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Official Records

President: Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 37

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/66/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/66/367)

Draft resolutions (A/66/L.15, A/66/L.16, A/66/L.17 and A/66/L.18)

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): Our meeting today on the question of Palestine is of crucial importance. The issue of Palestine has been particularly central during this session of the General Assembly. We all witnessed a historic development here in New York when the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, submitted Palestine's application for membership in the United Nations to the Secretary-General on 23 September. Mr. Abbas announced the contents of that initiative to the world here before the General Assembly. For my part, within the framework of my mandate, I circulated that request to all States Members of the United Nations.

Other developments have taken place since then. The Security Council Committee on the Admission of New Members examined the Palestinian application. A widely commended exchange of prisoners successfully took place. The Quartet stepped up its efforts to relaunch negotiations.

Today, 29 November, we observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. We commemorate the day on which, in 1947, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), dividing the territory known as Mandatory Palestine into two States — one Jewish and one Arab.

This morning, in addressing the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I recalled the sustained and resolute commitment of the General Assembly to the Palestinian people, to the peoples of the region and to the peace process.

This year, and today in particular, the General Assembly has a special responsibility to renew and reaffirm its commitment to finding a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine. It is my conviction that the General Assembly must play a role in that respect.

We must continue to work collectively for the attainment of a just and comprehensive negotiated peace settlement in the Middle East, a peace settlement that results in two viable, sovereign and independent States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security within the recognized pre-1967 borders.

We should therefore all work together so as to be able to welcome, as soon as possible, Palestine as a new Member of the Organization. For my part, I will spare no effort in that regard.

In the short term, however, we must take steps to alleviate the daily suffering of the Palestinian people.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-506. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.



The humanitarian situation on the ground is a source of great concern.

In that context, I would like to acknowledge with gratitude the efforts of the United Nations system, in particular the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), as well as non-governmental organizations and civil society at large, which have played a critical role in alleviating the suffering of the growing Palestinian refugee population. They have done so under extremely difficult political and financial conditions. I would urge all Member States to strengthen their valuable contributions to the work of UNRWA.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Abdou Salam Diallo of Senegal, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to introduce draft resolutions A/66/L.15, A/66/L.16, A/66/L.17 and A/66/L.18.

Mr. Diallo (Senegal), Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (*spoke in French*): First of all, on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I would like to thank all delegations that attended this morning's special meeting in observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

On that special occasion, we undertook a comprehensive overview of the key elements of the events and facts that have affected the troubled Israeli-Palestinian relationship and have had a negative impact on the peace process.

Before I turn to the customary introduction of the four draft resolutions on the question of Palestine, permit me to mention just a few of those elements.

Throughout the year, the Committee has unwaveringly supported the resumption of meaningful permanent-status negotiations with clear objectives and a specific time frame. It is deplorable that the Quartet's efforts in that regard are constantly being undermined by the large-scale continuation of the Israeli settlement campaign, as the international community averts its eyes in embarrassment.

The resumption of negotiations therefore remains essentially contingent upon a permanent freeze on settlement-building in the occupied Palestinian

territory, including in East Jerusalem, and the dismantling of outposts.

Like the rest of the international community, the Committee welcomed the implementation, on 18 October, of the first stage of the prisoner exchange between Israel and Hamas. However, it is urgent that all political prisoners illegally held by Israel be released and reintegrated into society.

Unfortunately, the peace dividend that the exchange was rightly expected to generate did not materialize, owing to rocket fire from Gaza and the disproportionate retaliation by Israel.

The Committee, which deplores the killing and injury of innocent civilians, calls on all parties to respect the truce brokered by Egypt, with a view to securing a lasting ceasefire and the complete lifting of the Gaza blockade. Furthermore, the Committee encourages the United Nations to give favourable consideration, as did UNESCO, to the application for admission to membership submitted by Palestine.

In that connection, we deplore the confiscation by Israel of tax revenues belonging to the Palestinian Authority, thereby worsening an already precarious fiscal situation. At this difficult time, the Committee requests donors to maintain and, if necessary, increase their financial support for Palestine in order to sustain its efforts to build a viable State.

I will now introduce the four draft resolutions adopted by the Committee and circulated under this agenda item: A/66/L.15, A/66/L.16, A/66/L.17 and A/66/L.18. I should like to inform the Assembly that Sierra Leone and Viet Nam have joined the list of sponsors of draft resolution A/66/L.15, and Brunei Darussalam and Mali have joined the list of sponsors of all four drafts.

The first three draft resolutions relate to the work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People; the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat; and the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information.

The draft resolutions reaffirm the important mandates entrusted to those entities by the General Assembly. As in the past, the Committee will endeavour to ensure that the resources made available to them are used effectively.

The fourth draft resolution, entitled "Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine", reaffirms the position of the General Assembly with regard to the essential elements of such a settlement and notes the main developments of the past year, including the application of Palestine for admission to membership in the United Nations. In essence, the four draft resolutions deal with positions, mandates and programmes of particular importance.

While the resolutions on the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine and the special information programme of the Department of Public Information traditionally enjoy wide support from delegations, there is room for improvement with regard to the vote on the draft resolutions relating to the work of the Committee and the Division.

I would like to say to the group of States that believe our deliberations are unbalanced that those deliberations reflect the asymmetrical nature of the conflict and the disproportionate balance of power between its protagonists.

The Committee has always been a staunch supporter of the two-State solution and intends to continue to play a constructive role in support of the international community's efforts to bring about a peaceful solution to the question of Palestine. For that reason, we believe it is important to support the Committee, which is the only body established by the General Assembly to focus exclusively on realizing that goal. In pursuing objectives common to us all, the Committee counts on the sincere cooperation of all Member States.

In conclusion, I call on the General Assembly to vote in favour of the four draft resolutions.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Saviour Borg of Malta, Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to introduce the report of the Committee.

Mr. Borg (Malta), Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People: It is an honour for me, in my capacity as Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to present to the General Assembly the annual report of the Committee, contained in document

A/66/35. Allow me to summarize each section of the report.

In chapters I through III, the report covers the Committee's perspective on the events that have taken place in the course of the year. Those chapters outline the mandate entrusted to the Committee by the General Assembly and contain information on the organization of the Committee's work during the year.

In chapter IV, the report reviews the situation relating to the question of Palestine, as monitored by the Committee during the past year, and contains a detailed, factual account of events that have taken place in the reviewed period. That includes the daily difficulties faced by the population in the occupied territory as a result of restrictions, illegal settlement activities, demolitions, increased violence by Israeli settlers, the continued construction of the wall in the West Bank, including in and around occupied East Jerusalem, and the grave humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip.

Highlighting the continuing grave situation of Palestine refugees, the Committee reiterates its appreciation of the dedication of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to its mission and calls upon all donors to increase contributions to ensure the well-being of the population of 4.8 million registered refugees under the mandate of the Agency.

Chapter V reviews the action taken by the Committee, including the Chairman's participation in General Assembly and Security Council debates, statements issued by the Committee and its Bureau, and the continuing dialogue between the Committee and members of intergovernmental organizations. The chapter also reports on the various international meetings and conferences organized by the Committee, as well as other mandated activities carried out by the Division for Palestinian Rights. Chapter V also highlights the close cooperation among the Committee and intergovernmental organizations, civil society organizations and parliaments and inter-parliamentary organizations.

Chapter VI provides an overview of the work done over the year by the Department of Public Information (DPI) in pursuit of its General Assembly mandate. The chapter also provides information on the valuable coverage provided by DPI to raise awareness of the question of Palestine, especially through UNTV,

United Nations Radio and the United Nations News Centre, the annual International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East, held this year in Budapest in July, the training programme for young Palestinian journalists and the dissemination of information and the organization of outreach activities.

The last chapter of the report contains the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee. In it, the Committee expresses its frustration at the current stalemate in the peace process and calls for a resumption of credible negotiations towards the two-State solution. The Committee reiterates that Israeli settlement activities are inimical to the peace process and contravene international law, Security Council and General Assembly resolutions and the road map.

The Committee also expresses its view that further progress towards the realization of the inalienable rights of Palestinians requires a dismantlement of the Israeli occupation and its associated regime of settlements, checkpoints, the separation wall, demolitions, land confiscations and expulsions, which have been intensifying at an alarming rate, particularly in East Jerusalem and in Area C.

The Committee calls on donors to provide urgent and generous support to the Palestinian Authority to enable it to sustain its State-building momentum. It condemns any illegal and provocative seizure by Israel of the Palestinian Authority's revenues.

The Committee expresses its deep concern over the situation on the ground and the systematic violations of humanitarian and human rights law. The Committee reiterates that all attacks against civilians must stop immediately and unconditionally, including rocket fire from Gaza and air strikes on populated areas in Gaza, settler violence and the shootings of unarmed protesters. It calls for the Gaza blockade to be immediately lifted, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). The Committee calls on the Security Council and the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to act urgently and decisively to guarantee the protection of civilians in all situations and to ensure accountability for violations of international law.

The Committee recommends that its programme of international meetings and conferences in 2012 be focused on the widening of international support for the achievement of the inalienable rights of the

Palestinian people, as well as on strengthening international support for resumption of the permanent status negotiations.

The Committee will aim to mobilize increased international scrutiny of the developments on the ground, in particular the halt of all settlement activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and an end to all other illegal Israeli policies and practices in the occupied Palestinian territory. It also supports global campaigns to challenge Israeli impunity and promote the concept of Israeli accountability for its actions towards the Palestinian people.

The Committee will continue to pay special attention to highlighting the plight of the most disadvantaged Palestinians, such as Palestine refugees, Palestinians living in Gaza and Palestinian political prisoners. Taking into account the urgency of resolving the situation of thousands of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails and detention facilities, and as a follow-up to its 2010 international meeting on that issue, the Committee will hold an international meeting at the United Nations Office at Geneva on that topic.

The Committee will continue to mobilize support for Palestinian institution-building and all other efforts to contribute to the viability of the Palestinian State. It will reach out to and engage Governments, parliamentarians and civil society to mobilize support for a just solution of all permanent status issues. It will pay particular attention to the inclusion and empowerment of women and their organizations in that process.

