital support of the United States, the members of the Quartet, the League of Arab States and all other concerned countries. Our hand remains extended in peace. That is why we took the decision a few months ago to participate in a new round of negotiations with the Israeli side aimed at resolving all final-status issues and concluding a comprehensive and final peace agreement.

“I affirm that we began and that we shall continue those negotiations in good faith. We are committed to fostering the most conducive atmosphere for the continuation of the negotiations in a meaningful and credible manner in order to reach a peace agreement that redresses the historic unprecedented injustice that has befallen the Palestinian people since the Nakba of 1948 to the present day. We seek a peace agreement that bring about a complete end to the Israeli occupation and the independence of the State of Palestine on all Palestinian lands occupied in 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital; that ensures the security and dignity of our people; and that provides for a just and agreed solution to the plight of the Palestine refugees, in accordance with resolution 194 (II), as called for by the Arab Peace Initiative. In that regard, we stress that that historic initiative, which was widely received by the international community, constitutes a real opportunity for the accomplishment of a comprehensive regional peace in which the Arabs recognize Israel in exchange for its full withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories and the implementation of the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders.

“On this day, which marks the sixty-sixth anniversary of the adoption of the 1947 partition resolution 181 (II), the Palestinian people look forward to the future with great hope. They are determined to remain steadfast on their land and to realize their inalienable rights, confident that the international community will not allow the chance before us to be missed, the chance to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict on all tracks, starting at its basis, which is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This

is an opportunity to begin a new era of cooperation and coexistence in the region, where there is hope, peace, security and prospects for a better future for all of our children.”

*(spoke in English)*

Copies of this statement in English are available in the Hall. There is also a gift from the State of Palestine to all of those present on this special occasion, the first time that we have met in this capacity following the adoption of resolution 67/19 on 29 November 2012. I hope that members will enjoy both of them.

**The Chair** *(spoke in French)*: I thank Ambassador Riyad Mansour and ask him to convey our sincere thanks to President Mahmoud Abbas for his very important philosophical and political message. On behalf of the Committee, I would also like to assure President Abbas and through him the Palestinian people of the Committee’s firm commitment to continue its efforts as mandated by the General Assembly with a view to promoting a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank once again His Excellency Mr. John Ashe, President of the General Assembly; His Excellency Mr. Jan Eliasson, Deputy Secretary-General; Mr. Liu Jieyi, President of the Security Council; Mr. Filippo Grandi, Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East; and Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Under-Secretary-General, for their valuable contributions to this important meeting.

I shall now suspend the meeting for a few minutes to allow some of our guests to leave.

*The meeting was suspended at 11.30 a.m. and resumed at 11.35 a.m.*

**The Chair** *(spoke in French)*: I now give the floor to Ambassador Palitha Kohona, Chair 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), Chair of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories: It is my pleasure to be present on this occasion, both in my capacity as Chair of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli

Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories and to represent my own country, Sri Lanka. The International Day of Solidarity highlights the struggle of the Palestinian people to realize their inalienable rights and strengthens the links between their well-wishers worldwide.

Looking back as this year draws to a close, we note that, despite all our efforts and considerable international attention, the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories has not seen much improvement. The hardships, the humiliations and the denial that the Palestinians have continued to suffer since 1948 are a sad reminder that, in spite of the progress we have made since the Second World War in the areas of international justice, human rights and humanitarian affairs, the international community has still to make any significant impact on the Palestinian situation.

During the annual visit to the Middle East of the Israeli Practices in the occupied territories Committee, on which we reported to the Fourth Committee, we were disappointed to note the same disturbing practices we had seen in the previous years. I recall that the Committee called on Israel to conduct credible investigations into cases of injuries and deaths of Palestinian detainees and prisoners, and the mistreatment of children in detention — a position supported by the UNICEF.

During the past year, Israel has continued its policies and practices, contrary to international law, to transfer its population to the territories occupied since 1967. The routine demolition of houses and the forced displacement of Palestinians in the West Bank have continued. We have expressed our concern over the continued construction of the wall and the encirclement of Palestinian communities by the wall. The Committee also called on Israel to comply with the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the legal consequences of the construction of the wall in the occupied Palestinian territory, and in particular to cease the practice of dividing communities and dispossessing Palestinian farmers of their land through the ongoing construction of the wall and the network of roads and highways connecting illegal settlement blocs in the West Bank. We note the lack of effort on the part of Israeli authorities to prevent or punish violence committed by Israeli settlers.

The blockade of Gaza, a prolonged collective punishment of the entire population of Gaza, has

entered its seventh year, although some relief has been provided recently. The Committee noted the deterioration of living conditions for ordinary citizens of Gaza since last November's hostilities. The blockade in Gaza has created an aid-dependent economy, and the United Nations is required to keep the vast majority of the people in Gaza supplied with their minimum necessities.

The Committee highlighted the illegal nature of activities of companies registered in their own countries that profit from and exploit Israel's settlements in the West Bank and the occupied Syrian Golan. It is the Committee's view that these multinational companies and non-governmental organizations help the perpetuation of the occupation. The Committee also called on Israel to end discriminatory water distribution practices in the occupied Syrian Golan and to desist from issuing drilling licenses to companies for oil and gas exploration, which amounts to the legitimization of exploitation of natural resources in the occupied Syrian Golan and thus a violation of Israel's obligations as the occupying Power.

