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Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Friday, 22 November 1991, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. SHIHABI (Saudi Arabia)
later: Mr. PENNANEACH (Togo)
(Vice-President)

- Question of Palestine: [19] (continued)

- (a) Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People
- (b) Report of the Secretary-General

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 33 (continued)

QUESTION OF PALESTINE:

- (a) REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE OF THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE (A/46/35)
- (b) REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/46/623 and Corr.1)

Mr. VERMA (India): The General Assembly and the international community have grappled with the question of Palestine for 44 years, but a settlement has remained sadly elusive. Palestinian hopes and rights still remain to be addressed with a view to their restoration.

Recent months and years have marked an era of welcome, positive developments all around the globe. The international political and security climate, aided by the end of the cold war and its salutary consequences, today bears little resemblance to the bygone period of Great-Power and ideological rivalry spawning regional conflicts. The last 12 months have in particular been witness to a new spirit of cooperation, agreements and understanding. If the infusion of this new spirit fails to realize peace and settlement in the Middle East, this region, with its oft-demonstrated explosiveness, has the potential to undermine the shape of things to come. The urgent, imperative need for evolving a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement in the Middle East is well recognized and should act as a spur to all efforts to be deployed to attain the desired objectives.

Viewed against this backdrop, it is no surprise that the international community has been unanimous in lauding the launching of the peace conference last month in Madrid. Given past set-backs, deep-rooted suspicions and mistrust, and the history of repeated hostilities and conflicts, the optimism

(Mr. Verma, India)

aroused by the new process is understandably laced heavily with caution, circumspection and even doubts. But these do not detract from the unquestionable political will demonstrated by all the parties concerned in getting to the conference table. No one doubts that the process will be long, arduous and strewn with what might seem insurmountable obstacles. Overcoming them will require unique political courage and high statesmanship on the part of all parties. Compromises and sacrifices will no doubt be necessary. It will need to be remembered that this rare opportunity for a peaceful settlement can be missed only at a heavy cost, not only for the people of the region, who have already lived through long years of insecurity, violence and denial of their rights, but also for international peace and security. The international community and the United Nations should therefore seek common cause in encouraging and supporting all parties to move forward in the quest for lasting peace in the region.

For making the new peace effort possible, the United States and the USSR deserve our collective appreciation. The determination, energy and imagination that have gone into the exercise are laudable and my delegation trusts that they will achieve the results that the parties in the region and the rest of the world look forward to.

The issues concerned involve, not only the question of peace, territory and settlement, but also the future of the people who have been condemned to the life of refugees and of never-ending struggle. The Palestinian people, undaunted by their adversity and sufferings, have continued heroically to wage their campaign and the intifadah for their just rights. It is for their sake,

(Mr. Verma, India)

above all, that a settlement in the Middle East must be pursued vigorously to the end.

India's commitment to the cause of the Palestinian people has been unwavering and needs no reiteration. We have fully shared the consensus view, repeatedly reaffirmed by the General Assembly, that a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement in the Middle East, with the question of Palestine at its core, can be achieved only by taking full cognizance of the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to their homeland, as well as the recognition of the rights of all the States in the region, including Palestine and Israel, to live in peace within internationally recognized boundaries. The settlement must be on the basis and in the framework of the unanimous Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). "Land for peace" is the bedrock principle recognized and enshrined in those resolutions and in accordance with them it is essential that Israel withdraw from all the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, and from all the other occupied Arab territories.

At its last session, the General Assembly adopted resolution 45/68 calling for the convening of the International Peace Conference on the Middle East, under the auspices of the United Nations and with the participation of all parties to the conflict, including the Palestine Liberation Organization, the sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and the five permanent members of the Security Council. The proposed Conference and the peace process launched with the Madrid Conference are not mutually exclusive, but can be complementary and should therefore be pursued accordingly. The

(Mr. Verma, India)

United Nations has in any case an important and, indeed, an indispensable role to play in efforts to re-establish peace and achieve a settlement in the Middle East. We thus hope and trust that the United Nations and the Secretary-General will soon have the responsibility and status commensurate with their essential role in the current peace process.

The Foreign Minister of India, Mr. Madhav Sinh Solanki, in his statement in the general debate here two months ago, expressed his sincere hope with regard to the ongoing peace effort,

"that the flexibility shown by all parties concerned will help to resolve the Middle East conflict". (A/46/PV.11, p. 25)

I should like also, in conclusion, to recall what our Prime Minister, Mr. P. V. Narasimha Rao, conveyed in a recent message:

"The reactivation of the peace process and the positive response of all the concerned parties to this initiative are important and welcome developments. It is particularly gratifying that the centrality of the Palestinian issue to the Middle East problem is at last receiving due recognition by all concerned. We sincerely hope that the process of dialogue which has been launched will culminate in the restoration to the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights, for which they have struggled hard and long, and an equitable resolution of the Palestinian problem. I reaffirm India's continued and unstinted support for the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people."

Mr. AL-YOUSEFI (Yemen) (interpretation from Arabic): The question of Palestine is one of the most important issues that the international community is especially interested in resolving, as it stands at the core of the conflict raging in the Middle East region. It has witnessed a number of failed attempts at solution as a result of Israel's intransigence and persistence in usurping Arab lands in its expansion and occupation by military force since 1948.

This question constitutes a severe test for the international community and for its credibility in dealing with international issues. For 44 years now, the Palestinian people have been subjected to various forms of murder and repression. Daily they suffer repeated violations of their human rights, such as arrests, deportations, confiscation of land, demolition of houses, the establishment of settlements, denial of employment, freedom of movement and the imposition of curfews - all practices that constitute blatant violations of the Charter, international law and other relevant international instruments.

None the less, the Palestinian people have written a glorious chapter of sacrifice and heroism. The children of the intifadah continue their uprising and are martyred daily, thereby demonstrating their determination to pursue their intifadah until their just cause is victorious.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) submitted a report at this session (A/46/13) in which he stated that since 9 December 1987 988 Palestinians have been killed and more than 70,000 wounded in the intifadah and that Palestinians have suffered from beatings, tear-gas inhalation and rubber-bullet or live ammunition wounds. Fourteen thousand persons have been detained without charge or trial. That report referred to one of the most brutal incidents that took place in Haram Al-Sharif in October 1990.

(Mr. Al-Youafi, Yemen)

Seventeen Palestinians were massacred and over 150 persons injured in clashes with Israeli security forces. These figures are cause for serious concern and make it clear that the socio-economic situation of Palestinians in the occupied territories continues to deteriorate as a result of the arbitrary measures adopted against them.

Force is no longer the law to be used in today's changing international circumstances. Israel's persistence in perpetuating its brutal policies and its attempts at imposing a fait accompli in the Palestinian occupied lands is not founded on any legal justification, logic or law, but rather on recalcitrance and aggression. The question of Palestine is one of the just causes of the world. Yet no just solution has been found for it in spite of that glimmer of hope, the convening of the Madrid Peace Conference, though it took place outside the auspices of the United Nations, the resolutions of international legality and the principle of peace for the land that has been usurped by Israel and which it is trying to hold on to in pursuance of its policies and logic.

Israel's acceptance to attend the Conference does not mean that it has changed its impossible conditions. On the contrary, it is trying to exploit the Conference and gain a semblance of legality for its expansionist aspirations and settlement policies and to gain time. Israel's plans are common knowledge and have been exposed since the 1940s. Those plans aim at ending the Arab boycott, preventing the establishment of regional and bilateral cooperation and rejecting the very thought of parting with any of the Palestinian and Arab territories under any circumstances. It also rejects the establishment of a Palestinian State.

(Mr. Al-Yousfi, Yemen)

All delegations present here have stated that the Peace Conference is an historic opportunity that must be seized in order to achieve just, comprehensive and lasting peace between the peoples of the region, whose substance derives from the implementation of international legality as embodied in United Nations resolutions, especially Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

From the very beginning, the Republic of Yemen welcomed efforts to convene the Peace Conference. It expressed satisfaction with the invitation extended to the concerned parties by the United States and the USSR to convene this Conference. The Republic of Yemen took this position in consonance with its keen desire to restore peace and stability to the region and guarantee for the Palestinian people their legitimate rights, including the right to have their own State on their land.