The Committee emphasizes the useful and constructive contribution of the Division for Palestinian Rights in supporting the Committee's mandate to enable the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights. It strongly recommends that the Division continue and further enhance, where possible, its annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority. The Committee requests the Division to continue its substantive and secretariat support and to pay special attention to continued development of the "Question of Palestine" website and the use of new technologies and media, such as Facebook and Twitter.

The Committee requests that the Department of Public Information continue its special information programme on the question of Palestine, with the necessary flexibility, as it has made an important

contribution to informing the media and public opinion of the relevant issues.

Finally, the Committee calls upon the Security Council and the General Assembly to favourably consider Palestine's application for United Nations membership. It supports the appeal made by President Abbas before the General Assembly to the States that have not yet recognized the State of Palestine, to do so.

In conclusion, I would like to express the hope that the report I have just introduced will be of assistance to the General Assembly in its deliberations on the question of Palestine.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): Allow me to convey Palestine's deep appreciation to you, Mr. President, for your skilled leadership and guidance of the important work of the General Assembly at its sixty-sixth session.

Today, I also reiterate our abiding appreciation to the members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and its Bureau: the Chair, Ambassador Abdou Salam Diallo of Senegal, Vice-Chairs Ambassador Zahir Tanin of Afghanistan and Ambassador Pedro Núñez Mosquera of Cuba, and the Rapporteur, Ambassador Saviour Borg of Malta. We are grateful for the Committee's principled efforts to assist the Palestinian people to realize their inalienable rights, including their right to self-determination, and for its continuing efforts to mobilize international support for the just cause of Palestine and for peace via its work at the United Nations and in international conferences held during the year.

We also express appreciation to the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information for their cooperative efforts with the Committee and in raising international awareness of the Palestine question. We also reiterate our appreciation to the Department of Political Affairs, and to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his efforts at the helm of the Organization to achieve a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole.

We gathered this morning to solemnly commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, on this day that marks the sixty-fourth year since the General Assembly adopted resolution 181

(II). That resolution partitioned Palestine into two States and set off a chain of events that dramatically altered the geopolitical landscape and future of the Middle East. While the partition led to the establishment of the State of Israel, for more than six decades the independence of the Palestinian Arab State and the rights of the Palestinian people have been unjustly obstructed and denied.

From the 1948 Al-Nakba, which resulted in the uprooting of the majority of the Palestinian people from their homeland — nearly 5 million are now Palestine refugees — to Israel's 1967 military occupation of the remainder of historic Palestine and other Arab lands, and on to the present day, the conflict born of that decision has continued to gravely impact the lives of the Palestinian people and the prospects for peace and security regionally and globally.

The wound of that tragedy and injustice remains open and bleeding, challenging the fundamental ideals and laws on which the international system was established. For the conflict has not only caused immense human suffering but has also undermined the credibility and efficacy of the United Nations and the legal instruments that Member States are obliged to uphold and respect in all circumstances. In that sense, the loss of the Palestinian people has been a loss for the international community as a whole. It will continue to be a loss until the question of Palestine is resolved in all its aspects.

That is why we continue to come before the Assembly and all other United Nations organs, including the Security Council, year after year, appealing for the implementation of United Nations resolutions and the rule of law, and striving, with the support and solidarity of countries all over the world, for the realization of justice and the inalienable rights of our people, including their rights to return, to self-determination and to freedom. The Palestinian people living under Israeli occupation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, throughout the diaspora and in refugee camps in the region continue to look to the international community to urgently redress that grave injustice.

This year, our appeal has taken on a new and significant dimension. For the first time in the history of the Palestinian people, the application of the State of Palestine for admission to United Nations membership has been submitted. On 23 September, President

Mahmoud Abbas formally presented Palestine's application to the Secretary-General and came before the Assembly (see A/66/PV.19) to appeal to the international community to do justice by the Palestinian people. Palestine's application was immediately transmitted to the Security Council, which convened its Committee on the Admission of New Members to consider it. The Committee issued its report, contained in document S/2011/705, on 11 November. Regrettably, the report reflects the lack of consensus among Council members with regard to recommending Palestine for membership.

Despite that outcome, Palestine will remain unwavering in its appeals and its bilateral and multilateral efforts for recognition of its historic, natural and legal right to independence and to be a United Nations State Member.

We believe that it is high time for the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities vis-à-vis the question of Palestine. That includes heeding our appeal to the Council, which is supported by many Member States, to make a positive recommendation to the General Assembly for Palestine's admission, based on the merits of our application and our fulfilment of the criteria defined by the Charter.

In that regard, we firmly believe that good faith actions undertaken at the United Nations — the centre of the world's multilateral activity — can and should contribute towards actualizing the two-State solution, and that they will not obstruct the objective. In fact, what is preventing progress towards that solution and destroying its viability is the deliberate, insidious and illegal Israeli settlement campaign in the occupied Palestinian territory, especially in and around East Jerusalem, and not by any means our peaceful and legal political efforts.

Of course, we are fully aware of the difficulties in the process in the Security Council due to an unfair negative stance against our application. The Palestinian leadership is therefore considering all options at this critical juncture, focusing on the rights of the Palestinian people and the goal of peace and security. We reiterate, first, that there is no contradiction between the Quartet's efforts to restart negotiations between the two sides, on the one hand, and the Council's responsible consideration of Palestine's application, on the other. Secondly, the Palestinian

leadership's commitment to peace negotiations is unquestionable.

Likewise, Palestine's achievement of membership in UNESCO, which received wide support, does not contradict the efforts to revive the peace process. It is a positive reflection of the international position vis-à-vis Palestine and its status in the international community.

In fact, all of those processes, whether in the Security Council or the General Assembly or at the negotiating table, share the objective of the two-State solution — Palestine and Israel living side by side in peace and security on the basis of the pre-1967 borders — and must be viewed as mutually reinforcing and necessary. We therefore continue on this path towards the realization of the rights and national aspirations of the Palestinian people and Palestine's rightful inclusion in the community of nations.

International support for, and solidarity with, the Palestinian people are traditionally highlighted on this day. Such support is honourably extended to Palestine year around by peace-loving nations, civil society and peoples worldwide. For that we are deeply grateful. It has helped our people to maintain resilience and alleviate the hardships caused by the massive oppression and violations committed by Israel, the occupying Power. Moreover, it has helped to safeguard our rights and hopes for a solution to the plight of our people, including to the plight of the Palestine refugees, on the basis of resolution 194 (III), and for the achievement of peace, justice and stability.

The political, economic and moral support and assistance extended to Palestine is invaluable. We are proud that, to date, at least 130 countries have recognized the State of Palestine. Those countries have taken a principled stand in support of our people's right to self-determination, consistent with the relevant United Nations resolutions, from resolution 181 (II) in 1947 to subsequent resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council and the 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. We are immensely grateful for their recognition and support, which is an investment in peace in accordance with the two-State solution.

We reaffirm our abiding gratitude to the more than 100 countries that have recognized Palestine from the time of the declaration of independence in 1988. We reaffirm as well as our profound gratitude to those

countries that in the past year made the decision to recognize Palestine, beginning with Brazil in December of last year, and all the other friendly countries that recognized the State of Palestine thereafter from South America to Central America to the Caribbean to Africa and Asia. They did so in line with their moral, legal and political responsibilities. We recognize their valuable contribution to the just cause of Palestine and the cause of peace between Palestine and Israel. In that connection, we also recognize the important efforts of the League of Arab States, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the African Union. We continue to appeal to countries to recognize the State of Palestine.

At the same time, over the past two years there has been real progress in building and strengthening Palestinian national institutions with the implementation of the Palestinian Authority's two-year plan to prepare for the independence of our State. This is an extensive project whose success has been significantly enhanced by the strong support of numerous donor countries. In spite of the obstacles and severe dysfunctions caused by the Israeli occupation, that initiative has made remarkable strides, as affirmed by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations and the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians, which reaffirmed that we are ready for independence with viable, effective institutions that are above the threshold required for a functioning State.

Our efforts therefore entered a new phase this year, firmly rooted in the recognition of the inalienable right of our people to self-determination and their independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the pre-June 1967 borders. That is the core of the two-State solution for a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, on which there is international consensus.

The global acknowledgement of the urgency of achieving the two-State solution, which is being gravely threatened by the occupying Power's illegal actions, surely prompted the series of State recognitions accorded to Palestine in the preceding months of this year, as well as the proposal by French President Nicolas Sarkozy, the growing support of Governments and civil society, the Quartet statement of 23 September (see SG/2178) and subsequent efforts by all concerned parties to resume credible negotiations between the two sides.

The revival of peace negotiations, however, has proven to be elusive. It is a fact that the peace process has repeatedly failed for the following reasons: Israel's relentless breaches of the law and its refusal to commit to the fundamental parameters of the peace process based on the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, including land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the road map.

For nearly two decades, the negotiations undertaken by the Palestinian side in a spirit of historic compromise have been undermined by Israel's gross violations of its obligations, in total contradiction to the agreed principles and goals of the peace process. Moreover, the constant provocations and ridiculous, insulting pretexts given by the Israeli Government for the continuation of those illegal policies and the threats and incitement against the Palestinian people and their leadership continue to deepen mistrust and stoke tensions, making the prospects of serious negotiations even more remote.

The consequences, however, have not been borne by the occupying Power, which continues to act with total arrogance and impunity while the international community continues to fail to hold it accountable. Instead, the consequences have been borne by generations of Palestinians, who continue to suffer the hardships of ongoing dispossession and the brutality of the Israeli occupation in all its manifestations.

Those manifestations include the illegal colonization campaign throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly occupied East Jerusalem, marked by constantly expanding settlements, the wall and the confiscation of land. That is destroying the contiguity, unity and integrity of the territory and is severing East Jerusalem from the rest of the territory. There are also Israeli military raids and attacks against the defenceless civilian population. There are rising acts of terror, violence and destruction by extremist Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians and properties. In addition, thousands of Palestinians, including children and women, are imprisoned. We continue to demand their release. The Gaza Strip has endured an illegal, inhumane blockade for nearly five years. There are innumerable other measures of collective punishment and systematic violations of human rights carried out against the entire Palestinian population, civilians who are entitled to protection under international humanitarian law.