The Committee is concerned that, if the unsatisfactory conditions in the occupied territories continue, simmering popular discontent could result in another round of serious violence. We therefore hope that every effort will be made to achieve success in the resumed negotiations so that both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples will be able to enjoy peace and prosperity in their lands.

We note that the Caracas Declaration requested the General Assembly to proclaim 2014 the international year of solidarity with the Palestinian people. This would be a welcome expression of international solidarity with the Palestinian people as they seek to recover their inalienable rights. The world continues to aspire to a peaceful settlement between Palestine and Israel. My colleagues and I join in celebrating the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestine people.

**The Chair** (*spoke in French*): I thank Ambassador Kohona for his important statement. We appreciate his Committee's contributions to our meeting and the active participation of his country in our Committee's activities as an Observer.

I now have the pleasure of giving the floor to Ambassador Mohammad Khazaei, Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations, who will deliver a message from His

Excellency Mr. Hassan Rouhani, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries.

**Mr. Khazaei** (Islamic Republic of Iran): I am honoured to address this meeting on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for its important work in promoting the cause of the Palestinian people. The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is a solemn occasion for renewing our commitment to a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine and to comprehensive peace in the Middle East — a goal that has eluded us for far too long, with serious consequences. This day is a reminder that the question of Palestine remains the oldest unresolved issue before the United Nations. It is an occasion to reflect on a situation of continued occupation that has dispossessed the Palestinian people and subjected them to untold suffering and tragedy over the decades.

For many years, the Non-Aligned Movement has maintained a firm position of solidarity with the Palestinian people and its just cause, which has rejected Israel's illegal occupation of all of the Arab territories and has condemned the massive, flagrant and systematic violations of human rights and of international humanitarian law committed by the occupying Power. In this context, at the sixteenth Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in Tehran in August 2012, the Heads of State and Government of the Movement again reviewed the serious situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and reiterated their grave concern regarding the suffering of Palestinian people under the prolonged and brutal Israeli military occupation. Likewise, they rejected their ongoing deprivation of their inalienable rights, including the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination in their independent State of Palestine. The Movement also reiterated its position on the right of return of the Palestinian refugees, based on resolution 194 (III).

NAM expresses its grave condemnation regarding the illegal Israeli practices aimed at altering the demographic composition, legal status, character and geographic nature of the occupied Palestinian

territory, including East Jerusalem, so as to facilitate de facto annexation of more Palestinian land. Israel, the occupying Power, has also continued to commit other violations, including the ongoing and routine demolition of homes and the forced displacement of Palestinians in the West Bank, the continued construction of the wall and the encirclement of Palestinian communities by the wall, the dispossession of Palestinians from their agricultural land, violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians and their property, and the lack of serious effort on the part of Israeli authorities to prevent or hold settlers accountable for such violence.

The continuing illegal Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip has forced 1.7 million Palestinian civilians into poverty and isolation. The devastating impact of the blockade and the repercussions of the trauma, destruction and displacement inflicted by Israeli military aggression, in particular in 2008-2009 and 2012, have continued to impact all human rights and to disrupt every aspect of life. We believe that the blockade constitutes collective punishment of the entire Palestinian civilian population in Gaza, in defiance of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law and in breach in particular of its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The ongoing illegal Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory are a matter of grave concern. The recent provocative declarations made by Israel, the occupying Power, regarding plans to construct thousands more settlement units are further confirmation of Israel's refusal to cease its settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory. In this regard, NAM calls for urgent action and practical measures on the part of the international community, in particular the Security Council, to compel the occupying Power to cease completely its illegal and destructive settlement campaign in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and to abide by all of its obligations under international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, United Nations resolutions, the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice and its obligations under the road map in this regard.

The Movement expresses its deep concern at the lack of progress in the Middle East peace process and calls for immediate and practical efforts to advance a fair and credible peace process based on the relevant United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, including



the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the road map. We stress that the peace process must ensure an end to the occupation of the Palestinian territory and the other Arab territories occupied by Israel since 1967, including East Jerusalem; the exercise by the Palestinian people of their right to self-determination in an independent, sovereign and viable State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital; and a just solution for the plight of the Palestinian refugees based on resolution 194 (III).

The Movement welcomes all efforts and initiatives aimed at realizing justice for the Palestinian people and stresses the importance of the admission of the State of Palestine as a non-member observer State by the General Assembly on 29 November 2012, and its admission as a member State by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization General Conference. We consider this development to be a vote of confidence that Palestine meets the Charter criteria of statehood and is ready and willing to assume its Charter responsibilities. We express optimism that the granting of non-member observer State status to Palestine by the General Assembly will help accelerate the momentum in the Security Council regarding its pending United Nations application.