It is true that we cannot expect the Peace Conference to achieve the desired results in one month or a few months. However, dealing with the objective realities of the issue is a must if we are to achieve significant results that would be the harbinger of better times for the peoples of the region and the world at large and usher in a new era in international relations. This means the adoption of one single standard, without discrimination between one issue and the other.

Israel has begun to realize that its claims have no foundation and that its attempts to make others doubt the sincerity of Palestinian's and the Arab countries' desire for peace have become rather threadbare, especially now that recent developments have shown that it is the Palestinians and the Arabs who believe in peace based on justice.

(Mr. Al-Yousfi, Yemen)

Today, more than ever, the international community has the opportunity of restoring peace in the Middle East by halting the political, economic, military and financial support extended to Israel. It is that support which has encouraged it to persist in its intransigence and to continue to obstruct every attempt at restoring peace and the just and legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.

Finally, my delegation wishes to reiterate that peace in the region of the Middle East must be forged by joint efforts within the framework of the United Nations on the basis of Israel's full withdrawal from the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, including holy Al-Quds, and the other occupied Arab territories, and the exercise by the Palestinian people of all their rights, in particular, their right to self-determination and the establishment of their independent State under the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization, their sole legitimate representative.

Mr. AL-NI'MAH (Qatar) (interpretation from Arabic): Allow me at the very outset to express to you, Sir, due congratulations on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at this session. I extend congratulations to you with a feeling of heartfelt pride as you represent a country that is linked to mine by deep-rooted relations of history, good-neighbourliness and brotherhood. We share a common culture, civilization and heritage.

I also have the pleasure to express sincere thanks and appreciation to Mrs. Absa Claude Diallo, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and to the entire membership of the Committee for their laudable efforts which have been reflected in the report to the General Assembly.

(Mr. Al-Ni'mah, Qatar)

In their report, they have continued to discharge the noble and important task of highlighting the rights of the Palestinian people through their investigations and the seminars they have held in different parts of the world with a view to bringing home to the world the tragedy of the Palestinian people. They deserve our thanks and commendations for that report and for their unceasing efforts to bring to light the facts of the Palestinian question.

The parameters of our world have changed. Following a long period of strife between the two blocs, mankind has begun to feel genuine hope that peace might prevail in our world. Let us hope that this is the beginning of a new era of well-being. Mankind aspires to brotherhood and cooperation. In this era, let the clouds of enmity and suspicion be dispersed.

However, that dawn has not shed its light on our countries, which thirst for peace and tranquillity. The question of Palestine is undoubtedly the major problem in the Middle East, an intractable question that remains without solution. Without a solution, there can be no hope for the peace that all the peoples of the region aspire to and desire.

The question of Palestine is not so intractable that the international community could not solve it. Its origins, its aggravation and the fact that it has reached this level of complexity and difficulty are all the result of a flagrant, planned violation, a blatant violation of the laws and norms of that very international community. What else can we call the occupation of territories, the expulsion of people and the destruction of the means of livelihood of the Palestinian people? What else can we call the violation of their human, social and economic rights and the denial of their right to live,

(Mr. Al-Nimah, Qatar)

like any other people, a decent human life? What else can we call the confiscation of property, the building of settlements on land which has been confiscated from its legal owners? What else can we call the seizure of moneys and the incarceration of innocent people in detention centres and jails? What of the demolition of homes as an act of revenge? What else can we call the intransigence of the Israeli side on the question of the future of the occupied territories which they plan to occupy forever and in which the original inhabitants, the legitimate owners, are deprived of the right to recover their property and land following the annexation of Al-Quds, the Golan Heights and the building of settlements on all Palestinian lands? All this has taken place in the past and continues to take place today.

Side by side with other efforts to settle the question of Palestine by peaceful means, the Palestinians have made great concessions in order to reach a peaceful settlement. Notwithstanding, the Israeli side shows no inclination to compromise and understand. As soon as the peace negotiations began, the Israeli Knesset passed a resolution prohibiting negotiation on the Syrian Arab Golan issue. The cry from Israel was that it needed to keep every inch of land that it occupies today, in contravention of international law. The policy of repression and humiliation pursued against the Palestinian people has led to the intifadah, the heroic uprising which today enters its fifth year. That intifadah shows how valiant this people is, how it refuses to knuckle under to any of the forms of repression and humiliation to which it has been subjected throughout the years of occupation.

The Palestinian people has always rejected the brutal Israeli occupation and the usurpation of their land and property. It has defended and continues

(Mr. Al-Ni'mah, Qatar)

to defend its legitimate rights, which have been upheld by the international community in resolutions that underline the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and call for an end to occupation, the establishment of an independent homeland for the Palestinian people and the exercise by that people of its inalienable rights. In defending themselves through the intifadah, the Palestinians have paid a high price in lives and property. The intifadah has gained the sympathy and support of all those who love peace and justice in our world.

As for Israel, it has escalated and continues to escalate its arbitrary policies. It goes on incarcerating thousands in jails and detention centres without trial or sentence in violation of the human rights of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories, including Al-Quds. Israel has perpetrated shameful acts, including the use of live ammunition by the army and inhabitants of Israeli settlements against unarmed people, the deportation of people, the imposition of coercive economic measures, the demolition of homes and the plundering of property.

While we can view the peace negotiations which began in Madrid last October with cautious optimism, we should note that Israel, through its behaviour, does not show any desire for peace, nor does it respond to the call that came from Madrid. We find that Israel continues to build settlements in the occupied territories, continues to adopt resolutions to avoid the inclusion of the Syrian Arab Golan Heights in the peace negotiations and continues to desecrate the holy shrines of the Palestinian people.

Recent events give true testimony of that. The Israeli occupation forces perpetrated an attack against the shariah tribunal in occupied Al-Quds and

(Mr. Al-Ni'mah, Qatar)

took away historical documents concerning the ancient history of Al-Quds and property deeds from the occupied West Bank. The State of Qatar strongly denounces this Israeli act of aggression against Islamic and historic shrines. We appeal to the General Assembly to denounce such acts and to put an end to Israel's oppression and acts of aggression against the holy shrines of Islam.

The efforts which were exerted to convene the Peace Conference deserve our thanks and commendations. It seems, however, that the international community continues to be silent in the face of the violations perpetrated by Israel.

(Mr. Al-Nimrah, Qatar)

The economic, political, monetary, technological and military assistance which continues to be provided to Israel encourages it to persist in its aggression and to perpetuate its occupation and annexation of the Palestinian lands occupied since 1967.

Israel's record, its policies, its behaviour and the measures it adopts against the Palestinian people show that Israel, contrary to its claims that it desires peace, continues to violate the Charter of the United Nations and to trample all the resolutions adopted by the United Nations on the question of Palestine.

Israel persists in its acts of injustice. It does not want peace. It does not want tranquillity. Its lust for expansion does not know any bounds. Even in the wake of the Madrid conference, it perpetrates more acts of repression and stops at nothing in its arrogance. And now it engulfs the road to peace in deep fog, in the hope that this will hide the horizon and stop the march towards peace in a labyrinth of darkness so that peace may fall victim to the mirage of water dreams. In so doing, Israel seems to forget that the Palestinian people, which has suffered for a long time and made many a sacrifice, will continue to be attached to its land even if it turns to hot coals under its feet. It will continue to draw strength from its native soil. The aspirations of the Palestinian people will not wither and die away. Those aspirations will live on, thrive on sacrifice and draw sustenance from the Palestinian people's yearning to return and its underlying love for the holy of holies.

(Mr. Al-Ni'mah, Qatar)

The Palestinian people, in the midst of its terrible plight, has aspirations which must be supported by this august General Assembly of the United Nations. Let us put an end to its sorrow and extricate it from its plight. This is a human tragedy that must touch the human heart.