Furthermore, the region has borne the consequences. It continues to be plagued by the insecurity and turmoil caused by this conflict, which has also prevented normal development in the region. The international community has also borne the consequences. It continues to suffer from the wide impact of the tensions and instability in the region and to expend vast effort and resources, to no avail, on attempts to alleviate the conflict's impact and ultimately to resolve it. The resulting situation is totally unsustainable. In the absence of a political horizon or hope, we are on the edge of a precipice.

It cannot be lost on the Assembly that the very State created by resolution 181 (II) — Israel — continues to deny the existence of the nation of Palestine and the rights of its people. It is that State that continues to thwart all initiatives to resolve the conflict in accordance with international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. That injustice must be directly and urgently redressed.

Despite Israel's intransigence and escalation of violence, the Palestinian leadership remains committed to a two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders and to the peace process, as does the international community in its entirety. As the past several months have shown, the Palestinian leadership continues to undertake non-violent, peaceful, diplomatic and political efforts to advance the rights of the Palestinian people and achieve a two-State solution.

We now renew our appeal to Member States to stand with us for right and to answer the call of history. A historic moment is before us, when Member States can act to uphold the Charter and their legal obligations. It is a moment to live up to the responsibility to fulfil the promise made to the Palestinian people decades ago and the pledges of the past and the present to bring an end to this protracted conflict and finally allow the Palestinian people to live in freedom and dignity.

The Israeli Government must be held responsible for its violations and obstruction of peace. The onus must be placed on the occupying Power.

Israel must prove that it is a peace-loving State that is ready to abandon its aggressive occupier mentality and greedy expansionism and commit to peace. It must abide by its obligations under international law, including the Fourth Geneva

Convention, and relevant United Nations resolutions. It must realize that its subjugation of the Palestinian people will never be accepted, and it must recognize the right of our people to live in freedom in their homeland. It must end its blockade of the Gaza Strip, which has so traumatized our people and disfigured the fabric of our society. It must prove that it is willing and able to take the steps necessary to put an end to all the crimes perpetrated in the name of its 44-year military occupation, including all settlement activities, and ultimately bring the occupation to an end. It must commit to the parameters of the peace process and prove that it is ready and able to negotiate in good faith on all the core final status issues — refugees, Jerusalem, settlements, borders, security and water — with the aim of achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting solution, which will lead to true peace and coexistence.

We are at a crossroads, and the international community's role at this moment is pivotal. We call on Member States to find the political will and the courage to uphold their responsibilities, to restore hope to the cause of peace and advance it. That objective is made even more imperative in the light of the dramatic changes occurring in our region. With commitment to international law and the principles of peace, justice and security, it will be possible to overcome the impasse and finally resolve the question of Palestine.

But the window of opportunity is narrowing, and we must act now. The Palestinian leadership is determined to end the injustice endured by our people. We are committed to the achievement of reconciliation and national unity among all our people, so vital to advancing Palestinian national aspirations. We are determined to peacefully achieve the independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the pre-1967 borders, living side by side with Israel in peace and security. We are grateful for the strong support of the international community, and we urge that no effort be spared at this critical time to make that a reality.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt): I have the pleasure of addressing the General Assembly today on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) on agenda item 37, "Question of Palestine".

I would like to begin by thanking Ambassadors Abdou Salam Diallo of Senegal and Saviour Borg of Malta, the Chair and Rapporteur, respectively, of the

Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, for their comprehensive statements today and for introducing the four draft resolutions before us under this item (A/66/L.15, A/66/L.16, A/66/L.17, A/66/L.18).

This important day coincides with the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People and represents an opportunity to solidify the international community's resolve to achieve the legitimate inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. Foremost among those rights is to establish an independent, sovereign and viable State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the two-State solution and in accordance with the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Unfortunately, our meeting today comes at a time when Israel continues to carry out illegal actions in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. That seriously aggravates the situation on the ground and undermines efforts to revive the negotiation process.

It is regrettable that all serious efforts to date by international and regional parties, including the last Quartet statement on 23 September (see SG/2178), to resume and advance direct negotiations on the Palestinian track towards that objective, have failed. That is mainly due to a lack of clear parameters for the negotiations and the insistence of Israel, the occupying Power, on continuing to illegally, unilaterally and aggressively change the facts on the ground. Such actions belie Israel's claims that it accepts the Quartet's statement and that it is acting in good faith to end the conflict.

It is worth mentioning that about the same time last year, many of us had hopes that we would reach an agreement within the year. Yet the negotiations at that time collapsed, due to Israel's refusal to renew the so-called moratorium on settlement activities, to cease its illegal settlement campaign and to abide by clear parameters for negotiations to achieve a just and lasting solution.

Such persistent Israeli behaviour and Israel's refusal to commit to the internationally endorsed parameters for a two-State solution cast a dark shadow of doubt over its professed intentions. That conduct underscores the belief that Israel's insistence on the negotiation path is merely for the sake of negotiations,

not to actually reach any comprehensive peace settlement.

It is highly condemnable that Israel, the occupying Power, continues to pursue its illegal settlement activities, along with many other illegal policies and practices, in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Such illegal actions undermine peace efforts and are the main obstacles to efforts to resume the peace process, making it nearly impossible to realize a two-State solution on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders. Recent announcements regarding the establishment of thousands more settlement units, particularly in and around occupied East Jerusalem, the continued Israeli demolitions of Palestinian homes and properties, and devious attempts by the Israeli Government to legitimize its illegitimate settlement schemes are the true measure of Israel's alleged commitment to the peace process and a two-State solution.

All indications at the present time — from provocative declarations and accelerated construction on the ground to the continued revocation of Palestinian residency rights — confirm that Israel chooses settlements over peace and continues to choose occupation and conflict at the expense of the future of both peoples and the region as a whole.

The Non-Aligned Movement remains firm in its condemnation of Israel's illegal settlement policies and practices. It stresses that all such unlawful attempts to alter the demographic composition, character and status of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, remain rejected and unrecognized by the international community.

The fact that a majority of NAM member States sponsored the draft resolution presented earlier this year to the Security Council, calling for the immediate cessation of all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory — as outlined in relevant letters addressed by the Chair of the Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement to the President of the Security Council — reflects the international position on this most critical issue. The Non-Aligned Movement regrets that the draft resolution was not adopted by the Security Council, as we had hoped and expected.

The Non-Aligned Movement reiterates its call for all bodies and agencies of the United Nations system to be resolute in demanding that Israel abide by its legal

obligations. Moreover, the Movement believes that calls for compliance must be backed by credible action, which is incumbent upon the Organization in the light of its Charter duties and the clear conclusion that the occupying Power continues to deliberately obstruct the attainment of peace and security in the Middle East region.

Israeli impunity must no longer be tolerated. Israel must be called upon to abide forthwith by all of its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention, relevant United Nations resolutions and the road map. They include an immediate cessation of all settlement activities and full respect for the international consensus on the issue, including the calls of the United Nations, NAM, the European Union, the Quartet and all other concerned international and regional bodies and actors.

The Non-Aligned Movement emphasizes the need to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to lift fully its illegal blockade, in accordance with its obligations under international law, Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and all other relevant United Nations resolutions. The Movement reiterates that this unacceptable and unsustainable situation must end. The unresolved crisis continues to have serious repercussions on universal efforts to promote peace and to inflict deep suffering on the Palestinian people.

In that connection, the Movement re-emphasizes the need for the reconstruction of Gaza. It calls on Israel to open all its crossing points with Gaza and allow the sustained and regular movement of persons and goods. That must include the import of essential reconstruction materials, including those necessary for the long-overdue reconstruction of United Nations facilities and the schools of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and normal commercial flows.

NAM also reiterates the need to empower UNRWA with all the financial and human support necessary to undertake its vital mission of assistance to the Palestine refugees effectively, pending the achievement of a just and lasting solution on the basis of resolution of 194 (III).

NAM welcomes the prisoner exchange, achieved under Egyptian auspices, that led to the release of an Israeli soldier in return for more than 1,000 Palestinian prisoners and detainees. NAM strongly condemns the continued detention and imprisonment of thousands of

Palestinians in Israeli jails, where ill-treatment and torture are widely used. It is the conviction of members of the Movement, as reiterated in the special declaration adopted by the NAM ministerial conference in Bali in May, that those prisoners, who include children and women, should be immediately released and that proper international inspection of their current condition should be a priority for the international community, including the Assembly, the Security Council and the Human Rights Council.

There were three main developments during the past few months. The first was the historic speech by President Abbas on 23 September in this Hall (see A/66/PV.19). The second was the agreement on Palestinian national reconciliation, achieved under the auspices of Egypt. It is a continuous process, as we saw at the meeting held in Cairo last week in that context. The core pillar of that agreement is the holding of legislative and presidential elections within a year. The third development was the fact that to date, more than 130 countries have recognized the State of Palestine on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders, including more than 100 members of the Non-Aligned Movement, constituting more than two thirds of the membership of the General Assembly.

Those three major developments, coupled with the recognition of all major international organizations and institutions — including the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians — that Palestinian institutions are more than ready for statehood, are clear indications that the dream of a Palestinian State is closer than ever to becoming a reality.

What is lacking is an Israeli commitment to the path of peace, to the two-State solution and to the provisions of international law, which are essential for the just and complete resolution of the conflict. Israel's respect for its legal obligations is imperative for the resumption of direct negotiations towards achieving a two-State solution on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008), the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, and of the Arab Peace Initiative and the road map.

The international community must exert all efforts to compel Israel to abide by its obligations and

commitments forthwith and to resume final status negotiations based on clear parameters. That would include the cessation of all settlement activities, an agreed time frame that recognizes the urgency of the matter, and the 4 June 1967 borders as the foundation and starting point for the negotiations, as set out by President Obama in his 19 May speech and as supported by the entire international community.

In saying that, the Movement stresses the utmost importance of the ongoing efforts of the international community and the United Nations and of a credible negotiation process in bringing an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967 and in finally achieving the independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and a just and lasting solution for all other aspects of the Palestine question that leads to genuine peace and security in the Middle East.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Mr. Vrailas (European Union): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The candidate countries Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Iceland; the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and Serbia; as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, align themselves with this statement.

The events taking place throughout the Middle East and Northern Africa in recent months have taken on truly historic proportions that will not only shape the future of the entire region but will also have repercussions far beyond the countries concerned. The fundamental changes witnessed across the Arab world have made the need for progress in the Middle East peace process all the more urgent. Recent events have indeed shown the necessity of heeding the legitimate aspirations of peoples in the region, including those of Palestinians for statehood and of Israelis for security.

