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

Summary record of the 333rd meeting

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Chair: Mr. Diallo (Senegal)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

1. *The agenda was adopted.*

Update on developments since the previous meeting of the Committee

2. **The Chair**, summarizing some of the activities and developments that had taken place since the Committee's previous meeting, said that, on 21 April 2011, the Security Council had held an open debate to discuss the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, at which he had delivered a statement on behalf of the Committee.

3. On 27 April, Palestinian factions concluded a reconciliation agreement under the auspices of the Egyptian Government. The Secretary-General's representative, Mr. Robert H. Serry, had attended the signing ceremony, which had been taken place in Cairo on 4 May 2011.

4. The United Nations Seminar on Mobilizing Assistance to the Palestinian People had taken place in Helsinki on 28 and 29 April.

5. On 6 May 2011, the status of the Palestinian delegation in Cyprus had been upgraded to that of a diplomatic mission.

6. From 14 to 17 May, Ms. Valerie Amos, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, had visited the Occupied Palestinian Territory. During her visit, she had called for an end to the forced displacement of Palestinians from East Jerusalem and the protracted blockade of the Gaza Strip.

7. On 19 May, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Robert H. Serry, had briefed the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. On that same day, the President of the United States of America, Mr. Barack Obama, had delivered a speech on the Middle East in which he had stated that negotiations should result in two States. The borders of Israel and Palestine should be based on the 1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps, so that secure and recognized borders were established for both states. The Palestinian people must have the right to govern themselves, and reach their potential, in a sovereign and contiguous State. On 20 May, the Quartet had issued a statement expressing strong

support for the vision of Israeli-Palestinian peace that had been outlined by President Obama. On 23 May, the Council of the European Union had called for the urgent resumption of direct negotiations leading to a comprehensive solution on all tracks. The Council had also reiterated its readiness to recognize a Palestinian State, when appropriate.

8. The 16th Ministerial Conference and Commemorative Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement had been held in Bali from 25 to 27 May. At the conclusion of their meeting, the ministers had reiterated that the Non-Aligned Movement would continue to support the Palestinian people in its quest to achieve freedom, peace and justice, in line with the long-standing international consensus recognizing the Palestinian people as a nation and recognizing its inalienable right to establish a State on the basis of the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

9. On 2 June 2011, the Foreign Minister of France, Mr. Alain Juppé, had presented a peace plan to the Palestinian Authority during his visit to Ramallah. That plan was largely based on the principles that United States President Obama had set out in his speech on 19 May 2011. He had also conveyed a proposal to hold a peace conference in Paris by the end of July 2011 in order to discuss how restart Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

10. On 6 June, Fatah official Mr. Nabil Shaath had stated that Lesotho had recognized the State of Palestine, within the 1967 borders.

11. The European Union had remained highly engaged in efforts to overcome the current stalemate in the peace process. From 12 to 15 June, Mr. Jerzy Buzek, President of the European Parliament, had visited Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory and pressed for the resumption of direct negotiations. He had also reiterated the Parliament's support for the Palestinian reconciliation agreement. On 17 and 19 June, Baroness Ashton, the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, had met with Palestinian and Israeli leaders and discussed practical measures to restart direct negotiations.

The situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and developments in the political process

12. **Mr. Cook** (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) said that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) had continued to face considerable challenges in carrying out its mandate. Recent events in the Syrian Arab Republic had affected its operations and the situation in the Gaza Strip, despite some easing of the restrictions on access, had continued to be of considerable concern.

13. The Israeli security cabinet decision of 20 June 2010 to ease certain aspects of the blockade of the Gaza Strip had fallen short of ending the restrictive measures that precluded recovery in the territory. Persistently high unemployment and continuing deterioration in real wages had led to significant levels of poverty, with the refugees being the most affected.

14. The Agreement on Movement and Access, the purpose of which was to ensure the movement of persons and goods between Israel and the Gaza Strip, on the one hand, and the Gaza Strip and the West Bank on the other hand, had almost completely unravelled in 2011. The closure by the Israeli authorities of all but one of the four land crossings between Israel and Gaza had tightened the blockade at a time when the international community was evaluating its so-called easing.

15. Poverty in Gaza had become endemic under the prevailing access regime. Nearly two thirds of the entire population was either food insecure or vulnerable to food insecurity. Without access to jobs, efforts to shorten the food queues were bound to fail. Indeed, there was a risk that the territory could become almost completely dependent on external welfare provisions.