Israel, which daily gives more funerals to our people in Palestine, makes us realize that it will not come to its senses. It does not want the Palestinian people to come out of the dark tunnel of its terrible plight. Indeed, it continues to heap yet more tragedies upon the Palestinian people. Israel seems to hope that it will put an end to the very existence of the Palestinian people through the aggravation of that plight. However, the Palestinian people will not die out. The Palestinian people loves its homeland. Its tears which irrigate the land of Palestine and its love for that land will not be vain: its legitimate rights will be restored and its wounds will heal.

In the face of such behaviour and such practices, do we not have the right to wonder whether any heed has been taken of the Geneva Convention relating to the protection of civilians even though the General Assembly has affirmed repeatedly that the Convention applies to the Palestinian and other territories occupied since 1967. Has there been any adherence on the part of Israel to the resolutions of the General Assembly and Security Council? Will the conscience of the international community remain silent in the face of these heinous acts, which have been and continue to be perpetrated by the Israeli forces of occupation, with the aim of undermining the spirit of resistance of the Palestinian people through harsh economic measures, through

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the usurpation of properties and national resources, and particularly water, in order to impoverish the Palestinian inhabitants further and force them to bow down and surrender? The Palestinian people, which has been steadfast, heroically steadfast, will continue to hold on to its rights, land and property.

As the Prince of the State of Qatar, in his statement on the occasion of the International Day for Solidarity with the Palestinian People last year, said - and I quote - "Despite the plots hatched by Israel, despite its acts to advance its aggressive objectives, we affirm our confidence that the Arab Palestinian people, by its steadfast position, by its heroic intifadah to regain its usurped rights and by the support of all its Arab fraternal peoples as well as the support of all peace-, justice- and freedom-loving forces in the world, will abort Israel's criminal plans. Right will always be restored to its legitimate owner."

The question of Palestine is the core of the Middle East conflict. It is the essence of the raging crisis which threatens the region's peace and security and, consequently, world peace and security. Unless this question is resolved in a way that guarantees the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, and particularly its right to self-determination and the establishment of its own independent State, the overall situation in the Middle East will not change. Indeed, it will become more turbulent, more explosive, and the dangers arising therefrom will not be limited to peace and stability in the Middle East alone; they will also threaten international peace and security.

(Mr. Al-Ni'mah, Qatar)

The State of Qatar's support for the peace negotiations which were initiated in Madrid proceeded from its faith in the justice of the Palestinian cause. While supporting those negotiations in the interest of all, we reaffirm our support for the just demands of the Palestinian people, which have been underscored by the international community in many resolutions adopted by the General Assembly over many a decade. We reaffirm our support for the right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, which would be a homeland for that people which, for far too long, has suffered displacement, dispersion and untold agonies. We believe that that will never be achieved unless Israel withdraws from the occupied Arab territories, including Arab Al-Quds and unless the Palestinian people regains its rights and human dignity.

In conclusion, I wish to reaffirm my country's full support for the efforts made in support of the Palestinian people so that it may regain its freedom, and establish its independent State on its native soil so that peace, security and tranquillity may return to the Middle East region.

Mr. ALHUDHARI (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (interpretation from Arabic): The Palestinian question is one of the major concerns of the United Nations and the international community as a whole. For over 40 years, the General Assembly of the United Nations as well as other bodies and organizations, both regional and international, have continued to adopt resolution after resolution in which the international family defined its position vis-à-vis the Palestinian question and the manner in which it can be resolved. This international will has been expressed in many shapes and forms which have been crystallized in the recognition of the right of the Palestinian people to return to its land, its right to self-determination and the establishment of its independent State.

Recently, the international community's hopes of resolving many a world problem, including the Palestinian question, have been rekindled as a result of the unprecedented changes that have taken place in international relations with the end of the cold war, the consecration of the policy of détente, and the increasing recourse to United Nations mechanisms and capabilities.

Notwithstanding the fact that these changes have had a clear impact on enhancing international peace and security and in containing and resolving numerous regional conflicts, their effect has not crystallized, as yet, in the case of the Palestinian question. Every hope of finding a just solution to this question has been dashed as a result of Israel's continuing intransigence and deliberate disregard of international appeals. The international stand against the policy of occupation, aggression, repression, annihilation and the confiscation of land has been met by nothing less than rejection and total disregard at the hands of the Zionist entity.

(Mr. Alhudhari, Libyan
Arab Jamahiriya)

This rejection and disregard have been made abundantly clear by the annexation of Al-Quds and the Golan Heights, the continued building of settlements, the continuing immigration of Jews and their resettlement in those areas in a bid to create a new demographic status quo in Palestine and the occupied Arab territories and create obstacles in the way of any sincere international effort that seeks a just solution to the Palestinian question.

Throughout its history, the Palestinian people has demonstrated its determination to restore its rights and to realize its aspirations by resisting occupation. The intifadah is but evidence of that determination of the Palestinian people to secure its rights and its readiness to struggle for those rights. It is the response to the many injustices that have been heaped upon that people. It is the sincere cry that voices the heroic Palestinian people's resolve to regain its most cherished and basic right to freedom and independence. It is the clear evidence that when right is on the side of the weak it gives him greater strength than that given to the tyrant by technology. It is also evidence of the fact that any people's will to achieve its aspirations cannot be vanquished.

The Palestinian intifadah has attracted the attention of world public opinion and gained the sympathy of a world that has understood its motives and reasons and realized that it is the struggle of an entire generation which rejects subjugation and acquiescence to the will of others. However, the Israelis, whose wont is to efface and distort the facts, have portrayed the intifadah as illegitimate and have tried to quell it by every brutal means of repression at their disposal.

(Mr. Alhudhari, Libyan
Arab Jamahiriya)

The report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/46/35) submitted to this session of the General Assembly, enumerated those Israeli practices which include the excessive and indiscriminate use of force, firing upon demonstrators, the misuse of tear-gas and punitive beating.

The plight of the Palestinian people cries out for an urgent solution. First of all, the Fourth Geneva Convention must be applied; every necessary measure must be taken to protect the Palestinians, as they are exposed to every danger and to increasing violations and restrictions which affect every aspect of their daily lives, such as the arbitrary levying of taxes. The situation also requires the removal of all obstacles that obstruct the activities of organizations which give succour to the Palestinians, such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

The various forms of increasing restrictions and violations that face the Palestinian people in the occupied territories have been dealt with in many reports. For example, there is the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and other Arabs of the Occupied Territories (A/46/522), as well as the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, which highlights the fact that Israel has imposed additional measures which limit the Palestinians' access to health care, and the continued attacks on Palestinians even inside hospitals and clinics.

The dangers that continue to threaten the Arab region and the unceasing drive to exterminate the Palestinians, are flagrant examples of the failure by

(Mr. Alhudhari, Libyan
Arab Jamahiriya)

the international community to deal with the conflict in this part of the world. We do not deny the efforts of the United Nations and the international community to resolve numerous problems.

(Mr. Alhudhari, Libyan
Arab Jamahiriya)

However, in the case of the Palestinian question, the international community continues to be unable to find a just solution, due to Israeli intransigence and determination to thwart every peace effort. That has been made abundantly clear by the Israelis' recent decision to annex the Syrian Golan. That decision is in consonance with their policy of force and total war. At a time when the world moves towards détente, we find them manufacturing weapons of mass destruction. They reject the call by the States of the world to place their nuclear facilities under the safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). They are increasing and expanding their collaboration with the racist regime in South Africa in the nuclear field and in the other fields of military production. This continuing expanding collaboration poses a direct threat to the region of the Middle East and to Africa.

The United Nations and the international community at large, which have always given full attention to the need to resolve the Palestinian question, are called upon, more than at any time in the past, to exert intensive efforts to bring about peace and security in the Middle East region, through enabling the Palestinian people to attain all their legitimate rights and guaranteeing the withdrawal of the forces of occupation from south Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Golan.