The European Union reiterates its appeal to the parties to resume negotiations under the terms and within the timelines indicated in the Quartet statement (see SG/2178) of 23 September 2011. The European Union welcomes the positive statements of both parties in that regard. The European Union underlines the Quartet's crucial role in facilitating the resumption of direct talks between Israel and the Palestinians and recalls its readiness to support all efforts to bring the parties back to the negotiating table.

In that regard, the European Union reaffirms its clear positions with regard to parameters, principles and issues, including the conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council in December 2009, December 2010, May 2011 and July 2011, as well as the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union at the Security Council on 21 April 2011 (see S/PV.6520). The European Union fully supports the Quartet's call on the parties to refrain from provocative actions and to respect the obligations of both parties under the road map.

The European Union deplores the recent Israeli decisions to move forward with settlement expansion in the settlements of Mordot Gilo and Givat Hamatos and to accelerate construction in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, which run counter to the Quartet's efforts. The European Union further deplores steps to legalize, under Israeli law, houses in West Bank outposts. The EU reiterates that settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are illegal under international law, constitute an obstacle to peace and threaten to make a two-State solution impossible.

Mr. Loulichki (Morocco), Vice-President, took the Chair.

All settlement activity, including in East Jerusalem, should cease immediately. New construction plans should be abandoned. The European Union also calls upon both sides to avoid steps that run counter to the Quartet's efforts to restart negotiations.

The European Union welcomes the presentation of the Palestinian National Development Plan 2011-2013 on governance, social development, economy and infrastructure. It stresses the need for continued international support for the Palestinian State-building process, as outlined in the Chair's summary of the 18 September 2011 meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians.

The European Union is deeply concerned about the recent decision by the Israeli Government to suspend the transfer of revenues to the Palestinian Authority. It recalls in that regard the position of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee that clearance revenue collection by Israel on behalf of the Palestinian Authority should be efficient, transparent and predictable.

With regard to Gaza in particular, the European Union calls for the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), full respect for international humanitarian law and an immediate, sustained and unconditional opening of crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza, including goods from the West Bank. In that context, the EU calls for the full implementation of the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access. The European Union welcomes the measures announced by the Israeli Government as a step forward. However, more is needed. The EU calls for the full implementation of the Agreement and complementary measures in order to achieve a fundamental change of policy that allows for the reconstruction and economic recovery of Gaza, including through exports. The European Union has offered its assistance for achieving that objective.

The EU calls for a solution that addresses Israel's legitimate security concerns. The EU is very concerned at the renewed exchange of fire in the Gaza Strip and the south of Israel following the firing of rockets by Islamic Jihad from Gaza into Israel. The EU wholeheartedly condemns the indiscriminate targeting of civilians wherever they are and calls on all sides to respect the ceasefire brokered by Egypt.

The European Union reiterates its readiness to contribute substantially to the comprehensive and sustainable solution, which is to be found with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign and viable State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security and mutual recognition.

Mr. Mashabane (South Africa): I have the honour to address the General Assembly on behalf of the members of the IBSA Dialogue Forum, namely, India, Brazil and South Africa. Our countries, bound together by solid democratic foundations, also share common principles in their global action, chief among them is adherence to international law and diplomacy to achieve the peaceful settlement of all disputes. As a consequence, the IBSA countries, on whose behalf I have the honour to speak, also have a common position on the question of Palestine.

At the outset, allow me to express our appreciation to the President for convening this discussion on the question of Palestine in the General

Assembly as we mark the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

The IBSA countries recognize the Palestinian State on the basis of the 1967 lines, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and support the Palestinian request for full membership in the United Nations as a key step towards the full realization of the two-State solution. We believe that this recognition increases the prospects for a peaceful and negotiated settlement that addresses all final status issues in a timebound manner. The IBSA countries stand ready to continue to actively support all Palestinian efforts for statehood and recognition, including in the General Assembly.

The IBSA countries call for the urgent resumption of effective and results-oriented negotiations aimed at giving birth to a sovereign, democratic, independent, united and viable Palestinian State coexisting peacefully alongside Israel within secure borders. We commend the Palestinian leadership and the Palestinian people for their successful institution-building efforts, as recently recognized by the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of the International Assistance to Palestinians, and key donors.

Occupation is today the single most important obstacle to the further development of the Palestinian economy, which would ensure a better future for all Palestinians and advance security and democracy in the Middle East.

Prospects for peace have dimmed as illegal Israeli settlement activity continues unabated in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, in an attempt to isolate East Jerusalem from the other main Palestinian cities. That threatens the very feasibility of the two-State solution by altering the facts on the ground and the parameters of final status issues. The IBSA countries strongly urge the Israeli Government to freeze all settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories, including natural growth, and to reverse its decisions to build new housing units in East Jerusalem. Recent announcements in that regard are even more deplorable, as they came just days after the Quartet's call on the parties to refrain from provocative actions and to abide by their international obligations under the road map.

The IBSA countries welcome the Quartet's efforts to resume direct talks between the parties, in particular

the framework contained in its 23 September 2011 statement (see SG/2178). We hope that the parties will soon come forward with comprehensive proposals on borders and security, within the time frame set forth by the Quartet.

The IBSA countries believe that the Quartet's activities must be closely monitored by the Security Council, including through the Quartet's regular reporting to the Council on progress achieved in their contacts with the parties, or lack thereof. A comprehensive peace in the Middle East is crucial, not only for the peoples and countries of the region but also for international peace and security.

Concerned by the continuing deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza, we call on Israel to alleviate restrictions on the movement of people and goods, both in Gaza and in the West Bank. However, no easing measure can substitute for the complete lifting of the blockade against Gaza, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). We welcome the recent exchange of prisoners and hope it can lead to concrete steps towards enhanced cooperation and the end of the blockade.

The IBSA countries express support for, and appreciation of, mediation efforts aimed at achieving domestic Palestinian reconciliation. We urge all interested parties to contribute to the implementation of the reconciliation agreement.

The IBSA countries will continue to translate our deep-rooted solidarity with the people of Palestine and our commitment to peace into concrete contributions aimed at improving the living conditions of the Palestinian people. To that end, our South-South cooperation projects in the West Bank and Gaza, undertaken through the IBSA Trust Fund, include the creation of a Palestinian youth sports league, the partial reconstruction of a Red Crescent hospital in Gaza and the recently inaugurated multi-purpose sports centre in Ramallah.

A comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace process, including between Israel and Palestine, must make concrete progress on all tracks. We are convinced that the recent developments in the region may offer a chance for a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Increased participation of the international community in that endeavour, including developing countries with good relations with all parties, could bring a fresh perspective to the peace process. The IBSA countries,

comprising developing democracies from the South having a shared commitment to peace, multilateralism and cooperation, will actively support that process.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation is very grateful to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and its Chairman, to the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat and to the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information for their efforts to promote the implementation of resolutions of international legitimacy relevant to the question of Palestine. Those resolutions call for an end to the tragedy of the Palestinian people, who have suffered daily for more than six decades from occupation, killings, oppression and racism. Those resolutions also call for the Palestinian people to attain their inalienable legitimate rights, including their right to self-determination and the establishment of the independent Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as its capital, on all of its national territory, and a guarantee of the right of the refugees to return to their homeland in accordance with resolution 194 (III) of 1948.

The legitimate international community this morning expressed its solidarity with the Palestinian people and its commitment to supporting their cause in their struggle against the Israeli occupation and for the restoration of their full, undiminished legitimate rights. That solidarity and support have a special significance at this time — on the one hand, in the wake of the submission of the internationally supported Palestinian application for admission to the United Nations as a full-fledged Member, and, on the other hand, in the light of the reality that the suffering of the Palestinian people has entered a catastrophic phase.

The situation warns of dire consequences in view of the continued State terrorism practised by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Arab population in the occupied Arab territories, its continued policies of aggression and racism and its systematic violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, in blatant defiance of, and cynical disregard for, the will of the international community and its resolutions, with the blind support and direct protection of some influential States in this international Organization.

The situation puts the entire international community to an acid test, greatly undermining the prestige and credibility of the United Nations system

and the principles on which it was founded. In that light, it is no longer acceptable or understandable for the United Nations to stand idly by and fail to assume its responsibilities towards the question of Palestine by implementing its relevant resolutions.

The United Nations, including the Security Council, still has a chance to prove that it is capable of assuming its role and responsibilities under the Charter. It can still demonstrate that it is capable of preventing a small number of States that protect Israel from obstructing, in this house of international legitimacy, the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. It can do so by supporting the just Palestinian demand for recognition of the independent State of Palestine along the 4 June 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as its capital, and according it full membership in the United Nations, especially after Palestine has obtained full membership in UNESCO.

In that context, we wish to recall resolution 273 (III), of 11 May 1949, which set as conditions for Israel's admission to United Nations membership its commitment to the principles of the Charter and respect for relevant United Nations resolutions that asserted the right of the Palestinian people to the establishment of its independent State and the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland, from which they had been forcibly evicted by Zionist gangs. That principle is also affirmed in resolution 194 (III).

When accepting Israel's membership in the United Nations, the General Assembly took note of the declarations and explanations by Israel's representative before the ad hoc Political Committee in respect of its commitment to the implementation of those resolutions. In other words, Israel's membership in the United Nations was contingent on its commitment to the relevant United Nations resolutions. However, such commitment, regrettably, has been conspicuously absent in the international mechanisms that should hold Israel to account, given the public support of some States that call themselves super-Powers.

That has encouraged Israel to persist in its cynical disregard for international legitimacy and to reject peace, acting as a State that is above the law and exempt from accountability, and to continue in its aggressive practices. Those practices include accelerating the internationally condemned settlement campaign, which has never ceased, over the entire territory of Palestine. The campaign is especially

insidious in East Jerusalem, where it targets the very existence and cultural and civilizational identity of the city.

Other recent examples are the consent given to the construction of 1,557 new settlement units in East Jerusalem and 673 units in the West Bank, as well as the announcement by the Government of the occupying Power, Israel, of its intention to build more than 50,000 housing units in the settlements of East Jerusalem — all of this in the context of its unprecedented campaign to Judaize the occupied Holy City.

