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**STATEMENT BY
H.E. MR. PAUL BADJI
CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE
OF THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE**

Agenda item 16: Question of Palestine
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Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Permit me, at the outset, to express on behalf of the Committee our sincere appreciation to all representatives of Member States, Observers, representatives of intergovernmental organizations, United Nations system entities and civil society that participated this morning in the special meeting of the Committee to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. It forcefully reiterated the importance and urgency the United Nations membership ascribes to a comprehensive, just and lasting solution of the question of Palestine and highlighted the broad support for the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights.

Mr. President,

Before I introduce for your consideration the four resolutions prepared by our Committee under this agenda item, allow me to make some brief remarks as regards the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and developments in the political process.

One year ago, the international community, including this Committee, welcomed the holding of the international conference at Annapolis that had been convened by the United States upon an initiative by the Quartet. It led to the resumption of the political process between Israel and the Palestinians and elicited an unprecedented level of political, economic and financial support by the international community for the Palestinian Authority and, subsequently, to substantial pledges at the Paris donors' conference of December 2007. Our Committee joined the vast group of supporters of the reinvigorated peace process and worked by implementing its programme of work towards the creation of a climate conducive to the advancement of permanent status negotiations.

Under the auspices of the Committee, the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat organized three major international meetings and seminars in the course of the year. In February, in Amman, Jordan, the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People put the focus on the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan, encouraging donors to become active participants in its implementation. At the same time, it made an assessment of the substantial number of obstacles to accomplishing this goal - the hundreds of checkpoints, routine closures in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, stifling economic development, the expansion of settlements, and the construction of the wall on Palestinian land, further fragmenting the West Bank. The situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, were further discussed in a meeting of the Committee delegation with the Prime Minister of Jordan. After the Amman Seminar, a delegation of the Committee visited two refugee camps in Jordan and obtained a first-hand insight in the livelihoods of their residents.

The United Nations International Conference on Palestine Refugees, organized by our Committee in April at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, shed light on the fate of this large segment of the Palestinian people forced to live for over sixty years in refugee

camps in the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. The Conference stressed that a durable solution to the Palestine refugee problem, and to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, could only be achieved in the context of their inalienable right of return to the homes and property from which they had been displaced. It was highlighted that the right of return of refugees, a fundamental and widely acknowledged humanitarian and human rights principle, did not diminish with the passage of time and remained applicable to the Palestine refugees. The participants expressed strong support of the resumed political process, but cautioned that any final Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement must encompass a just and fair solution to the Palestine refugee question. The delegation of the Committee took advantage of its stay in Paris to meet with officials at the Quai d'Orsay, as well as with French parliamentarians at the Palais Bourbon and Palais du Luxembourg where we had useful exchanges of views on the role of the European Union, the United Nations and our Committee in international efforts at resolving the conflict.

In June, the Committee held the United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine in Malta assessing the challenges facing the parties in advancing the peace process. That meeting expressed particular alarm about the continued expansion of settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and the continuation of the construction of the wall, both repeatedly declared illegal under international law and prejudging the outcome of the permanent status negotiations. The Meeting also stated that violence by either side was damaging to the political dialogue. The participants supported all efforts to achieve a ceasefire. They appreciated the critical role played by countries of Europe and encouraged them to become more active in various aspects of the political process. The Committee delegation met with the President and the Foreign Minister of Malta and, on its way back, visited Vatican City for an exchange of views with the Secretary for Relations with States of the Holy See.

Mr. President,

I was highlighting one important aspect of the Committee's mandate to demonstrate how the work of our Committee contributes to all the other efforts of the United Nations to bring about a peaceful solution of the question of Palestine, namely through the establishment of a Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security.

Listening to the assessment of the experts, Palestinian and Israeli, and the analysis made by renowned international specialists on the issues, led the Committee to the conclusion that there was a widening gap, a stark discrepancy between the bilateral negotiations, the efforts of the international community and the deteriorating situation on the ground. Continued settlement activity, the blockade of Gaza, the construction of the wall on Palestinian land, house demolitions in East Jerusalem, daily incursions of the Israeli army into Palestinian population centers, settler violence, threaten to upset the fragile negotiations.

At this stage, one year after Annapolis, the Committee can only encourage the parties to continue the political process, to build on whatever understandings have been achieved. There is no alternative to serious, substantive negotiations. At the same time, actions on the ground have to change dramatically. Settlement expansion has to stop, extremists need to be held accountable to the rule of law. The blockade of Gaza has to be lifted. The ceasefire should be maintained and expanded to the West Bank. Palestinian economic activity needs to be assisted through lifting restrictions on movement of people and goods. This would build trust into the process, producing growing support of Palestinian and Israeli public opinion, thus allowing the parties to arrive at decisions that may seem very difficult now.

The Committee's position is that the continuing illegal occupation of the Palestinian Territory remains the root cause of the conflict. We emphasize the urgent need for a negotiated solution that will end the occupation, ensure the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights and guarantee security for the State of Israel. This settlement must be based on international law, General Assembly resolution 194, Security Council resolutions 242, 338, 1397 and 1515 and other relevant United Nations resolutions, and the principles outlined in the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The Committee remains much concerned about the internal Palestinian divisions blocking national reconciliation and the reunification of the West Bank and Gaza under the Palestinian Authority. It supports all efforts by Arab and other countries, as well as the initiatives of the President of the Palestinian Authority Mahmoud Abbas, aimed at restoring Palestinian national unity as a necessity on the path towards a permanent settlement of the question of Palestine.

Our Committee firmly believes that the United Nations should continue to maintain its permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine until it is effectively resolved in all its aspects in accordance with international legitimacy. The Committee calls on the Security Council to act decisively in implementation of its own resolutions with respect to the question of Palestine, in particular resolutions 242 and 338. The Committee is also hopeful that, as the principal United Nations organ responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, the Council will live up to its obligations under the United Nations Charter. The Committee for its part will continue to fulfil its General Assembly mandate aimed at helping the Palestinian people realize its inalienable rights.

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In this context, I would like to introduce to the Assembly the four draft resolution approved by the Committee and circulated under this agenda item, namely **A/63/L.32, A/63/L.33, A/63/L.34 and A/63/L.35.**

The first three drafts are related to the work of the **Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Division for Palestinian Rights**