Given our commitment to the provisions of international instruments and international law, my delegation declares its absolute support for the right of the Palestinian people to liberate its land and to establish its independent State with its capital, Al-Quds al-Shareef. We urge the

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international community to take practical steps to ensure the protection of the Palestinian people and the implementation of international resolutions which call for securing the Palestinian people's inalienable and legitimate rights.

Before I conclude my statement, I wish to extend the appreciation of my delegation to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for its efforts to sensitize international public opinion to the facts relating to the Palestinian question and its efforts aimed at implementing the resolutions of the General Assembly in this regard.

Mr. ARIDQR (Israel): Mr. President, as this is my first statement at the current session, I would like at the outset to congratulate you on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its forty-sixth session and to extend my congratulations to the Vice-Presidents as well.

Exactly 14 years ago, President Anwar Sadat of Egypt accepted the invitation of Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel and came to Jerusalem, from 19 November to 21 November 1977. I remember the day well: the Egyptian President climbed down from his aircraft and took a momentous first step on the soil of Israel. He had crossed our border. We all stood silently at attention as the two anthems were played - the Egyptian and the Israeli. President Sadat walked down the red carpet, stopped in front of the Israeli flag and paid it respect. Through his actions, he demonstrated that he accepted Israel's existence as an unalterable fact. He came to negotiate with a recognized Israel. In this manner, he passed the point of no return. Peace with Israel was no longer a question of "if", it was just a matter of "when" and under what conditions.

(Mr. Aridor, Israel)

How unfortunate it is that some Arab States chose not to accept the "Sadat approach". They came to Madrid to negotiate with an unrecognized Israel. They refused to have talks in the Middle East and insisted on going outside the region. They refuse to cross our borders for the sake of negotiating, they will not visit our capital, and they certainly are not willing to salute our flag. Indeed, many of them will not even shake our hands.

Moreover, in a recent interview, President Hafex al-Assad was asked about accepting the existence of a Jewish State in the Middle East. His answer was: "This has to be put forward in the conference." (Newsweek, 5 August 1991). How revealing are his words. If Israel is still unacceptable, then the question is not the Golan Heights nor is it settlements, but it relates to every square inch under Israeli control. The question is the very existence of Israel. This is a different approach to peace: the "Assad approach".

We welcomed the meetings which took place in Madrid and we look forward to the anticipated bilateral and multilateral negotiations, which we have sought for 43 years. The talks will present an unprecedented opportunity, but we must proceed cautiously. It is not enough just to look forward. One also has a duty to look around. As a nation that has been repeatedly attacked by our neighbours in the past 43 years, we have every right to be concerned that our existence not be placed again in jeopardy. We are confident that this is now understood more than ever.

But how serious are the Arabs about peace if a prominent Jordanian journalist, Sultan Hattab of Al-Ra'y, is expelled from the Jordanian Press

(Mr. Aridor, Israel)

Association and the Jordanian Writers' Union simply for giving an interview to Israel Television during the Madrid talks? Jordan may claim that it is a democracy, and that in a democracy journalists' associations are free to do as they wish. But what sort of democracy is it where a journalist is castigated for giving an interview to Israeli television? The Syrian Foreign Minister even refused to answer questions proffered by Israeli journalists in Madrid. He pretends to want peace; but not only will he not recognize the State of Israel, he will not even recognize Israelis. This demeanour cannot lead to peace between nations.

I therefore call upon the Arab States to discard the unhelpful "Assad approach", and to embrace the successful "Sadat approach". Let Israelis go to negotiate in Damascus, Beirut and Amman, and have Jordanians, Syrians and Lebanese come to Israel. Let us work out the problems of the region, in the region. Neither side would derive any advantage over the other from such a step. It would not set boundaries or predetermine the outcome of negotiations. It is only peace that would profit.

(Mr. Aridor, Israel)

This is the way to move forward. This is the way to move forward to future peace. Despite this, the Arabs still speak of a return to 1967, before the six-day war, and some even speak of a return to 1947 to the partition resolution. The Arab States must understand that time travel to the past is impossible. We cannot move back to 1967 or to 1947. Time travel is best left to the realm of science fiction - and thinking in terms of 1967 or 1947 is nothing more than political science fiction.

By insisting on turning back not only the clock but also the calendar, the Arab States are simply demonstrating their unwillingness to confront reality. And that reality is the failure of their campaigns to destroy us. Their demand that Israel revert to its pre-1967 status is illogical, unjust and immoral. Both from our point of view and from their point of view, it simply does not make sense.

From the Arab point of view, the Arabs are one people. At the Security Council on 27 May 1948 Jamal Bey Hussein - the Arab Higher Committee's representative at the United Nations - described his version of how the unified Arab Middle East had been carved up. He said:

"imperialist ambitions intervened to segregate the one country into several territories and thus to divide the members of one family from one another within different fictitious boundaries where there exist no real boundaries, and to make of one nation several nations where there exist no racial, social or physical distinctions." (Security Council Official Records, Third Year, Verbatim Records, 306th meeting, p. 9)

More recently, it has been said:

"One and the same people live in both Syria and Lebanon. They have not been separated throughout history. Heritage, language, songs and

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even jokes are the same, and seldom do you find a family in either Syria or Lebanon without a branch in the other country."

This is a correct definition. It is firmly rooted in reality and in political-science theory.

The source of that statement was none other than Hafez al-Assad, the President of Syria, as reported in Newsweek of 5 August 1991. So, there is one people with two States. Less than three months later - on 25 October 1991 - in an interview with CNN, Assad said, "We in Syria and Iraq belong to the same nation." - so: one people, three States. I could continue counting, until I reached one Arab people with 20 Arab States.

These are not my observations; I am merely quoting what the Arabs themselves say, which is that the Arab people are one people. Have they not already fulfilled their right to self-determination 20 times over? What need is there for a twenty-first Arab State at the expense of Israel's security, except to satisfy their appetite for land? But Israel does not intend to be digested.

No other people in the world has seen its right to self determination realized so often, so expansively and over so vast an area. No other people has so many options for expressing its national identity as do the Arabs. But I do not come here today to question the right of the Arab people to one State or 10 States, or even to 20 States. However, I do emphatically question their right to a twenty-first State at the expense of our security.

We have seen the Arabs' point of view, in their own words, both in the past and in the present. Now let us see what those who are not involved in the dispute have to say.

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Recently - on 15 October 1991 - the United Kingdom's representative on the Third Committee pointed out:

"Self-determination need not only be equated with independence: there are other options available."

And on 10 October 1991 the representative of the Soviet Union told the Third Committee:

"Experience suggests, however, that the right to self-determination is not a magic formula ... Anybody's view of self-determination as an absolute or an end in itself should not be allowed to rupture the live tissue of inter-ethnic relationships".

Self-determination is not automatic for every group, and certainly not for a group that already has implemented it 20 times over.

Now let us examine the Israeli point of view. Israel has always offered its neighbours direct negotiations in order to sign peace treaties. Since the signing of the Camp David Accords 13 years ago Israel, in order to solve in stages the problem of the Palestinian Arabs, has been offering them the option of autonomy in Judea, Samaria and Gaza - nothing more, but also nothing less, because for us it is a matter of survival.

The territories are vital to our security, as history has proved again and again. Prior to 1967 Israel was a mere nine miles wide at its narrowest point, which is only two-thirds the length of Manhattan. All of Israel's major towns and cities were within range of Arab artillery until 1967. Judea, Samaria, Gaza and the Golan Heights were launching-pads for repeated, merciless attacks against Israel and against Israeli civilians. Indeed, the pre-1967 borders were nothing less than a constant invitation to attack Israel.