In addition, it continues with the inhumane embargo imposed on the Gaza Strip since the Israeli aggression in 2008, when Israel committed war crimes and serious violations of international humanitarian law that are tantamount to crimes against humanity. It pursues systematic policies of aggression — murdering civilians, including women and children — and policies of collective punishment. It has carried out the arbitrary arrest of thousands of innocent people, including 23 democratically elected members of the Palestinian Parliament, and violated the sanctity of Islamic and Christian holy sites in an attempt to Judaize them. The most recent example is the planned demolition of the historic Maghrebi Gate leading to the Al-Aqsa mosque.

Finally, we reaffirm the need to take, in the framework of international legitimacy, concrete, serious steps commensurate with the atrocities perpetrated by Israel, the occupying Power; to compel it to stop acting as a killing machine and cease its acts of aggression and settlement campaign; to lift immediately the cruel embargo imposed on the Palestinian people in Gaza; to put an end to its occupation of the Arab territories and to withdraw therefrom to the 1967 borders, so as to allow the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Mr. Al-Jarman (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I have the honour, on behalf of the United Arab Emirates, to thank His Excellency Ambassador Abdou Salam Diallo, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and the members of the Committee for their unwavering efforts to support the just Palestinian cause.

On the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the Government

and the people of the United Arab Emirates reaffirm their solidarity with the Palestinian people and their support for their just quest to achieve their legitimate aspirations to self-determination, like other peoples of the world.

Despite the political importance given by the international community in 1947 to resolution 181 (II), which resulted in the changing of the map and the future of the Middle East and the creation of the State of Israel, the independence of Palestine under that resolution has not yet been realized owing to the continued occupation and the harmful political obstacles placed by Israel to this day to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian State.

The United Arab Emirates, which has always supported all regional and international endeavours made to date, including those of the Quartet, with the aim of achieving a permanent settlement for the Palestinian issue through peace negotiations, expresses its deep concern at the continued breakdown in those negotiations, which are at a stalemate as a result of the Israeli Government's repeated violations of its own commitments and obligations towards the most basic legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and the principles of the relevant peace accords.

Accordingly, we call upon the international community to exert firm pressure on Israel to compel it to immediately stop all its violations, including its seriously detrimental unilateral policies carried out in the Palestinian territories, particularly its illegal settlement campaign, which has been accelerated in the depth of the Palestinian territories with the aim of changing the facts on the ground before the outcome of the final status negotiations.

Israel is further required to remove and dismantle existing settlements, including the separation wall, in accordance with the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, and to stop all provocative illegal actions recently taken in East Jerusalem, including the demolition of homes, the confiscation of lands and properties, the expulsion of the original Arab inhabitants, and the endangerment of sacred sites. That will enable Israel to demonstrate its good intentions and desire for peace. It will also provide conditions that are conducive to a resumption of final status negotiations on the basis of the two-State solution and according to a set timetable.

In that context, we call for the strengthening of the important role of the United Nations, especially the Security Council, and recall its primary responsibility for implementing its mandate in that regard by holding Israel accountable for its illegal actions and determining the extent to which Israel complies with relevant international resolutions, including the Fourth Geneva Convention.

We also affirm our support for the Palestinian request to gain international recognition for the State of Palestine as a fully fledged Member of the United Nations. That request is consistent with resolutions of international legitimacy and neither undermines the peace process nor weakens its prospects. The Palestinian request gives impetus to peace negotiations, especially now that the Palestinian National Authority has fulfilled its commitments to build Palestinian institutions and further the peace process in accordance with international legitimacy.

My delegation expresses its grave concern at the continuing deterioration of the humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people, particularly in the Gaza Strip, where the inhumane siege imposed on Gaza since 2006 has denied its people access to international humanitarian assistance. We therefore call upon the international community to work together in order to impose concrete solutions on the ground that will ensure the complete lifting of Israel's siege and the release of Palestinian political prisoners, thousands of whom live under inhumane conditions in Israeli prisons.

In that context, we welcome the Palestinian reconciliation agreement concluded recently by President Mahmoud Abbas under Egyptian auspices, and we stress in that respect the importance of Israel's commitment to facilitating the transfer of tax revenues to the Palestinian Authority, without obstacles or conditions, in order to enable the Authority to fulfil its primary responsibilities towards the Palestinian people.

We also urge the international community, especially donors, to increase their economic, financial and humanitarian aid to the Palestinian National Authority so as to enable it to address the current economic and financial challenges facing it, and to alleviate the suffering of its people by providing them with basic services and improving their living conditions.

The United Arab Emirates affirms that a just and lasting settlement of the whole Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East cannot be achieved without obligating Israel to end all its aggressive policies against countries and peoples of the region. That includes Israel's full withdrawal from all Palestinian and Arab territories occupied since 1967, namely, East Jerusalem, the Syrian Golan and the remaining occupied Lebanese territories, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the Madrid terms of reference; the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy, particularly resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973); the two-State vision set out in the road map, and the Arab Peace Initiative.

In conclusion, I reiterate the commitment of the United Arab Emirates to continuing to work with the international community to ensure the success of all efforts and initiatives aimed at consolidating security, stability and peace, which all the people of the Middle East and around the world aspire to achieve.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): Six decades have passed, and the question of Palestine remains at the heart of the Israeli-Arab conflict and on the United Nations agenda, while the international community has been unable to put an end to Israel's occupation in order to establish justice by restoring the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to live in freedom and dignity on their territory. The inaction of the international community, and a lack of genuine political resolve, have led Israel, the occupying Power, to become even more arrogant and to continue to disregard resolutions of international legitimacy and to persist in its aggressive policies and actions, preventing the Palestinian people from exercising their basic human rights, without regard for repeated international demands.

Israel, the occupying Power, has flouted a number of agreements and treaties that had been agreed on with the Palestinian Authority within the framework of the peace process in the Middle East. It continues to exploit the absence of any condemnation by the United Nations of its illegal practices in putting up obstacles to all serious international efforts aimed at ending occupation and at restoring peace. Israel's persistence in its settlement activities, especially in East Jerusalem, its blockade of Gaza, its confiscation of land and demolition of homes, its detainment of Palestinians and

restrictions on the movement of people and goods demonstrates its sense of itself as above the law or any accountability and enjoying impunity from any sanctions.

Israel's unilateral policies, aimed at changing demographic and geographic reality on the ground, are the reason for the failure of negotiations and the undermining of the peace process. The halt to negotiations has increased tensions in the region and perpetuated the suffering of the Palestinian people because of their deplorable economic and social conditions — conditions of hopelessness and frustration that must not be allowed to continue to affect Palestinians, as they have for so many decades now. We must therefore be able to guarantee life and dignity for the Palestinian people. That, in turn, will have a great impact on their future.

Israel continues to justify its actions and violations of international law and legitimacy in the name of the security and safety of its people. Those goals will not be achieved, however, as long as Israel continues to occupy Palestinian territory. The international community, represented by the Quartet and the Security Council, must therefore shoulder its responsibilities in order to arrive at a concrete two-State solution to the issue of peace in the Middle East — thereby pressuring the Israeli Government to end its practices, comply with international law and implement Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008) — and confirm the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the road map.

This meeting coincides with the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Once again, we wish to reiterate our solidarity with, and support for, the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, particularly the political right to establish its independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. In that context, we commend the people and the State of Palestine on their acceptance as full-fledged members of UNESCO, demonstrating the significant role that Palestine can play within that important organization.

We strongly support Palestine's request for full admission to the United Nations. We reiterate how important it is that Israel implement resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan to borders of before 4 June 1967. Israel's continued occupation of Syrian territory constitutes a real

obstacle on the path to peace and security in the Middle East region. We also wish to emphasize the territorial sovereignty of brotherly Lebanon. We call on Israel to end its ongoing violations of Lebanese airspace and land and to comply with Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) and withdraw fully from the remaining occupied Lebanese territory.

Mr. Prozor (Israel): A great Jewish sage once wrote that the truth can hurt like a thorn at first, but in the end it blossoms like a rose. His words came to my mind today; his insight could really benefit many in this Hall. It takes a well of truth to water the seeds of peace. Yet we continue to witness a drought of candour in this body's discussion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. On this historic day, real facts in the General Assembly remain few and far between.

For any who have been here before on 29 November, today is *déjà vu*. Some may have noticed that some minor changes have been taking place in the Middle East lately, but any changes in this body's resolutions condemning Israel are very rare. Indeed, it did not take a creative writer to craft the language in these draft resolutions. The exact same text is copied and pasted, year after year, much of it dating back five decades.

The account we heard today is one-sided. It is unilateral, unjust and unhelpful. It presents a distorted and partial version of history. It transforms the cause of Palestinian self-determination into a deliberate attempt to denigrate, defame and delegitimize the State of Israel.

The political dynamics of this body are sadly predictable. Every November, the leaves change colour in New York, but the automatic anti-Israeli majority never changes its votes. Each and every responsible member of the international community that affixes its seal of approval to this exact same set of draft resolutions — which are irrelevant at best and damaging at worst — should do a little soul-searching. Is this the message we want the General Assembly to send to the world?

Let me take a moment to remind the Assembly about what actually occurred on this day 64 years ago, and in the days that followed.

On 29 November 1947, the United Nations voted to partition what was then British Mandate Palestine into two States: one Jewish, one Arab. Two States for

two peoples. The Jewish population accepted that plan and declared a new State in its ancient homeland. It reflected the Zionist conviction that it was both necessary and possible to live in peace with our neighbours in the land of our forefathers. The Arab inhabitants rejected the plan and launched a war of annihilation against the new Jewish State, joined by the armies of five Arab Members of the United Nations.

One per cent of Israel's population died during that assault by five armies. Think about that price. It would be the equivalent of 650,000 dying in France today, 3 million dying in the United States or 13 million dying in China. As a result of the war, there were Arabs who became refugees. A similar number of Jews who lived in Arab countries were forced to flee their homes as well. They, too, became refugees.

The difference between those two distinct populations was — and still is — that Israel absorbed the refugees into its society. Our neighbours did not. Refugee camps in Israel gave birth to thriving towns and cities. Refugee camps in Arab countries gave birth to more Palestinian refugees. We unlocked our new immigrants' vast potential. The Arab world knowingly and intentionally kept their Palestinian populations in the second-class status of permanent refugees.