In conclusion, the Non-Aligned Movement reiterates once again its strong support for and solidarity with the Palestinian people and reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the immediate restoration of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to exercise self-determination and enjoy sovereignty in an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In my national capacity, I would like to inform the Committee that a message of solidarity with the Palestinian people from His Excellency President Rouhani of the Islamic Republic of Iran has been submitted to the Secretariat for transmission to the Committee.

**The Chair** (*spoke in French*): I thank the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran for his important statement.

I now have the pleasure of giving the floor to the representative of the Republic of Djibouti, who will read out a message from His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Djibouti and Chairman of the Thirty-ninth Session

of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

**Ms. Hassan** (Djibouti) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to read out a message today on behalf of His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud Ali Youssouf, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Djibouti in his function as Chair of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

(*spoke in English*)

“I am honoured to speak on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation on the occasion of the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. This international gathering, held in November of every year, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 32/40 B, is indeed a confirmation of continued international solidarity with the Palestinian people and the international community’s responsibility towards the Palestinian cause.

“At the outset, the OIC is pleased that the Committee is proposing to the General Assembly that 2014 be proclaimed the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The OIC supports that initiative wholeheartedly and urges all Member States to support it in the General Assembly this afternoon.

“I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to the United Nations and all its organs for this Day’s celebration. In particular, I would like to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, and the Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, His Excellency Ambassador Abdou Salam Diallo, for his efforts and effective initiatives in support of the Palestinian cause, which contribute to the promotion of international solidarity and support for the just struggle of the Palestinian people to regain their legitimate rights.

“The OIC follows with the utmost interest the resumption and developments of peace talks between Israel, the occupying Power, and the State of Palestine and is deeply concerned by the difficulties that Palestinians face on a daily basis.

“Despite the near-unanimous and historic international recognition of the State of Palestine at

the General Assembly on 29 November 2012, Israel, the occupying Power, has intensified its violations and aggression against the Palestinian people and their territory, sacred sites and property. As we gather today to reaffirm our unequivocal support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinians, Israel is pursuing its policy of imposing new restrictions on the ground to change the demographic character of the city of Al-Quds, obliterate its identity and isolate it from its Palestinian environs in order to prevent its return to Palestinian sovereignty, through settlements, barricades and the construction of the apartheid wall. Such acts constitute grave breaches of international law, undermine the contiguity, unity and viability of the State of Palestine and jeopardize the prospects for achieving a two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders.

“By the same token, Israel has intensified its aggression against Islamic and Christian holy sites in the holy city of Jerusalem, especially in the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque by breaking into its premises and preventing worshippers from accessing the mosque, desecrating Islamic and Christian sites, distorting the authentic history of the city, changing its landmarks, demolishing Palestinian homes and closing Palestinian institutions with a view to isolating occupied East Jerusalem from its Palestinian surroundings. Such illegal acts threaten to expand the conflict and give it a dangerous religious dimension, which could further destabilize the region. While strongly warning against such unacceptable and unprecedented practices and provocations, the OIC emphasizes that such attacks threaten to further exacerbate the situation locally and in the region, and therefore require that responsible international action be taken to compel Israel to stop those serious attacks and violations.

“While reaffirming its unconditional support for the Palestinian position, particularly its demands to stop Israeli settlement activities in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, the OIC calls upon the international community to put pressure on Israel, the occupying Power, to stop the activities committed by extremist settlers who block roads, destroy property, seize land, uproot trees, desecrate holy sites and perpetrate other grave violations against the Palestinian people, their lands and their property, which constitute acts

of organized terrorism, adding to the record of violations committed by the Israeli occupation in the Palestinian territories.

“The OIC also follows with deep concern the issue of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons, particularly the policy of torture and administrative detention whereby Israel, the occupying Power, detains Palestinians for long periods of time without trial or charge. Those represent a blatant violation of international law and require the international community to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to fulfil its responsibilities, abide by the principles of international humanitarian law and respect its international human rights obligations.

“In the meantime, we reaffirm the OIC position that the continuing illegal Israeli blockade on the Gaza Strip not only is a continuation of injustice and aggression, but also constitutes a form of collective punishment and a blatant violation of international humanitarian law, which has grave humanitarian consequences for the Palestinian people and should therefore be brought to an end.

“In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate the support and solidarity of the OIC with the Palestinian people in their endeavour to regain their inalienable national rights, including their right to self-determination and independence and to establish their independent State, with sovereignty over the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967 and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

“The OIC once again calls on the international community, and the Security Council in particular, to assume its responsibilities and take the necessary concrete action for an immediate and permanent cessation of the Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people. We believe that a permanent peace between Israel and the State of Palestine is a *sine qua non* if both peoples are to focus their energies and resources on developing their societies in peace, harmony and co-existence.”

**The Chair** (*spoke in French*): I thank the representative of the Republic of Djibouti for her important statement on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which, as we all know, is an active partner of our Committee.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Tekeda Alemu, Permanent Representative of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to the United Nations, who will read out a message from Mr. Hailemariam Dessalegn, Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and Chairperson of the African Union.

**Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia):** I have the honour to read out the message of His Excellency Mr. Hailemariam Dessalegn, Prime Minister of Ethiopia and Chairperson of the African Union.