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Even in this age of missiles, strategic depth remains important. The Western Powers clearly recognize this fact. Under the terms of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, which was signed in Paris by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact on 19 November 1990, the Soviet Union had to remove a significant part of its forces that were facing Western Europe from the area that stretches west from the Ural Mountains. West of the Urals, the Soviet Union is allowed to maintain just 13,300 tanks, but there is no cap on the number to the east of the mountains. The distance between the Urals and the Polish border is about 4,000 kilometres. Were the Soviets to move even a small number of tanks to within these 4,000 kilometres, it could be considered, according to the agreement, a threat to the security of Western Europe and the United States. And this agreement was signed between countries that have been living in peace.

So let no one tell us that territory is not important. We do not ask for safeguards such as those. But we do have a right to demand the same criterion - and the criterion is that land is important for security. Is Israel, then, not entitled to the mere 50 kilometres that Judea and Samaria provide against possible danger in the future?

Israel cannot be expected to rely upon guarantees. No country can entrust its security to others - and especially not in the Middle East. On 17 May 1983 Israel and Lebanon signed a Treaty, which was subsequently abrogated by the Lebanese owing to pressure from Damascus. With the wave of a Syrian hand, the Treaty became a worthless piece of paper. Promises and assurances, and even treaties, simply do not, by themselves, guarantee security.

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The mountainous terrain of Judea and Samaria provides Israel with the necessary topographical advantage that would be crucial in withstanding any attack from the East. Israeli control of the rugged hills running north and south through the territories would grant Israel the time it would need to call up its reserves so that it could hold back a military onslaught. Just recently, Lieutenant General Thomas Kelly, Retired, the Director of Operations for the American Joint Chiefs of Staff during the Gulf War, said regarding Judea and Samaria:

"I look out from those heights and look on to the West Bank and say to myself, 'If I'm the chief of staff of the Israel Defence Forces, I cannot defend this land without that terrain.'" (The Jerusalem Post,
7 November 1991)

What General Kelly understood, the Arabs also understand. That is why they want these territories. But what the Arabs understand, we too understand. That is why we need these territories for our defence.

Israel is but a drop in the bucket compared to the Arab ocean. Including Judea, Samaria and Gaza, Israel is a mere 28,000 square kilometres, while the Arab States possess 14 million square kilometres. We are a small country of 5 million as compared to the 170 million Arabs spread about from the Gulf to the Atlantic. It is not as if there are 20 Jewish States surrounding and threatening one lonely Arab State. There is but one Israel and it has been repeatedly victimized by Arab aggression. Security Council resolution 242 (1967) speaks of a "lasting peace". In the Middle East the only peace that lasts is a peace that can be defended.

Israel's claim to Judea, Samaria and Gaza is not merely a function of security, however. It is a legally protected right, grounded in international

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law. This right was confirmed by the Balfour Declaration, as promulgated by the Foreign Secretary of Great Britain, Arthur James Balfour, on 2 November 1917. It was reconfirmed by the League of Nations and enshrined in its Mandate for Palestine, which stressed "the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine" (document A/70) and also emphasized that the Jews are "reconstituting" - I repeat - "reconstituting their national home in that country." (*ibid.*). The Mandatory Power was entrusted and explicitly charged with the duty of encouraging "close settlement by Jews on the land". I repeat: "settlement by Jews". To some, a dirty word "settlement" was used. But, in reality, that is a legal term used to guarantee the right of the Jewish people to live anywhere in the land of Israel. We are not ashamed to say it, we are happy to quote it and we are fortunate enough to be able to do it.

Even with the demise of the League of Nations the rights of the Jewish people under the Mandate endure. Article 80 of the United Nations Charter states:

"... nothing in this Chapter shall be construed in or of itself to alter in any manner the rights whatsoever of any states or any peoples or the terms of existing international instruments to which Members of the United Nations may respectively be parties."

This legally protected right of the Jewish community was a recognition by the international community of the historical ties binding the people of Israel with the land of Israel. But of course these ties also stand on their own merit, even without external sanction.

For the bond between the Jewish people and the land of Israel is a bond that stretches back to the beginning of recorded history. Thirty-five

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centuries of Jewish attachment to the land of Israel stand as eternal testimony to the immutable link between the people of Israel and the land of Israel. Although driven from their homeland for more than eighteen centuries the people of Israel never ceased to pray for their return. Buffeted by the forces of history, the land of Israel passed from hand to hand through 13 alien conquests down the ages. But the Jewish people stood alone in maintaining a tenacious link with the land, and continuous Jewish residence in Israel never ceased at any time in history.

It is a link that stretches back to Biblical times. The Bible in the Book of Genesis relates in detail how Abraham, the founding father of the Jewish people became the first Jewish immigrant to Israel, settling in Hebron. This was not in 1948 or in 1967 but nearly 4,000 years ago. It was only 2,000 years later, after King David had ruled in Hebron and Jerusalem, after two temples in Jerusalem had risen and fallen, after the prophets had preached and given an eternal moral heritage which emanated from Jerusalem our eternal capital, after the Babylonian exile and return, after the reign of Herod the Great, after the Jewish wars against Rome, after the Romans burned and sacked our holy cities, and after the Byzantine period, and it was only then that the Arabs, in 638 CE, arrived and conquered the Holy Land, only to be met there by the local Jewish community. So much for the exclusively so-called Arab character of this territory.

We need not apologize for winning. In 1948 the Arab States attempted to quash the fledgling Jewish State. In 1967 they sought to throw the Jews into the sea and in 1973 they attacked Israel on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish calendar. Just as crime should not pay, so too aggression should not pay. Why must the aggressor be given yet another chance? And why must he be

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handed the territories from which he launched attacks in the past? Crime and aggression against a State should not benefit the criminal, nor should he be free from the consequences of his actions. There can be no exceptions to this rule, not even for those who attack Israel. What sort of morality is this, where an aggressor has nothing to lose from committing aggression? This type of morality only encourages and invites further aggression.

The United Nations must bear a great portion of the blame for the bewildering and twisted immorality which demands that Israel, the victim, make concessions to its Arab attackers. Rather than making a contribution to peace in the Middle East by standing up to 43 years of Arab aggression, the United Nations has instead excoriated Israel and created numerous stumbling-blocks to peace. I have found nothing in the United Nations Charter that requires the Organization to dole out a quota of anti-Israel resolutions each and every year.

This body has gone so far as to adopt a resolution, General Assembly resolution 45/69 of 6 December 1990, supporting the intifadah, thereby supporting violence in Judea, Samaria and Gaza. In the process it has ignored the terrorism and attacks upon civilians which have characterized this bloody uprising. Not a word has been said about the more than 500 Palestinian Arabs who have been murdered in cold blood upon the orders of so-called liberation organizations and salvation fronts which have neither liberated nor saved, but have only murdered and maimed the innocent. Yet it is Israel that this body has chosen to condemn.

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On 29 November 1979 the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 34/65 B - ironically enough under the agenda item we are currently discussing, "The Question of Palestine" - which declared that "the Camp David accords and other agreements have no validity" (resolution 34/64 B, para. 4). The first and only treaty signed and implemented between Israel and an Arab country, the first step towards peace in the Middle East, was nevertheless condemned by the United Nations.

Still on the agenda of the General Assembly is item 42, entitled: "Armed Israeli aggression against the Iraqi nuclear installations and its grave consequences for the established international system concerning the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and international peace and security". Israel's prescient bombing of the Osirak nuclear reactor in Iraq came 10 years before the rest of the world caught on to what Saddam Hussein's intentions were. Yet even now, after the revelations surrounding Iraq's nuclear weapons programme, Israel's action continues to be included in the agenda of the General Assembly. Reality seems to have little bearing on what takes place within these halls.

Israel is the only country in the world whose sovereign right to choose its own capital has been questioned by this Organization - in Security Council resolution 478 (1980), of 20 August 1980. Israel is the only country in the world that has seen this Organization call for an end to immigration to Israel - in General Assembly resolution 45/83 B, of 13 December 1990. Israel is the only country in the world that has seen its sovereign right to form alliances and sign treaties described as posing "a threat to the security of the region" - in General Assembly resolution 45/83 A, of 13 December 1990.