In Lebanon, for many years and still today, the law prohibits Palestinians from owning land and from working in the public sector or as doctors and lawyers. Palestinians are banned from those professions. In Kuwait, the once significant Palestinian population was forcibly expelled from the country in 1991. Few remain. Those are truths. In Syria, thousands of Palestinians had to flee refugee camps in Latakia last August when President Assad shelled their homes with naval gunboats.

In the vast majority of Arab countries, Palestinians have no rights of citizenship. It is no coincidence that the Arab world's responsibilities for the inalienable rights of those Palestinians are never mentioned in the resolutions before the Assembly.

The basic question underlying our conflict for 64 years has not changed. That question is: Has the Arab world — in particular the Palestinians — internalized the fact that Israel is here to stay and will remain the nation-State of the Jewish people? It is still unclear whether they are inspired by the promise of building a new State or the goal of destroying an existing one.

Two months ago, President Abbas stood at the podium in this very Hall and tried to erase the unbroken and unbreakable connection between the Jewish people and the land of Israel. He said,

“I come before the Assembly today from the Holy Land, the land of Palestine, the land of divine messages, ascension of the Prophet Muhammad and the birthplace of Jesus Christ” (*A/66/PV.19*, p. 29).

That was not an oversight. It was not a slip of the tongue. It was yet another deliberate attempt to deny and erase more than 3,000 years of Jewish history.

The Arab leaders from the two nations that sought peace have offered a different message. For example, in 1995, King Hussein came to the United States and said,

“For our part, we shall continue to work for the new dawn when all the children of Abraham and their descendants are living together in the birthplace of their three great monotheistic religions.”

In 1977, President Sadat came to Israel’s Knesset and quoted this verse from the Holy Koran:

“We believe in God and in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes and in the books given to Moses, Jesus and the prophets from their Lord” (*The Holy Koran*, II:136).

President Sadat and King Hussein spoke of three monotheistic religions — not two and not one.

The resolution that gives the date of 29 November significance — General Assembly resolution 181 (II) — refers to the creation of a “Jewish State” no less than 25 times. We still do not hear Palestinian leaders utter the term. The Palestinian leadership refuses to acknowledge Israel’s character as a Jewish State. One will never hear them say “two States for two peoples”. If anyone in this Hall ever hears a Palestinian leader say “two States for two peoples”, please phone me immediately. My office has set up a special equivalent of a 911 number in the event of such an unprecedented occurrence.

Palestinian leaders call for an independent Palestinian State, but they insist that the Palestinian people return to the Jewish State. That is a proposition

that no one who believes in the right of Israel to exist could ever accept. The idea that Israel will be flooded with millions of Palestinians is a non-starter. The international community knows it and the Palestinian leadership knows it, but the Palestinian people are not hearing it. At this very moment, the gap between their perception and reality remains the major obstacle to peace.

Let me repeat that: the so-called right of return is, and will remain, the major obstacle to peace. It is not settlements. It is not the laundry list of baseless accusations launched against Israel in today’s resolutions. I will repeat it again: the so-called right of return is the major obstacle to peace, and everyone knows that. Yet all of those who were so vocal today in telling Israel what it has to do for peace mumbled, stuttered and conveniently lost their voices when it came to telling the Palestinians that the so-called right of return was a non-starter.

For decades, this body has rubber-stamped nearly every Palestinian whim, no matter how counterfactual or counterproductive. What has it accomplished? The lip service of this body has only done a disservice to peace. True friends of the Palestinians have a responsibility to tell them the truth. They will stop promoting the distorted vision of history that characterizes this day and start delivering the real lessons of history that the Palestinian leadership now refuses to heed. Those lessons are clear. Bilateral negotiations are the only route to two States for two peoples, living side by side in peace and security, negotiations that resolve the outstanding concerns of both sides.

While bypass manoeuvres may work for heart surgery and highway construction, they will not bring peace or security to our region. Direct negotiations were the way of President Sadat and Prime Minister Begin and the way of Prime Minister Rabin and King Hussein. They have been the framework for advancing peace between Israel and the Palestinians for the past two decades.

Time and again, we have extended our hand in peace to the Palestinians. Prime Minister Netanyahu stood in this very Hall in September and declared his commitment to the cause of Palestinian self-determination and his vision for establishing a Palestinian State, alongside the Jewish State of Israel — two States for two peoples (see *A/66/PV.19*).

Yet today we wait for the Palestinians to abandon the false idol of unilateralism and get back to the real, hard work of direct negotiations. As they continue to run away from the negotiating table, the Palestinian leadership continues to move closer into the embrace of Hamas, an internationally recognized terrorist organization dedicated to the destruction of Israel.

That development brings to my mind Groucho Marx's famous line: "Those are my principles, and if you don't like them, well, I have others". The Quartet has long insisted on three principles that Hamas must adopt. It must renounce violence, recognize Israel and abide by previous agreements. At no point has Hamas satisfied those conditions or indicated any intention to do so. Those who advocate recognizing a Government that includes Hamas are urging a Groucho-Marxist policy in a complex and unstable region. If Hamas is too extreme to accept those principles, they argue, we must tailor our principles to match the extremism of Hamas.

The bar has been set very low. There can be no adjustments to the basic requirements for peace. There can be no bargaining. There can be no holiday season discounts in this Hall or anywhere else.

Even more than the words spoken in the statements made here today — or the words in the draft resolutions before the Assembly — it is the words not spoken that speak volumes. The Assembly has made clear that it does not stand in solidarity with many people in our region today.

In this Hall, I hear no solidarity with the 1 million Israeli men, women and children who live under the constant rain of rockets, mortars and missiles from the Gaza Strip. I hear no solidarity with the 16-year-old boy who was killed last April when a Hamas anti-tank missile struck his school bus, or with the thousands of other Israeli civilians who have been killed or injured. I hear no solidarity with the Israeli children who learn the alphabet at the same time as they learn the names Kassam, Grad and Katyusha — the rockets that keep them out of school for weeks at a time.

I hear no solidarity with the Palestinians who are victims of brutal Hamas rule, with the political opponents who are tortured, the women who are subjugated, or the children who are used as suicide bombers or human shields.

Today I hear no solidarity with the many people in the Middle East who are being repressed and slaughtered every single day for demanding their freedom. From Syria to Iran to Yemen, those people are no longer content with their leaders' explanation that Israel is to blame for all the problems of the Middle East — a fiction that is advanced through draft resolutions such as the ones before us today.

Today the people of the Middle East demand real answers to their plight.

I also heard no discussion today about the incitement that continues to pervade the West Bank and Gaza, where the next generation of Palestinian children is being taught that suicide bombers are heroes, that Jews have no connection to the Holy Land, and that they must seek to annihilate the State of Israel. From the cradle to kindergarten classrooms; from the grounds of summer camps to the stands of football stadiums; from the names of public squares to the public pronouncements of Palestinian leaders — those messages are everywhere.

Just last month, President Abbas declared that the Palestinian Authority would provide a grant of up to \$5,000 to every terrorist released in exchange for Gilad Shalit, Israel's kidnapped soldier. Those include people like Ibrahim Shammassina, who helped to murder four Israelis, including two teenagers; people like Walid Anajas, who planned bombings in the heart of Jerusalem and Rishon Lezion, which killed 32; and people like Wafa-al Bis, who unsuccessfully tried to blow herself up in an Israeli hospital.

Bathed in the blood of innocents, those terrorists are being held up as role models for the next generation of Palestinian children.

Palestinian Authority television broadcast President Abbas's remarks to those released terrorists last October. He said,

"You are people of struggle and jihad fighters for Allah and the homeland ... Your sacrifice and your effort and your actions were not in vain [for those murders]".

Sustainable peace must take root in homes, schools and the media, which must teach tolerance and understanding so that those can grow in people's hearts and minds. It must come from a Palestinian leadership that is willing to tell its people about the difficult compromises that they will have to make for statehood.

It will come through the hard work of State-building, not the old habit of State-bashing.

Today none of those truths has been spoken. Today I hear no solidarity with the principles of peace.

I know that the truth can be a burden. I know that old habits die hard. I know that the convenience of the moment sometimes weighs heavy on the interests of the future.

Yet only the truth will set us free. After years of darkness, I call on the Assembly to bring new light to this debate. I call on each and every representative in this Hall to embrace pragmatic solutions, not automatic resolutions; to speak with candour, not slander; to grapple for a new vision, not old divisions.

I call on the Assembly to finally glean some truth from this historic day, nourishing the seeds of peace in our region so that they can blossom into a brighter future.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): Sixty-four years ago today, on 29 November 1947, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), which partitioned Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish State and a separate entity for Jerusalem. That resolution was unfair to both Arabs and Palestinians.

According to the last census conducted at the time by the Mandate authorities, in 1946 the Arab population in Palestine numbered 1,237,000, while the Jewish population numbered 608,000 — twice as many Arabs as Jews. The last official data published by those authorities then showed that 93 per cent of Palestinian land was owned by Arabs, while Jews owned only 7 per cent of it. However, the partition resolution gave 55 per cent of historical Palestine to the Jewish State and 45 per cent to the Arab State. Yes, 55 per cent of the land went to only one third of the Jewish people, who owned only 7 per cent of that land.

Historically, it is therefore logical and understandable that Arabs at that time would reject that resolution. However, Arabs in general and the Palestinian leadership in particular, following the 1973 war, changed their discourse from calling for one State on the land of Palestine where Jews, Christians and Muslims would coexist, equal in rights and obligations, to acceptance of the two-State vision as the basis for a historic settlement aimed at ending the conflict.

It is understandable and natural that the Palestinians would come back and accept resolution 181 (II) as a reference point as set out in the 1988 Algiers Declaration on Palestine. It is also normal that the two-State solution would be the cornerstone of the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative.

Today, the Palestinians, in order to reach a settlement that would end the conflict and establish peace on the historic land of Palestine, have accepted resolution 181 (II), although it did not do them justice when it was adopted. They have agreed to recognize the State of Israel despite its responsibility for Al-Nakba, especially given that hundreds of thousands of them were displaced and expelled in 1948 and given the subsequent occupation by Israel since 1967 of all that remained at that time of the historic land of Palestine, including East Jerusalem. They have even agreed to establish their State on only 22 per cent of the historical land of Palestine.