“We are meeting here today once again to mark the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, commemorated annually on the anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Palestine Plan of Partition in 1947 (resolution 181 (II)). Indeed, this year’s occasion provides us with yet another important opportunity to reaffirm our unwavering support and commitment to the people of Palestine in their quest for the realization of their inalienable rights to statehood and to exercise their right to self-determination, which they have been denied for far too long, with all the consequences that has had for them and the region as a whole. Rarely has the legitimate right of a people failed to be addressed in its own right without so many other considerations clouding it. It is our hope that the direct talks between the two parties will be pursued seriously in order to address all core and permanent issues, based on a two-State solution that ensures the creation of a situation where both Israel and Palestine can live side by side in peace and security. To achieve that, Israeli settlement expansion, the demolition of houses, land expropriation and the denial of the rights to property, blockades, and the closure of border crossings in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, should be ended without further delay. It is difficult to imagine progress until those practices are halted and their negative effects on the peace talks effectively addressed.

“The African Union has been supportive all along of the Palestinian people and their legitimate quest for self-determination and to establish their own, independent State. In that regard, for years the Union has consistently expressed its support for a peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, in accordance with the principles of international law and all the relevant United Nations

resolutions, in order to ensure the establishment of an independent Palestinian State on the June 1967 borders. However, all efforts made by the international community, including the United Nations, to ensure that that rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination are respected, remain unrealized. That the international community has failed to do the best it could — and that, in a way, it has failed the Palestinian people — cannot be ignored. The African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government, in its decision of 16 July 2012, reaffirmed once again its total support for the full realization of the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people. In the same decision, the Union also called on the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Quartet to take all the necessary measures to maintain security, peace and stability and to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace by applying the provisions of the relevant international law and past resolutions of the Security Council. There can be no doubt that this is in the interests of durable peace in the region, as is respect for the right of all States in the region to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized boundaries.

“I would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for its continued promotion of, and commitment to, the just cause of the people of Palestine. The Committee’s unyielding support for the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, and its efforts to mobilize international assistance for those who need it most, should be commended.

“In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that the African Union remains committed and determined in its solidarity with the people of Palestine in their just quest to establish their own independent and sovereign State.”

**The Chair** (*spoke in French*): I thank Ambassador Tekeda Alemu for delivering the message from His Excellency Mr. Hailemariam Dessalegn, Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and President of the African Union, which is a valuable partner of our Committee.

I now give the floor to Mr. Ahmed Fathalla, Permanent Observer of the League of Arab States to the United Nations, who will read out a message from

His Excellency Mr. Nabil Elaraby, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States.

**Mr. Fathalla** (League of Arab States) (*spoke in French*): I would now like to read out the following message from His Excellency Mr. Nabil Elaraby, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

“At the outset, in my capacity as Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, I have the pleasure to express my gratitude to the Secretary-General, the Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the members of that Committee. I extend warm greetings and commend the Committee’s tremendous efforts in support of the Palestinian people and their inalienable right to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on the borders of 4 June 1967. I would also like to commend Ambassador Diallo’s efforts during 2013, when he convened several meetings, in Rome, Addis Ababa and Beijing, to raise awareness of the Palestinian cause and its prospects.

“There can be no doubt that this year’s commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People is accompanied by a recognition of the political and diplomatic activity launched by the United States Secretary of State John Kerry, which we hoped might lead to positive results and the eventual establishment of an independent sovereign State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Despite the international consensus regarding such a solution, however, Israel has continued to defy and violate United Nations resolutions and human rights instruments. It has continued with its settlement policies, aimed at swallowing up more Palestinian land, as well as the cover, protection and support of the Israeli Government for the settlers’ activities in a manner that defies logic, attacking the rights of Palestinian civilians as well as churches, mosques and clerics. It also continues to hold more than 4,000 prisoners and detainees, including women and children, some of whom have spent more than 25 years in jail, and to maltreat them in inhumane conditions. All this demonstrates

that Government’s racist nature and contributes to establishing new facts on the ground, thus threatening to undermine the possibility of a two-State solution and to block any real opportunity to establish a sovereign Palestinian State.

“Israel also persists in its unilateral, illegal actions aimed at Judaizing East Jerusalem. It has demolished homes, changed the names of streets in some places and threatened the Al-Aqsa Mosque and its environs with daily violations. It seeks to change the city’s demographic composition, rewrite its history and appropriate its Islamic and Christian heritage by continuing such violations on the sanctity of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and other occupied Palestinian territories, notably in the Al-Agwar area, with confiscations and displacement of the population, who constitute the economic potential of the Palestinian State. I should like to emphasize the responsibility of the United Nations and its relevant organizations, agencies and funds to protect the Palestinian people and their property and to reactivate the role of the Organization in supporting the sacred and legitimate right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the establishment of an independent State.

“It is now clear that Israeli settlement policies and practices, and the new conditions that are being imposed by calling on the Palestinian side to recognize Israel as a Jewish State, reflect only the lack of real political will to engage in earnest and serious negotiations on all core issues, in consonance with international resolutions and their concrete terms of reference, within a definite time frame and eschewing partial, gradual or temporary solutions. It is no longer acceptable that the Palestinian issue, to which the international community is seeking a permanent solution on the basis of a just and comprehensive peace and the establishment of a viable State of Palestine, should remain subject to Israeli racist policies based on occupation and hegemony.