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Even today, as we speak, the Arab States are continuing to do their utmost to delegitimise Israel in this institution. The Arab countries are leading the campaign against the repeal of resolution 3379 (XXX), which was the most odious and despicable resolution this Organization has ever passed. One may ask: what is it that the United Nations can contribute to the advancement of peace? The answer is clear: start by ignoring Arab opposition and repeal resolution 3379 (XXX), which equated Zionism with racism. This great lie is simply unacceptable. This one-sided singling out of Israel has only served to harden the rejectionism of the Arab States over the years. This Organization granted the Arab States a hunting license and declared open season on the State of Israel.

Zionism is not racism. As its name indicates, it is the return to Zion, to Jerusalem, to the land of Israel. For there is only one place where we can settle as a free, independent nation, and that is the Land of Zion and Jerusalem.

Insisting upon our rights and standing by our principles is not racism. The true racism heard within these halls emanates from those who claim that Jews do not have a right to live in certain areas of their homeland because they are Jews. Jews here can live freely in Hebron, Connecticut. Jews here can live freely in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. They cannot be denied the right to live in Hebron, Judea nor in Bethlehem, Judea.

In his speech at the Madrid Conference, the Jordanian Foreign Minister said, "The illegal settlements should be removed". In an interview on 3 November 1991 on United States television, he explained, "The idea is that the settlements will be dismantled and the Jews will be withdrawn into the

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State that is called Israel. Otherwise, what are we talking about?". To suggest that Jews not be allowed to live in these areas because they are Jews is to subscribe to the Nuremberg Laws of the Nazis. It is to descend to the depths of racism. Segregation is not the answer. It will not solve the problems of the region. Only if Arabs and Jews learn to live together side by side, to interact with each other, will peace have a chance of breaking out. Segregation is a dirty word - not Zionism. Segregation should be condemned - not Zionism.

Arab leaders are wont to claim that Jews and Arabs lived together in harmony in the past. I do not intend to analyse this claim now, but I will ask: why then can we not live together in the present?

Nevertheless, we are the majority between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. Jordan has renounced any claims to Judea and Samaria, and rightly so. For they arrived in those territories as a result of their aggression against Israel in 1948. Indeed, prior to their illegal annexation of Judea and Samaria on 24 April 1950, Jordan was known as Transjordan, meaning across or over the Jordan River - referring to the fact that Jordan is on the east bank, not the west, and has nothing to do with the west bank. It was only after they occupied Judea and Samaria that the Transjordanians were transformed into Jordanians. But this game of semantics did not fool anyone. Though one can easily change a name, one cannot alter the fact that Jordan has no legitimate claim to any territories in Judea and Samaria, in the west bank of the Jordan River.

The choice facing the Arabs is clear. In the territories, the Palestinian Arabs have, up to this very day, chosen intifadah and bloodshed

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instead of autonomy and peace. They are free to change their decision. The sponsors of the Madrid Conference have invited the participants to direct bilateral negotiations, specifying that the negotiations between Israel and the Jordanian-Palestinian delegation "would be conducted in phases beginning with talks on interim self-government arrangements". Direct negotiations are indeed the way to do this, to get autonomy and peace.

The issues between us and our Arab neighbours may be complicated, but the solution is simple: the Sadat approach, the Begin approach, the Shamir approach. Call it what you will, but let us march together towards peace. Before the Berlin Wall came down physically, it had already fallen mentally. We have no problems with making peace. It is the Arabs who must knock down the mental walls which hinder them. This is what Sadat did; and if the Arabs follow suit, there will be peace.

Neither Jewish parents nor Arab parents wish to send their sons into battle, and neither wish to continue burying the casualties of war. We do not ask you to love us. We only ask you, the Arabs, to live with us - to live in peace and harmony with us. If you are serious about peace, if you are committed to living together with us in harmony, then there is nothing standing in the way of achieving this goal. All that it requires is the will to do it.

Mr. ORDONEZ (Philippines): The Philippine delegation welcomes the peace process begun in Madrid with a view to a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, at the core of which is the question of Palestine.

We agree with the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People that, for the first time, conditions are ripe for direct negotiations between the concerned parties. We share the hope expressed by previous speakers, including the Observer of Palestine, that bilateral talks will soon resume, and we are most heartened by this morning's news that the Jordanian-Palestinian delegation could be meeting with its Israeli counterpart in a fortnight in Washington.

Indeed, the end of the long, dark tunnel to peace in the Middle East may not yet be in sight. The way, as all of us gathered here know, is littered with debris from decades of fierce antagonism and with the fallen victims of internecine strife and regional wars. Even the air has grown suffocating with the thick cloud of acrid rhetoric and caustic gambits.

But Madrid has unbolted the heavy doors of that tunnel, and the fresh air of international cooperation and understanding is rushing in. We, the United Nations, could do no less than add our collective light and walk shoulder-to-shoulder with all the parties to this conflict in this perilous but not impossible journey.

One way to do that is for members of this Assembly to contribute towards the elaboration of the five principles for the achievement of peace in the Middle East which are embodied in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). Individually or in small groups, Member States could bring their wisdom and diplomatic skills to bear on each and every element of a

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comprehensive solution. There have been ideas in the past and there are recent parallels to draw from. While the hard decisions will remain for the parties themselves to take, a helping hand from all of us can somehow lighten the burden.

My delegation finds it auspicious, Mr. President, that a man of peace from that troubled region, a son of the Holy City of Jerusalem, should now be presiding over the forty-sixth session of the Assembly, just when that ray of light shone in Madrid. It is also most auspicious that on the very day this Assembly began its consideration of the question of Palestine, the Security Council unanimously decided to recommend another man of peace from that region to become the next Secretary-General. The Philippines affirms its resolute cooperation with both of them as they guide the work of this Organization, for the sake of the Palestinians and all peoples of the Middle East and of the world.

Mr. LI Daoyu (China) (interpretation from Chinese): Mr. President, please allow me at the outset to congratulate you sincerely upon your election to the Presidency of the General Assembly at its forty-sixth session. I am deeply convinced that with your outstanding talent, wisdom and guidance, this session of the General Assembly will be a fruitful one.

The situation in the Middle East has undergone major changes since the last session of the General Assembly. However, peace and tranquillity have not come to the Middle East in the wake of the Gulf War. No substantial progress has been made in solving the Arab-Israeli dispute which has plagued the peoples of the region for more than four decades. This regional conflict not only has a direct impact on peace and tranquillity in the countries of the

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region but also poses a serious threat to stability and development in the world. Therefore, the importance and urgency of an early settlement of the Middle East and Palestinian question have stood in sharper relief. We are of the view that a fair and reasonable settlement of the Palestinian question accords with trends of the times. As many of the international disputes have made progress towards political settlement over the past few years, the time has indeed come for a settlement of the Palestinian question.

The Chinese Government and people have followed closely the developments in the Middle East and the settlement of the Palestinian question and have all along supported the Palestinian and other Arab peoples in their just struggle. We maintain that there should be a just and reasonable settlement of the Palestinian question and the Middle East question as a whole through negotiations on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, particularly Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). The occupied Arab territories should be returned, the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people restored and the sovereignty and security of all countries in the region, including Israel, respected and guaranteed, leading to the eventual realization of harmonious coexistence between the Arab and Jewish nations.

The above proposition provides a sound basis for a just, reasonable and lasting settlement of the Middle East and Palestinian question. It embodies some of the established norms governing international relations. First, the acquisition of territory of other countries by force is impermissible. As is known to all, the present occupation of some Palestinian and Arab territories is the product of the Arab-Israeli wars, particularly the 1967 war. In order

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to bring about peace among the countries concerned in the Middle East, it is only natural that the territories occupied during the wars be returned.

Secondly, the equal rights of all nations and the right to self-determination should be respected and the Palestinian people should be left to decide their own destiny by themselves. The Palestinian people have striven for decades for their national ideal. They are entitled to make their own choice and the international community should respect it.