It is paradoxical that Israel continues to reject the legitimacy bestowed by resolution 181 (II) on the Palestinians to establish the State of Palestine in an area of Palestine, like the State of Israel, considering that such a State, if it is ever to be established, would only be the outcome of negotiations with Israel — that is, based on Israel's consent and on its own conditions, and not as a right enshrined in resolution 181 (II).

In fact, the right of the Palestinians to establish their independent State is not only enshrined in resolution 181 (II). It is a right that is categorized as an inalienable right, as reaffirmed by the General Assembly in successive resolutions since 1974, and therefore, as we have always reiterated, the establishment of a Palestinian State is not a negotiable right. However, negotiations, as called for by the Palestinian leadership, remain the necessary means for achieving a final settlement. The issue is not the establishment of the Palestinian State, but rather the final status issues, namely, refugees, Jerusalem, security, settlements, borders and water. But how are we to achieve productive negotiations as long as the Israeli leadership reiterates every day that it will not stop settlements, will not allow the return of refugees, nor accept the 1967 borders as a reference point and not negotiate the status of Jerusalem?

The Israeli leadership has started to impose conditions on the Palestinians to recognize Israel as a Jewish State, with all that includes and with all the

threats that will entail for the future of the Arab population inside Israel proper and the right of Palestinian refugees to return, pursuant to resolution 194 (III), adopted by the Assembly.

The reply to the question of how to achieve productive negotiations is that such negotiations should be based only on clear principles and foundations that require the international community to accept an unambiguous formula that emphasizes the well-known principles of peace negotiations, namely, the Madrid peace process, land for peace, relevant Security Council resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. Those are the principles and the foundations that call for a just solution to such issues as the refugee question, the illegality of settlements, the legality of the 1967 borders as a reference point, and the rejection of the Israeli annexation of occupied East Jerusalem.

There are some who see the negotiations as a crisis, simply because of the failure of the Palestinians and Israelis to sit together at the same table for more than a year now. That is true also because Israel refused to continue the moratorium on its settlement activities, even though that moratorium was only partial to start with. Such a statement ignores the fact that the Palestinians and the Israelis have sat at the same negotiating table for more than 20 years without achieving the desired peace agreement.

We must recall as well all the deadlines that Israel did not respect. It did not abide by completing the final status negotiations within five years, as stipulated in the Oslo Agreement almost 20 years ago. It did not abide by the two-year deadline contained in the road map, or the one-year period set forth in the Annapolis agreement. Nor, of course, did it abide by the so-called framework agreement called for by the Quartet and the deadline it set, which expired last September. In fact, emphasis placed on reference points or the importance of abiding by deadlines is not sufficient to achieve productive negotiations. What is required is active international intervention that restores the balance that those negotiations lack, an international intervention that will play the role of a true arbitrator that holds accountable the party that fails to abide by the international reference points or respect fixed deadlines.

That is what the United Nations should do in order to be true to its mission, its resolutions and its stated role.

Ms. Gunnarsdóttir (Iceland): My statement will be very short, but substantive.

First of all, Iceland aligns itself with the statement that was made earlier by the observer of the European Union on the question of Palestine.

However, Iceland would like to take this opportunity to inform the Assembly about the resolution that was passed earlier today by the Icelandic Parliament, with broad support and no votes against. In that resolution the Parliament entrusts the Icelandic Government to recognize Palestine as an independent and sovereign State within the pre-Six-Day-War borders. The matter now rests with the Icelandic Government.

Mr. Wibowo (Indonesia): My delegation is immensely grateful to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for its report contained in document A/66/35, and to the Secretary-General for his report on the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine contained in document A/66/367. Those reports provide an unsettling and depressing picture of developments relating to the question of Palestine in the past year, many of them already known to us.

Before continuing, I would like to associate myself with the statement made by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

During the period under review, the hopes that we nurtured last year for positive developments leading to a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have simply evaporated. Last year, we saw the failure of the United States-sponsored proximity talks. In the occupied Palestinian territory, Israel's settlement practices, highlighted by its failure to continue the moratorium on settlement construction, made an already bad situation considerably worse.

In the past year, the Palestinians have suffered all the terrible elements of that policy, such as accelerated settlement construction and expansion in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the demolition of houses, the revocation of residency rights, the eviction of Palestinian citizens, settler violence and extremism, and the transfer of more Israeli settlers into the city. Those Israeli settlement practices, aimed at altering the demographic composition, physical character and status of the Palestinian territory, including East

Jerusalem, are continuing and remain a blatant violation of international law.

Along with that obnoxious settlement policy, Israel has continued its illegal construction of the separation wall in the West Bank, including in and around occupied East Jerusalem. The wall is a barrier varying significantly from the 1967 Green Line and encroaching into occupied Palestinian territory, in defiance of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

In Gaza, Israel has continued to maintain its grip on the area through a well-controlled blockade that has seen very little easing. Israel continues to hinder the movement of persons and goods, thereby making it extremely difficult for the people on the ground to recover from the last military conflict. It is distressing that, years after the conflict, the importation of essential supplies and reconstruction materials continues to be almost impossible. Indonesia strongly condemns the fact that Israel can so blatantly continue to ignore its obligations under international law to provide protection to the civilian population in the Gaza Strip, as more and more of the people there are living in unemployment, poverty and dependency.

Indonesia is pleased, however, that in spite of Israel's refusal to do the right thing and return to the road that leads to peace and security, the Palestinian Authority has continued to move forward in its State-building programme. We are also quite pleased that this effort continues to enjoy the strong support of the international community.

Two months ago, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas formally transmitted to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon Palestine's application for membership in the United Nations. Indonesia strongly supports that application, just as it has continued to support the struggle of the Palestinian people through the years to achieve their inalienable rights.

We must note, in that regard, that the dogged resistance to progress that Israel has demonstrated in the past year has coincided with the Arab Spring, in which various countries have witnessed the uprising of significant numbers of their people who are united in their demand for political change, better governance and social justice. We hope that Israel has heard that call, because Palestine will not be immune to the message. In our view, if Israel truly wishes to resolve the conflict with Palestine, it must respond by deciding

to work within the dictates of international rules, and not for its own narrow interests.

Indonesia shares the view of the Secretary-General that, in order to break the current deadlock, all parties must show the leadership, courage and responsibility necessary to arrive at a mutually agreeable and lasting peace that would resolve all final status issues. Furthermore, we would like to reiterate that a truly comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East requires a solution that also includes the Israel-Lebanon and Israel-Syria tracks, on the basis of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

Indonesia remains committed to the pursuit of an independent, viable and democratic Palestine living side by side in peace and security with Israel. We appeal to members of the international community to continue to offer their strong support for that vision. Despite the setbacks, we still believe that resolution of the conflict is within reach.

On this International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, we wish to take this opportunity to relay the message sent to them today by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, that Indonesia will continue to stand by them through their struggles and in their desire to join the community of nations. We also encourage all Palestinians to close ranks and work diligently towards building a strong and united nation. Indonesia remains behind them and will continue to work to protect and advance Palestinian interests.

Mr. León González (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the Secretary-General for the report entitled "Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine", contained in document A/66/367, and the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for a similar report, contained in document A/66/35. In particular, we would like to thank Ambassadors Abdou Salam Diallo of Senegal and Saviour Borg of Malta for their presentations of draft resolutions A/66/L.15, A/66/L.16, A/66/L.17 and A/66/L.18 and the report of the Committee.

This item was included for the first time in the Assembly's agenda 64 years ago, in 1947, when the majority of the representatives present here today probably had not even been born. Since then, the Assembly has held similar debates on 39 occasions, while it has been unable to prevent Israel's crimes against the Palestinian people. Nor has it been able to reverse Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory,

including East Jerusalem, 44 years after that occupation started, in 1967.

Israel, the occupying Power, has defied the international community with its constant transgression of international norms and treaties, including a long list of resolutions of the Assembly and the Security Council. Nor has it heeded the reiterated calls to the Secretary-General and other leaders of international organizations to put an end to its illegal actions and its crimes against the Palestinian people.

The situation has continued its downward spiral since we last met to take up this question, 12 months ago. The reports (A/66/35 and A/66/367) that the Secretary-General and the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People have presented to us are eloquent in describing the worsening situation.

Israel has continued its illegal settlement activities in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in violation of resolutions of the Security Council, the Fourth Geneva Convention and its obligations pursuant to the road map. Israel has continued the illegal construction of the wall in the West Bank, including in occupied East Jerusalem and surrounding areas, against the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (see A/ES-10/273). It has continued its non-compliance with its obligations under international law to provide protection to the civilian population in the Gaza Strip. Israel has pursued murder and harm to the Palestinians through attacks and incursions by the Israeli army. The blockade of the Gaza Strip perpetuates the deterioration of social indicators of the people living there, including women and children.

Those are only some elements of information that are reflected in the reports, and they confirm the gravity of the facts. There are ample reasons to adopt not only condemnatory political measures, such as those available to the Assembly for adoption one more time, but also binding decisions of the Security Council to halt Israel's crimes and punish the perpetrators.

Why does the Security Council remain so passive in view of that overwhelming evidence? Why is the perpetration of those crimes against the Palestinian people not punished? Why does the Council not deprive those responsible of the economic resources they use to carry out their acts, or limit their movements? Why does NATO show no concern at the

constant flouting of the human rights of the Palestinian people as a result of Israel's aggression?

That question exposes the hypocrisy and double standards of a number of developed countries that proclaim themselves paradigms of human rights. The United States of America has prevented the Security Council from condemning Israel, which is very different to what happens to countries of the South that oppose and denounce its imperial policies.

The people and Government of Cuba have historically defended the cause of the Palestinian people, supported the exercise of their rights and condemned Israel's crimes in plain language. Our position is unchanged. We also support the establishment of a Palestinian State — which Cuba recognized when it was first proclaimed — based on the pre-1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. Likewise, we support the decision of our Palestinian brothers and sisters to seek full membership for their State in the United Nations, and we are proud to have supported Palestine's admission to UNESCO as a full member State.