“In the absence of any framework of reference for negotiations grounded in international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, Israel has stepped up its illegal settlement policies and construction in the territory of the future State of Palestine, creating an artificial situation for the Palestinian people, who have existed there since the dawn of history. The Palestinian people



and the Arab nations have always been in favour of negotiations for a just peace, a stance that has received no response or positive reaction from the other side.

“After nine rounds of direct negotiations, most Israeli leaders have made statements to the effect that the talks will not lead to a comprehensive solution, under the pretext that the Palestinian side has not agreed to the conditions laid down by Israel, including recognizing Israel as a Jewish State, which means denying the presence of the Palestinians who have resided in the territories occupied since before the 1948 occupation. That would create a security panic in the event of an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, which means that occupation in all its forms and aggressive practices against the Palestinian people will be continued forever.

“Israel has also maintained its unjust blockade of the Gaza Strip and continues to enforce an appalling array of alarming racial practices that call to mind the apartheid policy of South Africa. Such actions have an adverse and dangerous impact on the lives of the more than 1.5 million Palestinians from 1948, imposing and implementing a policy of forced transfers and displacements and denying the right of Palestine refugees to return to their homes.

“The occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is an occupied territory as defined by international law and by virtue of the United Nations resolutions adopted in September 2012, when Palestine was recognized as a non-member observer State. Israel’s unilateral actions are thus null and void. The international community, in particular the Security Council, and all other influential stakeholders, in particular the United States, must shoulder their responsibilities and put an end to the Israeli Government’s policies of evasion and procrastination in its response to the peace process and negotiations.

“In that regard, we are surprised that the international community appears so powerless and ineffective before Israel’s obdurate stance and intransigence, and we call on the Security Council to put an end to double standards, to assume its responsibilities in a genuine and effective manner and to review its working methods in a manner capable of counteracting the unilateral measures adopted by Israel, in order to prevent that country

from taking further Palestinian territories and hindering the realization of the two-State solution.

“It is high time indeed for the Palestinian people to gain their independence and to live like all other people of the world in freedom and independence. It is time for the international community to work for that legitimate goal by upholding the values and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and to raise the voice of truth. Granting Palestine the status of a non-member observer State should be a step towards affirming the right of the Palestinian people to their territory, which is an occupied territory and not a disputed land, as Israel claims.

“To conclude, I would like to reiterate that the Palestinian people accept the negotiation process and that the role of the United Nations in assisting them to achieve their legitimate rights provides a ray of hope in a world in which justice has been eclipsed and double standards prevail. If the current negotiations fail, the consequences for our region will be disastrous. We do not wish that for our region or any other region of the world. We therefore call on the international community to intensify its efforts and to exert pressure on Israel to respond to the objectives of the negotiations and to seize the chance to guarantee their success in a way that will benefit the peoples of the region and the world.”

**The Chair** (*spoke in French*): I thank Ambassador Ahmed Fathallah for his statement and would ask him to kindly convey to Mr. Nabil Elaraby, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, the sincere appreciation of the Committee for his important message and his strong support of our Committee’s activities.

I now give the floor to Mr. David Wildman, Executive Secretary for Human Rights and Racial Justice of the United Methodist Church’s General Board of Global Ministries, who will deliver a statement on behalf of civil society organizations active on the question of Palestine.

**Mr. Wildman** (United Methodist Church): Let me first express my thanks for the opportunity to be here and for the invitation to speak at the events commemorating and marking the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

I first became involved in solidarity with the Palestinian people in June 1982, just across the street,

when the United Nations was meeting here in the second special session devoted to disarmament. I was active in the peace movement and there were 1 million people in Central Park and on the streets to urge Member States to pursue disarmament. One week before that meeting, Israel invaded Lebanon. There was a division in the peace movement at that time. Some of the organizers said that it was about nuclear weapons only, and that no one would speak about the invasion of Lebanon. In fact, no speaker that day mentioned Israel's invasion. We know about the bloodshed that happened that summer and about the massacre of unarmed Palestinian refugees in Sabra and Shatila that occurred in September. When I saw the silence of my own involvement in the peace movement and the incapacity of the international community to protect Palestinian refugees, I knew that I had to become active and take stronger actions in support and solidarity with the Palestinian people. That is how I first became involved.

Today I serve as the Executive Secretary for Human Rights and Racial Justice with the United Methodist Church. There are three components of that work that relate directly to Palestinian rights. I work with Palestinian and Israeli human rights groups and international human rights groups on the ground. I am also involved with advocacy work, both here in the United States through the United States Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation, the largest coalition here in the United States that is based on human rights and also globally, through the World Council of Churches and others. The third area of my work concerns corporate accountability. As ecumenical religious shareholders, we have met many companies and challenged their involvement and complicity with the settlements, the wall and the Israeli military and in sustaining and profiting from the occupation. I have therefore also been very involved in the boycott, divestment and sanctions efforts of many sectors of civil society. I am happy to share some of those experiences today.