16. The nearly \$4.5 billion that had been pledged at Sharm el-Sheikh in 2009 for the reconstruction of Gaza had not yet been put to use because of Israeli-imposed restrictions on construction supplies. Prior to the blockade, the construction sector alone had employed 50,000 workers. Only the resumption of large-scale construction, manufacturing and exports could alter the situation in a meaningful way and enable the people of Gaza to be self-sufficient once again.

17. In 2010, the Occupied Palestinian Territory had received only \$290 million, which was half of its funding needs, through the Consolidated Appeals Process, making the Territory one of the most under-covered emergency areas in the world. In 2011, the Agency's Gaza Field Office had appealed for \$300 million to meet the needs of refugees who had become aid dependent. Of that amount, \$165 million were needed in order to maintain services at 2010 levels. However, the UNRWA Emergency Appeal was facing a significant funding shortfall that threatened to disrupt delivery of food to the poorest of the poor and cut off short-term job opportunities. While the Agency continued to call for an end to the blockade, it also appealed to its donors to help close the funding gap.

18. Media reports of a flourishing West Bank economy should not be given too much credence. In fact, a recent UNRWA study showed evidence of a deteriorating labour market with rising unemployment and lower real wages. As in the Gaza Strip, the refugees were disproportionately affected by economic conditions. Violence, demolitions, access restrictions, searches and arrests continued to be part of Palestinians' daily lives in the West Bank. As of 12 June 2011, at least 258 Palestinian structures, including 117 residential units, had been demolished since the beginning of the year. Damage or destruction of water and electricity supply and restrictions on access to land had also had a debilitating effect on Palestinian families.

19. Access for UNRWA staff and vehicles continued to be problematic. Since the start of 2011, a total of 164 access incidents had occurred throughout the West Bank. Although not all access incidents were reported, access constraints were on the rise, which made it difficult to plan operations and meet the needs of the population in a timely manner.

20. The situation in the Syrian Arab Republic had made it difficult for UNRWA to maintain communications with and gain access to its installations in that country. The Agency had nonetheless been able to provide all of its health centres with sufficient supplies to meet needs until the end of July 2011. The poorest of the refugees had been severely affected by the prevailing situation and increasing numbers of them were requesting cash assistance. School children preparing for important national examinations had also been affected in some areas. UNRWA was planning to hold compensatory

classes and a summer learning programme in response to the disruption of the academic year.

21. The Palestine refugees in Lebanon faced some of the worst conditions in the region. Recent changes in the law governing the employment of Palestinians in Lebanon had not yet been implemented. Refugees had continued to hold protests against UNRWA, which was struggling to meet their needs. Such protests were becoming frequent and worrying in their aggressiveness towards the Agency. Frustration, not only towards UNRWA, but also the political stalemate and the increasingly difficult personal circumstances of refugees, was at the core of the protests.

22. Although the Agency continued to make progress with the reconstruction of the Nahr al-Barid refugee camp, it nonetheless faced a major challenge because the funds it had received amounted to less than 40 per cent of the total reconstruction needs. If the camp's population remained displaced, it would have a serious effect on the stability of the Palestine refugee community and, possibly, of Lebanon.

23. Despite having reduced its budget to a level that reflected its funding expectations for 2011, the Agency nonetheless predicted a shortfall of \$65 million; that was particularly worrisome because, since March 2011, indicators pointed towards an increasing shortfall. UNRWA might also be forced to increase substantially staff salary in order to reflect increases implemented by its comparators, the host authorities. Should that happen, then the shortfall could reach \$80 million at the beginning of 2012. Such a shortfall would be crippling for the Agency.

24. Although UNRWA was strengthening its resource mobilization strategy, the process would take time and would not solve the immediate problem. The quality and quantity of the Agency's services would be at serious risk unless it received a quick and substantial injection of new funding. Any decline in service could only be detrimental to the stability of the region at a crucial time in its history.

25. **Ms. Qaraman** (Save the Children UK), speaking on behalf of the Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA), which was the coordination forum of international non-governmental and non-profit organizations working in the areas of development and emergency or humanitarian relief in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, said that a recent survey of AIDA members had shown that movement

and access restrictions had affected their ability to deliver aid to the communities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

26. Restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities included denial of access permits for movement of personnel between Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, denial of work visas for international staff and denial of project permits in Area C, which comprised more than 60 per cent of the West Bank. The movement of national staff in and out of Gaza was nearly impossible. Organizations had been forced to take costly measures in order to compensate for the restrictions, including duplication of functions and purchase of video-conferencing equipment, and had incurred significant travel and accommodation expenses.