Thirdly, the sovereignty and security of all countries should be guaranteed. This principle accords with the purposes of the United Nations Charter. Without a fair and proper arrangement for the security of all countries in the region, there will be no guarantee of peace in the Middle East, and even if peace is attained it will not be a lasting one.

In recent years, the United Nations and its Security Council have been playing an increasingly important role in solving regional disputes and maintaining world peace and have won universal acclaim from the international community. The United Nations has also been concerned about the peaceful settlement of the Palestinian question and the Middle East question as a whole and has made tremendous efforts to that end. We are convinced that the United Nations can play a greater role in bringing about an early solution to the Palestinian question and a comprehensive, fair and lasting peace in the Middle East.

The Chinese Government has always supported the parties concerned in the Middle East in all efforts deemed appropriate and conducive to the peace process in the region. Not long ago, the parties concerned started negotiations to explore ways for solving the Middle East question. To enter

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into talks, in any account, is a good signal. We sincerely hope that the parties concerned will make full use of this opportunity and adopt a practical and flexible approach, calling on Israel to stop building Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, so that positive results will emerge from talks on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions in the interest of a just and reasonable settlement of the Middle East question.

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As a permanent member of the Security Council, China, together with other parties concerned, has made unremitting efforts for the political settlement of the Middle East and Palestinian question. We shall, as always, join the international community in continued efforts to promote the peace process in the Middle East and bring about the eventual realization of a comprehensive, just and peaceful settlement of the Middle East question.*

Mr. VAN SCHAIK (Netherlands): I have the honour of speaking on behalf of the European Community and its member States.

The past months have been characterized by intensive diplomatic activity, culminating in the opening of the Middle East Peace Conference in Madrid at the end of last month. The European Community and its member States welcome this historic event in which they have participated alongside the two co-sponsors. Bearing in mind our geographical proximity, a widely shared historical heritage and intensive relations across the whole spectrum of political, cultural, economic and humanitarian affairs with the people of the Middle East, the Community and its member States cannot but have a close interest in the future of a region with which they share so many concerns. We are resolved to play an active role in the building of peace. The Twelve's guiding principle has been and remains that lasting stability in the Middle East region can be achieved only when based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). This means the principle of "land for peace" and the principle that all States in the region have the right to exist within safe, recognized and guaranteed borders. The Twelve have also long supported

* Mr. Pennaneach (Togo), Vice-President, took the Chair.

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the principle that all peoples in the region have the right to justice, which includes the recognition of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination. The Twelve wish to recall the importance they attach to the principles and guarantees embodied in the Charter of the United Nations. Those principles have in recent years provided universally accepted guidance in the resolving of several regional conflicts. The Twelve believe that the United Nations will have an important role to play in the Middle East peace process. The Twelve are encouraged by the progress made so far at the Middle East Peace Conference in Madrid and express the hope that the negotiation process will soon move on.

While work on a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian question proceeds, however, continued attention will have to be given to the plight of the Palestinians in the occupied territories.

The acquisition of land by force is not acceptable under international law and creates new political and humanitarian problems. The Twelve wish to draw attention to the difficult situation Palestinians, particularly in the occupied territories and Jordan, find themselves in. The arrival in Jordan of Palestinian refugees from the Gulf region places an additional burden not only on Jordan but also on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

So long as a peaceful settlement has not yet been reached and the territories continue to be occupied, the Fourth Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949 applies to the occupied territories. Since one of the main objectives of the Fourth Geneva Convention is the protection of civilians under occupation, the Twelve remain of the opinion that measures to provide

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for the safety and protection of Palestinian civilians living under Israeli occupation could be considered. The Twelve call on Israel to recognize the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to the occupied territories and to abide by its provisions. The lack of security and the unstable educational conditions will affect more than one generation of Palestinians and jeopardize the social and economic future of the Palestinian people. In that connection the Twelve welcome the decision of the Israeli Government to reopen educational institutions in the occupied territories, and we hope that the University of Bir Zeit will also be included in that positive gesture. We urge the Israeli Government to cooperate with the United Nations by allowing the civilian population in the occupied territories to take full advantage of the economic and social support provided by the United Nations and other organizations.

The establishment of settlements in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, is illegal and contrary to the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention. The settlement policy in particular affects the demographic structure of the occupied territories. It is clearly an obstacle to the ongoing international peace efforts.

The Twelve are aware of the particular importance of Jerusalem as a holy city for three religions. The freedom of everyone to have access to the places of worship must be safeguarded. We consider the status of Jerusalem a fundamental issue that cannot be prejudged by any unilateral decision.

The use of violence and the threat of violence have, for all too long, been elements of daily life in the occupied territories. Mounting tensions in the autumn of 1990 prompted the Security Council to adopt unanimously

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resolutions 672 (1990), 673 (1990) and 681 (1990). The Twelve support all efforts undertaken by the Security Council and the Secretary-General to stem any resurgence of violence in the occupied territories. The Twelve welcome the recent decline in violent confrontation in the territories and an apparent willingness on both sides to take up olive branches instead of weapons. The Twelve appeal to all parties to refrain from actions or statements that might jeopardize the peace process.

In that connection the Twelve deplore attacks on and threats against Israeli citizens by some extremist groups. Likewise, the Twelve consider the recent large-scale attacks by Israeli forces on Palestinian camps in Southern Lebanon as contrary to the common endeavour to promote peace.

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Now is rather a time for gradually getting rid of obstacles to constructive negotiations and removing sources of distraction and tension. The Twelve confirm in this context once again their disapproval of resolution 3379 (XXX). We think it should be repealed. Apart from that, the Twelve look forward to tangible improvement in the situation in the occupied territories. We also believe that a halt to Israel's settlement policy and the abandonment of the Arab trade boycott against Israel would help greatly to strengthen the basis of mutual confidence needed in order to make a success of political dialogue.

There is now a historic opportunity to solve the Palestinian problem. Since 1988, when the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) renounced terrorism and accepted Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the Palestinians have shown an increasing readiness, as they did at the last meeting of the Palestine National Council, to take part in dialogue. Israel for its part has taken an important step in the peace process by embarking on a Middle East conference and direct bilateral and multilateral negotiations.

The Palestinian question will remain a major source of instability in the region if we do not succeed in achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement. Such a settlement can be just only when all States in the region recognize the rights of the Palestinian people, and can be comprehensive only when all countries throughout the area accept responsibility for their share in the solution.

Once such a settlement is achieved, the European Community and its member States for their part are prepared to support the peace-building process and the economic recovery of all peoples and States in that part of the Middle

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East region and to consider ways and means of enhancing economic cooperation between those States and peoples.

Mr. HUSSAIN SHAH (Pakistan): Events in the Middle East during the past year have been of great significance. Against the background of a positive international political climate, we witnessed the effective manner in which a rejuvenated United Nations system overcame a major crisis in the area. At the same time, it rekindled the legitimate hope that the international community would address other long-standing situations in which people have been forcibly deprived of their inalienable right to self-determination. Above all, these events have served to highlight the fact that lasting peace and stability in the region will be possible only on the basis of a just and comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, at the heart of which lies the question of Palestine.

In spite of the profound changes that have swept the globe, we find that the conditions of the people of Palestine remain unchanged. In complete disregard of its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, Israel, the occupying Power, continues its policy of repression. The massive violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people continue unabated in the occupied territories.

A matter of great concern to the international community is Israel's regrettable attempts to change the demographic composition of the occupied territories, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, through the establishment of new settlements and the expansion of old ones for new immigrants. This practice is in complete contravention of international law and contrary to the Charter of the United Nations. It is widely recognized that the policy of settlements

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constitutes a major obstacle to international peace efforts. It is therefore imperative that Israel immediately put an end to the settlement policy in the occupied territories.

For the last four decades the people of Palestine have made tremendous sacrifices in their struggle for liberty and a life of dignity and for their fundamental right to a homeland. The denial of the right of the people of Palestine to self-determination is at the core of the conflict in the Middle East. The basic grievances behind the Palestine issue are political. The answer thus lies in a fair and just political solution.