However, in addition to being thankful for this invitation, I want to take this opportunity also to express my frustration and to underscore a challenge to us all. For too long, the United Nations, the international community and civil society have expressed our solidarity with the Palestinian people through words without actions. In fact, in some cases, our actions that have supported Israel's occupation speak much louder than our words. Today, therefore, I want to challenge us all by examining some of the actions of complicity by the international community that have too long

supported, intensified and even profited from Israel's long-standing colonization of Palestinian land and its systematic discrimination against the Palestinian people. Secondly, I want to pay tribute to some actions by civil society and some Governments seeking to end that complicity as a crucial and necessary step to ending the occupation and the long-standing denial of Palestinian rights.

Last month I was in Gaza. It had been nearly a year since the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hamas, and yet the situation was as precarious as ever. Participants have already heard statements by the representatives of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and other entities about the desperate situation, the lack of access to clean drinking water, which may well be completely unavailable in two years, and the power outages that have led to sewage in the streets, homes and businesses in many parts of Gaza.

Egypt, sadly, has joined with Israel in sustaining that blockade by closing off tunnels and access in Rafah. The blockade needs to end. We all need to work together for that. Five years since Operation Cast Lead, there has still not been sufficient rebuilding in Gaza. Ten years ago, Rachel Corrie was bulldozed when trying to protect a Palestinian home. She was one of many in the international community that, when it was unable or unwilling to protect Palestinian refugees and the Palestinian population, acted on the ground. Sadly, she, together with a number of other people, and far too many Palestinians lost their lives simply trying to protect Palestinian homes and families. I proffer the actions of the Christian Peacemaker Teams, the International Solidarity Movement and the World Council of Churches Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel as efforts by civil society to work on protecting the Palestinian population from the ongoing violations.

Over the past few months, there have been peace talks. We have heard a little about those this morning. Also, it is 20 years since the handshake upon the signing of the Oslo Accords. While I am a long-standing member of the peace movement and active in Concern for Peace in the Middle East, I have to say that my experience has been that talking about peace has too often been linked with actions that escalate the suffering of Palestinians. More settlements were built under the so-called Oslo peace process than at times when the conflict was more open and overt.

Participants may remember the Annapolis Conference launching another peace process in 2007. Human rights organizations have documented that the number of violent attacks by the Israeli military and settlers was higher following the talks than before. Now, during the current talks, there is a ray of hope. This summer, the European Union (EU) put forward guidelines about ending connections between grants and financial activities and loans relating to the settlements. They are important guidelines but are only as important as the force of Member States that implement them. Now, amid the peace talks, the United States and other parties are urging delay in implementing those guidelines and not to set conditions. Yet I want to recall that when there is talk without actions, it tends to go in the wrong direction.

Now I want to turn to talk a little more specifically about some of the companies and their involvements with the occupation and the settlements. I was also in the West Bank last month. We visited the Palestinian fields of a number of villages outside Bethlehem and Hebron and observed where raw sewage from some of the settlements went down onto the fields and polluted the water, contaminating the fields. While we were there, a “class” trip of eight-year-old to ten-year-old boys from the Israeli settlement nearby on the hill was walking through the very heart of the valley of Palestinian fields. The adults all had machine guns. We had cameras. We passed each other. I wondered to myself what the young Israeli boys were learning on that so-called “class” trip as they walked on other people’s land at gunpoint as an active intimidation. If that was really about security, why would anyone endanger the lives of children by walking through someone else’s field unless it were also about intimidation. I have to say that such actions are rarely reported widely but that happens every day if one sits and listens to the stories of Palestinian villagers.

I will mention two other places. The Prawer plan is a plan for the Negev that the Knesset adopted recently and that may displace as many as 70,000 Bedouins from their land. Words will not protect their homes and their families. In fact, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination of the United Nations has warned against such actions of ethnic cleansing that would remove people from an area simply on the basis of their identity. In Area C, as members heard earlier, there are similar acts of displacement and home demolitions and of increasingly separating Palestinians

from their agricultural lands. There are waste dumps, one of which is operated by Veolia, a French company.

Such companies and kinds of actions cannot sustain themselves alone. It takes a powerful military to enable that. Israel has one of the strongest and largest military forces in the world. Last year, it was the sixth largest exporter of weapons, as well. If one looks at the proportion of the gross domestic product in Israel generated by the arms industry, it was the highest percentage of any country in the world in 2012. Exports have increased by 74 per cent over the past five years.

Arms deals require at least two partners. In that regard, I raise the complicity of the international community. One country after another around the world is engaging in buying and selling weapons, surveillance equipment, security control mechanisms and technology with the Israeli military and Israeli arms companies. There are over 6,700 licensed arms dealers in Israel, and over 1,000 companies that are involved in so-called security exports.

Lest we think that the foregoing is simply about the situation in Palestine, the United Nations recently adopted the Arms Trade Treaty, which is an important mechanism to monitor, regulate, document and reduce the extensive arms trade that has been so deadly in countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe, as well as in the United States. Addressing the involvement of the arms industry and companies with Israel in the suppression of Palestinians is therefore an important part of all of us working together to reduce the level of violence and arms in the world.