27. The quality and effectiveness of programmes had been reduced because the restrictions were forcing organizations to focus on short-term, less sustainable and potentially inappropriate projects and practices. Organizations could not bring staff together, carry out financial monitoring, deliver training or share best practices.

28. Vulnerable communities were not being reached because organizations had been forced to postpone or abandon projects. Of such projects, slightly more than half were in Gaza and some 38 per cent were in Area C of the West Bank. Nearly half of the AIDA members surveyed had stopped work in the Gaza border areas because of the access restrictions.

29. In view of the increasingly difficult humanitarian conditions of the Palestine refugees, AIDA recommended that the civilian population must be allowed to enjoy basic rights guaranteed under international law, including the right to freedom of movement and choice of residence, as well as the right to an adequate standard of living, adequate housing and access to education and healthcare.

30. The international community should therefore urge the Government of Israel to ensure that humanitarian and development organizations were granted rapid and unimpeded access to all areas of operation in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza.

31. **Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser** (Observer for Palestine) said that her delegation wished to thank the representative of UNRWA for his informative

presentation, which had dispelled many misconceptions about the reality of the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In that connection, she would welcome further information on the nature of the demolitions that were being carried out in East Jerusalem, particularly in Area C. She would also welcome any information concerning the status of the Bedouin community in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. With regard to the situation in Gaza, she wondered how much progress UNRWA had made in rebuilding its facilities and refugee shelters that had been damaged or destroyed and whether the Agency had been able to obtain sufficient quantities of construction materials.

32. **Mr. Adnan** (Indonesia) said that he wished to know how the Palestine refugees had reacted to the possible declaration of the State of Palestine in September 2011.

33. **Mr. Cook** (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East), responding to the questions from delegations, said that it had been a longstanding issue of concern that Bedouin families, who had traditionally lived in the West Bank and were extremely vulnerable because they made their living as herders, faced disruption to their lives owing to the demolition of their homes and other buildings. In one case, a school built by Bedouins to give their children access to education was now under threat of demolition after several months of operation. UNRWA was constantly required to provide new tents, cooking equipment and food to vulnerable families. The reason given for the demolitions was that construction permits had not been obtained, but it was extremely difficult if not impossible to obtain approval for construction. Families expanded over the years and required accommodation, so they often built without receiving approval.

34. With respect to Gaza, discussions were still under way regarding approval for reconstruction projects, to which UNRWA would be a major contributor. Some \$660 million worth of work was required for UNRWA to reconstruct homes and schools and provide new schools for the growing population, yet approvals were being granted at a very slow pace. In addition, the fact that only one crossing point was open between Israel and the Gaza Strip severely limited the flow of traffic, which fell woefully short of the level required to supply the needs of the people of Gaza and of UNRWA for its reconstruction efforts. He hoped that high-level

discussions currently under way within the Israeli Government might change that situation.

35. **Ms. Qaraman** (Save the Children UK) said that larger numbers of schools were being demolished in Bedouin communities and there was a pressing shortage of classroom space in Area C and East Jerusalem. Obtaining permits was virtually impossible, but building without a permit placed the structure at immediate risk of demolition. Crucial infrastructure such as water cisterns and sources of livelihood for families were also subject to demolition.

36. Young people, heartened by the events in the region, had developed a youth movement in Gaza and the West Bank and had taken to the streets to call for national unity. The announcement of reconciliation talks between Fatah and Hamas had given Palestinians a sense of relief and hope, as a unified Government would yield immediate benefits in the form of improved services for families and children.

37. On the question of Palestinian statehood, refugees were concerned that they would be left out and that their legitimate claims would not be addressed. Given the rising levels of poverty among Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, people would begin to feel encouraged only when an easing of the acute restrictions on access and movement led to tangible improvements in their livelihoods and their ability to provide for their families.

Report of the Chair on the United Nations Seminar on Mobilizing Assistance to the Palestinian People, Helsinki, 28 and 29 April 2011

38. **The Chair** said that the seminar, under the theme “Mobilizing international efforts in support of the Palestinian Government’s State-building programme”, had been held on 28 and 29 March 2011 in Helsinki, Finland. It had been well attended by representatives of Governments, Palestine, intergovernmental organizations, United Nations system entities and civil society organizations.

39. In the keynote presentation, Mr. Ali Al-Jarbawi, Minister for Planning and Administrative Development of the Palestinian Authority, had outlined the progress achieved in the implementation of the State-building programme — known as the Fayyad plan — and had elucidated the strategies embodied in the Palestinian National Development Plan for 2011-2013, which

looked forward to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State and beyond.

