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THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Report of the Secretary-General

1. The present report is submitted in pursuance of paragraph 7 of General Assembly resolution 31/61 of 9 December 1976, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to inform the Co-Chairmen of the Peace Conference on the Middle East of the resolution and to submit a report on the follow-up of its implementation to the Assembly at its thirty-second session.
2. By identical letters dated 6 January 1977, addressed respectively to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the Secretary of State of the United States of America, in their capacity as Co-Chairmen of the Peace Conference on the Middle East, the Secretary-General brought resolution 31/61 to their attention. The following day, he transmitted to the Security Council the text of the resolution and drew particular attention to paragraph 6 of that resolution, in which the General Assembly requested the Council to take effective measures, within an appropriate time-table, for the implementation of all relevant resolutions of the Council and the Assembly on the Middle East and Palestine.
3. The implementation of General Assembly resolution 31/61 is closely related to that of resolution 31/62, in which the Assembly called for the early convening of the Peace Conference on the Middle East, under the auspices of the United Nations and the co-chairmanship of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the United States of America, not later than the end of March 1977, and requested the Secretary-General "(a) to resume contacts with all the parties to the conflict and the Co-Chairmen of the Peace Conference on the Middle East ...; and (b) to submit a report to the Security Council on the results of his contacts and on the situation in the Middle East not later than 1 March 1977".
4. In February 1977, the Secretary-General undertook a visit to the Middle East. The main purpose of this mission was to discuss with the parties concerned the best course to follow in resuming the negotiating process and to consult with them as to the best means of overcoming the various obstacles in the way of that objective, but the mission also provided an opportunity for an exchange of views

on the wider aspects of the Middle East problem itself. The results of the Secretary-General's mission were set out in the report which he submitted to the Security Council on 28 February 1977 under General Assembly resolution 31/62 (S/12290 and Corr.1). The Secretary-General found that although the parties expressed their desire for an early resumption of the negotiating process through the convening of the Peace Conference on the Middle East in Geneva, there was no agreement on the question of the participation of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the representation of the interests and rights of the Palestinian people. In this connexion the Secretary-General observed that the obstacles in the way of reconvening the Geneva Conference were of a kind that could not be overcome by purely procedural means. Changes of attitude on all sides were necessary. These would involve mutual recognition of the legitimacy of the claims of the different parties in suitable forms and with adequate guarantees, as well as an effort on all sides to define more clearly the shape of an ultimate peace settlement in the Middle East.

5. Immediately after the Secretary-General's visit to the Middle East, he sent representatives to Moscow and Washington for the purpose of briefing the two Co-Chairmen of the Geneva Conference on his consultations with the parties concerned and his findings. Since then efforts to resume the negotiating process have continued at various levels in New York and elsewhere. The Secretary-General and his immediate advisers on the Middle East have been in close contact with the two Co-Chairmen in this connexion.

6. Recently a number of developments took place in the Middle East which have a bearing on the search for a peaceful settlement in the area. Those developments have already been brought to the attention of the General Assembly and the Security Council in communications submitted by the parties or other Member States and circulated as official documents of those two organs. 1/ The present report is not the place to deal in detail with those communications, but it may be appropriate and useful to recall briefly here the developments referred to in them.

7. In July the Government of Israel legalized three existing settlements in the West Bank of the Jordan. In the following month it decided to apply Israeli laws in the fields of health, labour and other services to the Arab population of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Later in August it authorized the establishment of three new settlements in the West Bank. Arab States and PLO have strongly protested against those decisions, which they considered as deliberate acts to consolidate Israeli occupation and to pave the way for annexation. At the request of Egypt (A/32/241), the General Assembly has decided to include an additional item in the agenda of its thirty-second session entitled "Recent illegal Israeli measures in the occupied Arab territories designed to change the legal status, geographical nature and demographic composition of those territories in contravention of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, of Israel's international obligations under the fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and of United Nations resolutions, and obstruction of efforts aimed at achieving a just and lasting peace in the Middle East".

1/ See A/32/155, A/32/173, A/32/176-S/12384, A/32/192-S/12388, A/32/210-S/12396, S/12376, S/12377, S/12382 and S/12386.

8. The Government of Israel for its part has brought to the attention of the General Assembly and the Security Council a recent decision taken by the Central Council of PLO in which it rejected Security Council resolution 242 (1967). In a letter dated 31 August 1977 (A/32/202-S/12392), the Permanent Representative of Israel indicated that the statement issued by the Central Council, together with "the recent indiscriminate outrages against civilians by PLO", demonstrated yet again that PLO could not be a partner to any steps leading to a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

9. It is also relevant to make a reference in this report to the situation in southern Lebanon, where fighting between de facto forces flared up recently with renewed intensity, since a deterioration of this situation may have considerable implications in the wider context of the Middle East problem.

10. In the Secretary-General's report to the thirty-second session of the General Assembly on the work of the Organization (A/32/1), he referred to the above developments. In particular, the Secretary-General expressed the view that, in the present critical stage in the search for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, it is of vital importance that all the Governments and parties concerned should refrain from any moves likely to heighten tension or to affect the current efforts to resume the negotiating process.

11. As the thirty-second session of the General Assembly gets under way, the two Co-Chairmen of the Geneva Conference and high-ranking representatives of all the parties concerned have come to New York. On this occasion, the efforts to bring about an early resumption of the negotiating process are entering a new intensified phase. At this crucial stage, it would be inappropriate for the Secretary-General to comment substantively on the efforts under way. He wishes only to express the earnest hope that it will prove possible, with the co-operation and understanding of all concerned, to bring about an early resumption of the negotiating process as a first step towards the achievement of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, as called for by the General Assembly and the Security Council. As the Secretary-General indicated in his report on the work of the Organization: "It is more than ever urgent and vital that the parties preserve the spirit of moderation and realism and channel that spirit into the arduous and lengthy process of negotiation. If that were not to happen, I greatly fear that we shall be facing a major international crisis in the not too distant future."