Some of the arms dealers have identified the occupied territories as a laboratory where they test new weapons and measures of population security technology in the field. Yotam Feldman, an Israeli filmmaker, has a documentary movie called *The Lab*, which documents some of that activity. In that context, I would like to connect the EU guidelines put forth this summer and due to go into effect in 2014 with military deals. Let us apply the EU guidelines and the Arms Trade Treaty to all of the arms deals that are taking place with the Israeli military. In that regard, I include my own Government, the United States, which provides over \$3 billion a year in military aid. Each country has a responsibility to stop that activity.

The United Kingdom Government issued a report to its Parliament in July on export controls for arms. That report documents all of the licences for

27 countries of concern in relation to human rights. There are over £12 billion in contracts and licences for various equipment and military hardware with those 27 countries, one of which is Israel; two thirds, nearly £8 billion of the £12 billion in contracts and licences, are with Israel, and they need to be examined. The United Kingdom has started the process, but it needs to go further.

I know that at the United Nations we often talk about general human rights principles and that we are reluctant to talk about particular countries. It may therefore be my responsibility, as part of civil society, to name some countries and some companies. But I want to remind the Assembly of where that is coming from. I told participants that I first got involved in 1982. In that year and again in 1983, the General Assembly adopted some resolutions calling for an end to all military aid, sales and purchases with the Government of Israel (resolutions ES-9/1 and 38/180). In fact, the Assembly called for sanctions. That was over 30 years ago. What would the situation be like for the Palestinian people and the exercise of their inalienable rights today if the Member States and civil society had joined together 30 years ago in an arms embargo?

Sadly, one of the greatest barriers to such an embargo is my own Government, that of the United States, and its use of the veto in the Security Council. Since 1970, more than half of the vetoes the United States Government has used have been to block international action in relation to Israel's systematic violations of human rights in the region. That is a sad legacy, and I would urge all of the permanent members of the Security Council to refrain from the use of the veto, which blocks the democratic process that is so important and that the General Assembly embodies.

Turning to companies, I also want to look at my role, that is, the role of civil society. I have visited Gaza and the West Bank. I go there regularly. I work on advocacy. Yet every two weeks, some of my money is invested in companies that sustain and profit from the occupation, companies like Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard, Motorola Solutions, Veolia and United Technologies. It is not just me, but it is thousands of United Methodists, in fact, millions of hardworking people across the United States, whose pension funds — and we are thankful that we do have pension funds — are invested in companies. There is therefore a responsibility on my part to end not only my personal complicity in the form of my retirement being linked in part to the suffering of

Palestinians, but also to end civil society organizations' and those companies' involvement. It is not that I want to just have clean hands; there is a responsibility when one sees harm being done to end the immediate involvement but also to end the cause. I am therefore looking at two things — first, not participating, so I have worked on divestment and tried to move my own personal funds and I have encouraged others also to divest.

A number of things have happened over the last few years. After 10 years of engaging with Caterpillar, Motorola Solutions, Hewlett-Packard, Microsoft, Veolia — the list goes on — of meeting with the companies, filing shareholder resolutions, we have found no significant movement by most of those companies. But there has been movement in civil society. I would therefore like to touch briefly on that point.

Last year, the United Methodist Church joined the international efforts to boycott settlement products and companies that are involved in sustaining the occupation. The Presbyterian Church of the United States also joined in boycotting settlement products. The Mennonites earlier this year voted to divest some of their funds from companies that were involved and have refused to change. Quakers have divested as well. The United Church of Canada adopted a boycott last year. Three years ago, the British Methodists — the list goes on. I do not have time to go through all of the different churches. On campuses, students are calling on their trustees to divest funds. That has occurred at the University of California and Hampshire College and many more. Trade unions have made similar efforts.

There are also the United Nations guiding principles on business and human rights that John Ruggie, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Business and Human Rights from 2005 to 2011, worked very hard on. They include strong principles but, again, they are guiding principles, and the question then becomes the power of implementation. When I spoke with John Ruggie last year, I asked him whether, if Governments' failure to act was not changing complicity, businesses were doing better at achieving that end. He said that no amount of inaction by Governments would absolve businesses of their responsibility.

In conclusion, I would like to say that municipalities have joined the efforts of grass roots civil society in dropping contracts with Veolia. In fact, the company



has lost some \$18 billion worth of contracts in the past few years, in part due to its ongoing involvement with the occupation.

I hope that we can join together, not simply in talking about peace, but in just actions of solidarity, as the General Assembly called for 30 years ago. Let us together stop arms deals that sustain Israel's blockade of Gaza and enable its ongoing colonization in the West Bank. Let us stop corporations from profiting. Such actions would not in fact apply a double standard to Israel but would rather end the double standard in the international community by holding Israel accountable to the same standards as other nations. International civil society, churches, universities and trade unions are all taking action to end complicity, the occupation and apartheid practices. The EU guidelines are a step in that direction, but only as far as they are implemented.