This morning we again celebrated the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, a tradition that has brought us together every 29 November since the Assembly adopted resolution 32/40 B in 1977. In his customary message on this occasion, Cuba's Minister for Foreign Affairs reiterated my country's condemnation of Israel's serious violations of international law, which are contrary to the objectives of the peace process; the illegal construction of settlements; the alteration of population demographics; the imposition of arbitrary and racist restrictions on movement throughout the occupied Palestinian territory; the demolition of houses; and the eviction of Palestinian families in East Jerusalem, as well as other illegal acts of incitement, provocation and aggression that extremist settlers have perpetrated against the Palestinian people and their holy sites.

The Cuban Minister for Foreign Affairs himself addressed the Assembly in the general debate inaugurating its sixty-sixth session. Speaking on behalf of the people and Government of Cuba, he said:

“If the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to independence, sovereignty and self-determination is recognized; if the need to re-establish the exercise of the human rights of Palestinians is recognized; if the blockade of

Gaza, the economic coercion and segregation symbolized by the infamous wall are recognized as crimes; if the subjugation of a nation to conditions jeopardizing its very existence is described as genocide; if all Member States are supposed to adopt all legal measures within their reach to protect Palestinian civilians, then the General Assembly should take action now.

“Cuba, a country with a small Jewish community, condemns the historical injustice of anti-Semitism, the crime against humanity that was the Holocaust, and recognizes the right of the State of Israel to exist. Our people harbour only fraternal feelings towards the Israeli people, who are also victims of this conflict.” (A/66/PV.26, pp. 14 and 15)

Earlier in the same meeting he said,

“The General Assembly has the inescapable moral, political and legal obligation to ensure the recognition of an independent Palestinian State, with the boundaries established before 1967 and with East Jerusalem as its capital, as a full Member of the United Nations. This should be accomplished with or without the Security Council, with or without the veto of the United States and with or without new peace negotiations.” (*ibid.*, p. 14)

Mrs. Al-Mughairy (Oman): I would like, first of all, to convey through the President our appreciation to His Excellency Ambassador Abdou Salam Diallo, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Senegal, for his effective efforts as Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and for the report prepared by the Committee contained in document A/66/35. I also wish to commend him on his comprehensive statement to the Assembly on the matter. I would also like to express our appreciation for the efforts of the members of the Committee in working towards a just solution to the grave issues confronting the Palestinian people.

In this statement I intend to give the Sultanate's views on the agenda items entitled “Question of Palestine” and “The situation in the Middle East”.

There is no doubt that this meeting is of special importance against the background of the developments of the past year and the initiatives of the State of Palestine to enhance its status in the United Nations and other

bodies of the United Nations system. We gather to consider a major international problem that continues to pose a challenge to the international community that it has so far been unable to meet.

The Palestinian people remain under occupation and their situation worsens by the day as a result of the occupying Power's systematic oppressive practices. The international community must not remain silent and allow that situation to continue.

We are now in the sixth decade of the occupation, which has witnessed the killing and displacement of Palestinians and the destruction of the basic infrastructure of the occupied territories. Yet the proud Palestinian people remain undiscouraged and continue to claim their legitimate rights, represented by the establishment of an independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

My country congratulates the Palestinian people on their major and historic achievement in obtaining full membership in UNESCO. We invite the international community to support the admission of this State to membership in the United Nations.

The Government of the Sultanate of Oman is deeply concerned about the tragic situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, which results from the continuing Israeli blockade and the imposition of a humanitarian crisis on civilians in the Gaza Strip. The situation is also a consequence of the occupying Power's intensified campaign and inhuman and illegal attacks in Al-Quds Al-Sharif and around religious sites, which are aimed at changing the demographic composition of the population through the abolition of identities and forced displacement of the indigenous people. The latest action was the Israeli Government's announcement of its intention to accelerate the construction of 2,000 new settlement units in occupied East Jerusalem as a retaliatory measure to collectively punish the Palestinian people, following Palestine's admission into UNESCO as a full member State on 31 October.

This year marks the sixty-fourth anniversary of the General Assembly's adoption in 1947 of resolution 181 (II), on the division of the land of Palestine into two States. To this day, the Palestinians are still deprived of the exercise of their legitimate rights and their national sovereignty, and of their right to self-determination and to the establishment of an

independent State on their own land, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The aspiration of the Palestinian people was and still is for the international community to protect them from the inhuman, illegal and arbitrary acts undertaken against them by successive Israeli Governments. The international community should therefore take a firm position in opposition to those practices. The war on the Gaza Strip that was launched at the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009 and the attack on the freedom convoy that was initiated in order to remove the unjust embargo imposed on Gaza by Israel are flagrant violations of human rights. By such acts Israel again demonstrates to the whole world that it is not interested in peace.

It is necessary for the international community to send a clear message to Israel to stop such policies. Genuine negotiations that lead to the establishment of security and stability are needed on the basis of the principle of land for peace, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the Arab Peace Initiative.

My delegation confirms what was stated in the statement of Oman in the general debate at the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly, in which we expressed our belief in the urgent need to find a solution to the chronic conflict in the Middle East (see A/66/PV.25). We encourage negotiations between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government. However, since negotiations are, unfortunately, still at a standstill, the United Nations should act and fulfil its commitment to finding a just and comprehensive solution. My Government believes that the establishment of a Palestinian State on the basis of the borders of 4 June 1967 and its recognition as a full Member of the Organization will lead to that just and comprehensive solution to end the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The Government of the Sultanate of Oman looks forward to the effective, balanced and continuous role of the United States of America. From that standpoint, my Government invites Israel to seize this historic opportunity and take advantage of the international momentum to support direct negotiations in order to achieve a partnership of peace and security with Arab countries.

The Sultanate of Oman was one of the first countries to welcome the peace process and to consider it a natural and civilized approach to settle differences through dialogue and negotiation. Oman invites the

concerned parties of the peace process to play an active role in the settlement of the conflict in the Middle East because of the seriousness of the situation in the region and the crisis witnessed by that region.

That will require the Security Council and the Quartet to work more vigorously and urgently towards a just and comprehensive solution to the Israeli-Arab conflict, in accordance with the relevant international resolutions, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative, which should lead to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State on the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, living side by side and in peace with Israel within internationally recognized borders.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate in this item for this meeting.

May I remind delegations that wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply that, in accordance with the rules of procedure, statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes and five minutes — but that is not an encouragement to exercise the right of reply twice — and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Sahraei (Islamic Republic of Iran): Since I have heard a baseless allegation against my country by the representative of the Zionist regime, which has based its policies, practices and behaviour on occupation, State terrorism, torture, violence, bloodshed and nonchalance towards international law, I would like to place on record that it is yet another preposterous and, indeed, well-worn practice by that regime to distract the international community's attention from its criminal policies and abhorrent atrocities in the region, including its heinous crimes against the people of Palestine.

There are few human rights principles that are not systematically violated by the Israeli regime. Various resolutions and numerous reports of the United Nations, including the recent report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/66/35), attest to the bitter fact that that regime has no respect for the basic values of the civilized world, nor does it respect the fundamental principle of human rights by which the world community functions. It is therefore high time for the international community to urgently weigh in to counter the Israeli regime's inhuman policies and practices in imposing a humanitarian disaster on the defenceless Palestinian people in all Palestinian territories.

The Islamic Republic of Iran continues to emphasize the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, who have suffered from occupation and suppression by the Zionist regime for decades. It stresses the importance of the international community's recognition of the Palestinians' inalienable right to self-defence against foreign occupation and aggression.

Mr. AlJarallah (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): The representative of Israel claimed in his statement that the State of Kuwait expelled Palestinians from its territories in 1991, when everyone knows that more than 1 million people from various communities, including our Palestinian brothers, left Kuwait during the Iraqi occupation in 1990. That was affirmed by international documents.

However, the Israeli Government and its representatives have always levelled charges and fabrications in international forums with regard to the problems and tragedy that they have inflicted on the Palestinian people throughout the past decades. That Government has carried out many threats, beginning with its occupation of Arab and Palestinian territories and the expulsion of the Palestinian people from their land. I do not think that the Israeli representative can deny that the number of Palestinian people expelled by Israel has amounted to more than 4 million refugees living in the occupied territories and in neighbouring Arab States.

In 1949, the United Nations established the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East to provide assistance, health care and education to the Palestinians displaced by Israel from their homeland. That country has confiscated their property and homes, and now it feverishly seeks to steal more land through the construction of more new settlements and by expanding the existing settlements, in blatant defiance of all international norms and resolutions.

Mr. Falouh (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation would like to speak in exercise of the right of reply to respond to the statement made by the representative of Israel.

The Israeli representative has taken it on himself to express distress at the fact that the General Assembly has celebrated the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. He feels that the attention paid by the General Assembly to the question of Palestine is biased against Israel and its policies of aggression and occupation and that all the positions of

Member States that support the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the establishment of their national State on their national territory, as well as all the international meetings, resolutions and statements, which count in the hundreds, are futile efforts that serve no useful purpose and have no value because Israel does not attach any importance to those efforts, because they do not support Israel's aggression and occupation and because they do not protect the crimes against humanity perpetrated by Israel against the Palestinian people for decades.

It seems that Israel's isolation in this serious debate left its representative with no alternative but to resort yet again to fabrications and card tricks, and expanding the scope of the discussion beyond the limits of the question of Palestine, in order to divert attention from the crux of the matter, which is Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories and its oppression of the Palestinian people around the clock in a way that is indescribable.

I believe that everyone here is surprised that the representative of the Israeli occupying authorities expresses keen concern for Palestinian refugees. It is Israel that has caused their plight and it was Israel that expelled them from their homeland under the threat of murder and daily oppression. Israel still refuses to recognize the most basic human rights of the Palestinians, including the legitimate right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes, thereby defying an unprecedented unanimous international will. Israel is now claiming, falsely, that it is concerned for the refugees hosted by Syria in the Al-Ramel camp in the southern section of Latakia. Those allegations are totally false and have no basis in reality. We in Syria have hosted our brothers the Palestinian refugees, whose tragic ordeal was caused by Israel, and have provided them with all possible services. We are most concerned about their lives and rights, which is our duty.

It has become clear to everyone that the representative of Israel, the occupying Power, having heard today all the condemnations and rejections of Israeli terrorist and racist policies, found himself in an unenviable position, as usual, which explains his failed attempt to distort what is happening in Syria and exploit it so as to shake off the international condemnations of his country and divert attention from them.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.