40. At the first plenary meeting, the experts had focused on the achievements and challenges of the State-building initiative, including obstacles that might undermine the Palestinian Authority's two-year plan to build an independent State. They had warned that those efforts had been hindered by the physical and political restrictions imposed by Israeli occupation and had stressed the urgency of reconstruction in the Gaza Strip and making headway in the Palestinian National Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan for Gaza.

41. In the second plenary meeting, the experts had considered practical aspects of building a viable Palestinian State and had stressed that democratic, accountable institutions backed by sound social and economic policies were essential for long-term success. The participants had called for specific measures to improve public sector accountability and efficiency; create an enabling environment for robust private sector-led growth; bolster the role of women in socio-economic development; and invest in youth through education. They had also discussed the role of the donor community in achieving those ends.

42. The third plenary meeting had focused on laying the groundwork for the sovereignty of the Palestinian State in the pursuit of independence. The experts had emphasized that the challenge was now to align the drive towards statehood with sound policies that would help overcome existing and future challenges. International and regional efforts to end the impasse in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations would be crucial to a successful outcome. Sustained donor support over the short, medium and long terms was also important.

43. In his closing remarks, the Chair of the Committee had said that the ascension of an independent State of Palestine to its rightful seat in the General Assembly would not mark the end of the Palestinian quest for nationhood, but a new beginning. A unified and cohesive State in which the rule of law and social justice prevailed and in which representative, accountable and transparent public institutions engaged in dialogue with civil society would be welcomed. An open and inclusive State would enable all citizens, including vulnerable groups such as women and young people, to develop their potential and count on economic opportunity and protection of their rights.

44. *The Committee took note of the report.*

United Nations International Meeting in Support of the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process, Brussels, 28 and 29 June 2011 (Working Paper No. 5)

45. **The Chair** drew attention to Working Paper No. 5, which contained the provisional programme of the United Nations International Meeting in Support of the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process scheduled to take place in Brussels from 28 to 29 June 2011.

46. Recalling that the theme was "The role of Europe in advancing Palestinian statehood and achieving peace between Israelis and Palestinians", he said that the meeting would take stock of 20 years of European efforts to promote Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking; examine current efforts at resuming direct negotiations for a permanent settlement; and look at alternatives to the negotiating process, including achieving a two-State solution through multilateral mechanisms. European political initiatives would also be considered, including the parameters for a negotiated settlement endorsed by the European Union in April 2011 and the role of parliamentarians and civil society in promoting peace.

47. Invitations had been sent to renowned experts on the issue, United Nations members and observers, parliamentarians, representatives of the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations, representatives of civil society and the media. Following the meeting, the Committee delegation would hold consultations with representatives of civil society on 30 June.

48. He took it that, if there were no objections, the Committee wished to approve the provisional programme contained in Working Paper No. 5.

49. *It was so decided.*

Other matters

50. **Mr. Ferdous** (Department of Public Information), briefing the Committee on the preparations for the 2011 International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East to be held in July in Budapest, said that the seminar, which would bring together policymakers from Israel and the Palestinian Authority, senior United Nations officials, international experts and representatives of the world media, would examine the current status of the peace process against the backdrop

of the changing political landscape in the Arab world and explore the role of culture and the media in creating conditions for peace in the region. It would also examine the role of visual and new media and of the creative community in promoting the peace agenda through better people-to-people contacts.

51. The Department of Public Information, in collaboration with the Department of Political Affairs and the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine, had updated and revised its exhibit on the Question of Palestine and the United Nations. The exhibit, which had last been updated in 2009, had been temporarily relocated during the capital master plan. The new exhibit, to be located on the third floor of the General Assembly building, would include a timeline reflecting the major developments of recent years and new audio-visual material. A formal launch would take place in November during the annual observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

52. **The Chair** informed the Committee that he had received an invitation, in his capacity as Chair of the Committee, to participate in the 38th session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of the Islamic Conference to be held in Astana, Kazakhstan, from 28 to 30 June 2011. As those dates coincided with those of the meeting being convened in Brussels, which the Chair was required to attend, Mr. Daou of Mali would represent the Committee at the session.

53. **The Chair** noted that Mr. Yuri Gourov, Chief of the Division for Palestinian Rights, and Ms. Cheryl Simon, senior Meetings Servicing Assistant in the Division, would retire at the end of June. Speaking on behalf of the members of the Committee, he thanked them for their long service in the Division.

The meeting rose at noon.