I conclude by thanking the Committee once again for its invitation and by inviting each Member State to join in solidarity actions by ending our own complicity, individually and collectively, in the ongoing colonization and human rights violations against the Palestinian people. Maybe, as we join our actions, our boycott, divestment and sanctions, they will speak louder than our words in solidarity with the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

**The Chair** (*spoke in French*): I thank Mr. Wildman for joining us on this important occasion. We have followed his support for the Palestinian people with appreciation. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all civil society organizations around the world that are active on the question of Palestine for their work in support of and in solidarity with the Palestinian people. They are essential to the Committee's work.

It is now my honour to announce that the Committee has received messages of support and solidarity from many Heads of State and Government, Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Governments and organizations. I would like to recall that the texts of those messages will be published in a special bulletin of the Division for Palestinian Rights, but I would like to read out the list of officials and bodies who sent them in the order in which they received.

We have received messages from the following Heads of State: His Majesty the King of the Kingdom of Bahrain, Her Excellency the President of the Federative Republic of Brazil, His Excellency the Interim President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, His Excellency the

President of the Republic of Indonesia, His Excellency the President of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, His Excellency the President of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, His Excellency the President of the Lebanese Republic, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Yemen, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Seychelles, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Senegal, 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 Morocco, His Excellency the President of the People's Republic of China, His Highness the Amir of the State of Qatar, His Excellency the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, His Excellency the President of the Republic of South Africa, Her Excellency the President of the Argentine Republic, His Excellency the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, His Excellency the President of the Russian Federation, His Excellency the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, His Majesty the King of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, His Highness the President of the United Arab Emirates, His Excellency the President of the Republic of Namibia and His Excellency the Vice President of the Republic of Iraq.

We have also received messages from the following Heads of Government: His Excellency the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, His Excellency the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand, His Excellency the Prime Minister of the Republic of India and His Excellency the Prime Minister of Malaysia.

The Committee has also received messages from the following Ministers for Foreign Affairs: His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Algeria, His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Madagascar, His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ghana, His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ecuador, His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic and His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Mali.

We have also received messages from the following Governments: the Government of Tunisia, the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the Government of the Republic of Guinea, the Government of the Plurinational State of Bolivia and the Government of the Republic of Belarus.

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.

From civil society organizations, we have received a message from Caritas.

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 the participants in today's meeting for their efforts to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine and for the steadfast support they bring to the Committee's activities.

I now have the pleasure to give the floor to Ambassador Nasser, Deputy Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations.

**Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser** (Palestine): On behalf of Ambassador Mansour and the entire delegation of the State of Palestine to the United Nations, I would like to thank you, Sir, and all the participants in today's meeting commemorating the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People at the United Nations. I would like to reiterate our gratitude to all the members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the observers of the Committee, as well as all Member States sharing in the commemoration of this Day, for their expressions of solidarity and support for the Palestinian people. Our gratitude is as immense as the support that has been given to Palestine over the decades, and we are hopeful that in the coming year, the solidarity shown to our people and our just cause will enable us to ultimately realize the peace we have long been seeking, a goal we cannot achieve without the support of the international community. That is a reaffirmation of the importance of these days of solidarity, and hopefully, as was mentioned, the forthcoming proclamation by the General Assembly of an international year of solidarity with our people.

I also wish to express my delegation's appreciation for everyone's attendance and support today, and we look forward to Member States' participation in the debate that will take place this afternoon. As is traditional on the Day of Solidarity, the General Assembly opens the debate on the question of Palestine, an important discussion at a very critical juncture. We will listen

attentively to the messages of the international community, as well as to the presentation of the Committee's report this afternoon by the Rapporteur. We also look forward to members' participation in the evening event in commemoration of this Day of Solidarity, at which, as Ambassador Mansour said, we will have performances by two young and talented Palestinians, Nai Barghouti and Mohammed Assaf, in a demonstration of Palestinian youth and in support of Palestinian calls to the international community for its continued support and solidarity.

**The Chair** (*spoke in French*): It is I who thank you, Madam Ambassador. Your call has been heard and I am sure the Committee will take it on board.

Before adjourning this special meeting, I wish to thank everyone who has made this meeting possible, in particular the staff members of the Division for Palestinian Rights, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management, the Department of Public Information, the Office of Central Support Services, the interpreters and everyone who worked behind the scenes.

Following the adjournment of this meeting, in a few moments we will be showing in this Conference Room a documentary film entitled *State 194*. As a small token of our solidarity, I would like to invite all representatives to stay on and view this film.

At 3 p.m. the General Assembly will begin its debate on the question of Palestine. I will introduce draft resolutions A/68/L.12, A/68/L.13, A/68/L.14 and A/68/L.15 under that agenda item, and the Committee's Rapporteur, Ambassador Grima, will introduce the report of the Committee (A/68/35). We strongly encourage delegations to support the adoption of the draft resolutions.

I would also like to invite representatives this evening to a cultural event — a concert featuring Palestinian singers, Nai Barghouti and her troupe, and Mohammed Assaf, the winner of the 2013 Arab Idol contest, who was named the Regional Youth Ambassador of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. The concert will be held from 6.30 to 8.30 p.m. in this same Conference Room. As seating is limited, the concert will also be screened in Conference Room 2. I hope that all representatives will be there this evening.

*The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.*