Pakistan firmly believes that there can be no durable peace in the Middle East without the withdrawal of Israeli forces from all Arab and Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, and the restitution of the inalienable rights of the people of Palestine. It is therefore incumbent upon the international community to ensure the implementation of the relevant United Nations resolutions, which have repeatedly called for the restoration of the national rights of the people of Palestine.

Pakistan welcomes the Middle East Peace Conference that recently commenced in Madrid under the co-chairmanship of the United States of America and the Soviet Union. It marks a hopeful beginning on a long and difficult path. It is imperative that the international community make a concerted effort to encourage all the parties to stay the course and help strengthen their resolve to carry the process forward to its logical conclusion.

The decision of the Palestinian leadership to participate in the Peace Conference has been a courageous one. Their willingness to engage in negotiations is a clear manifestation of their sincerity in working for a fair

(Mr. Hussain Shah, Pakistan)

and just settlement. This spirit needs to be reciprocated in full. The immediate end of the settlement policy as well as the repeal of measures imposed against the Palestinian people would be important steps in this direction. They would contribute towards the creation of an atmosphere conducive to further negotiations and provide a major impetus to the peace process.

Peace has so far eluded the Middle East. In the past, many promising opportunities have been lost. There is now a glimmer of hope for a fair and comprehensive settlement of the Middle East conflict and the Palestine issue. It is our sincere hope that the process of peace initiated in Madrid will culminate in the creation of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East based on the realization of the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people.

Mr. HATANO (Japan): In various parts of the world we have recently seen traditional rivals come together in a spirit of reconciliation to put an end to violence and attempt to resolve their differences peacefully. Dare we hope that this trend of reconciliation is at long last reaching the Middle East, a region that has been racked with violence and human suffering for many decades?

We were first given cause for optimism at the Palestine National Council meeting in Algeria in 1988. That optimism was strengthened later that year at the General Assembly meeting held in Geneva when Chairman Arafat clearly affirmed the commitment of the PLO to work towards a peaceful solution to the question of Palestine. But then those hopes were nearly shattered when a new wave of violence erupted in the West Bank and Gaza in protest of the continuous oppression of Israeli authorities. And now, once again, we are encouraged by recent developments in Madrid, where all parties have participated in direct talks.

Because the feelings of mistrust and animosity between Israelis and Palestinians are so profound, it would be naive to believe that a single conference could result in dramatic progress towards a comprehensive settlement of the problem. The fact that the meeting in Madrid did not break down, however, is in itself an encouraging sign. The Government of Japan expresses its great admiration for the tireless efforts of Secretary of State James Baker to convene the Madrid Conference. Japan urges all parties concerned to build on the momentum generated by this historic peace conference, for if the conference were to end in failure there would be a very real danger that the Palestinian people would succumb to frustration and despair and that the situation in the region would become even more violent than it was before the conference.

(Mr. Hatano, Japan)

Japan has long stressed that efforts towards a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine must be based upon the following principles: first, Israel's withdrawal of its armed forces from all territories occupied since 1967; secondly, recognition of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination; and, thirdly, recognition of Israel's right to exist.

In order to achieve the ultimate goal of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace based upon Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), a step-by-step approach should be taken through confidence-building measures by all the Parties concerned. Although the Palestine Liberation Organization is not participating directly in the Conference, and the question of participating representatives should be dealt with by Palestinians themselves, my Government maintains that the PLO represents the Palestinian people. Japan would like to see the PLO continue to take a flexible and realistic approach and, with patience and perseverance, strive to achieve substantive progress towards a peaceful settlement.

Once direct bilateral talks are under way, Japan will participate in multilateral talks on regional issues. I am confident that Japan can utilize its own knowledge and experience in a number of fields to contribute to the welfare of all the peoples of the region.

Until a comprehensive settlement is achieved, the safety of the Palestinian people will remain a subject of great concern. Japan urges Israel to rescind its illegal settlement practices in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, which pose a threat to the peace process. Visitors to the occupied territories cannot but notice the stark contrast between the living standards of the illegally settled Israelis and those of the Palestinians. While the newly arrived settlers cultivate fields that do not belong to them, Palestinians languish in poverty on their own land.

(Mr. Hatano, Japan)

Israel, as an occupying Power, must bear all responsibility for the consequences of such conditions. Japan would also remind Israel that it has an obligation under international law to comply with the Fourth Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. The daily violations of the premises of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the detention of its personnel by Israeli authorities are thus an outrage.

Internal fighting among the Palestinian people is also a source of concern. This is not the time for Palestinians to be fighting among themselves; rather, they should be preparing for the day when they will finally be able to exercise their right to self-determination by strengthening the solidarity and integrity of their community.

In closing, Mr. President, I should like to reiterate the hope that the peace process that has commenced in Madrid will proceed until our common goal - an early and peaceful solution to the question of Palestine - is achieved. Japan will spare no effort to help all parties of good will to work together towards that noble goal.

Mr. QUDOVENKO (Ukraine) (interpretation from Russian): Every year for more than 40 years now, the General Assembly has been considering various aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Palestinian problem, which lies at its core and whose roots go back to the times of the cold war, has always been a painful reminder of the fact that our international Organization, despite all its efforts, has so far been unable to ensure peace and justice in the Middle East region.

Nevertheless, the year we are now considering gives reason for optimism. It has been a period of major changes, marked not only by the tragic events

(Mr. Oudovenko, Ukraine)

resulting from the aggression of Iraq against Kuwait but also by new hopes linked to the opening on 30 October 1991 in Madrid of an international conference on the Middle East. Its participants, its nature and its objectives make that forum an event of great importance in the new politics of our world.

We all know how agonizingly long was the road to that Conference, a road strewn with thousands of victims, marked by great destruction, filled with hate, cruelty, enmity and extremism. Enormous efforts were required in order to set up the process for settlement. They reflected the enormous power of the good will and responsibility displayed by statesmen and politicians, all of those involved in resolving that universal issue. We are speaking, after all, of a region which holds the roots of civilization and culture thousands of years old, in which the vital interests of today's international community converge and which is the home of peoples whose genius left its stamp on the greatest achievements of mankind.

(Mr. Oudovenko, Ukraine)

The convening of the conference meant overcoming an enormous psychological barrier of mutual non-acceptance by the parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict who, for the first time in history, met at the negotiating table for direct talks. History has decreed that had there not been profound qualitative changes in the world which have enabled us to speak of a completely new peaceful period in history, we could not also have seen the emergence at last of real hope for an Arab-Israeli settlement and a solution to the Palestine problem.

Today a unique opportunity is opening. It would be unforgivable to let it slip. We all have an interest in its success, not only because in our time the rights of peoples and nations and human rights are being more generally recognized and becoming the universal basis for a world order but also for a particularly pressing and critical reason. The Middle East has become one of the regions most saturated with weapons; there is a build-up of lethal armaments, nuclear technology and other means of mass destruction. All of this cannot fail to be of concern to Ukraine, situated as it is in a region adjoining the Middle East.

The anxiety on this score is justified, and the international community has the right to expect the conference to produce decisions that will remove that concern. It seems to me that a guarantee of the success of the Madrid conference would be an attitude that seeks not the victory of one side over the other but a common victory over a brutal past. What is needed is peace, not merely the cessation of a state of war, and a lasting peace presupposes the attainment of and respect for the rights of the Palestinian people, which continue to be violated.

Ukraine, as a member of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable

(Mr. Judovenko, Ukraine)

Rights of the Palestinian People, wishes to draw particular attention to the conclusion drawn in the report of that body (A/46/35) to the effect that "pending progress towards a political settlement ... it is of the utmost urgency that all necessary measures be taken to protect the Palestinian people in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, in accordance with the provisions of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, and numerous resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly".

In particular, we are concerned at the stepping up of activity to establish and expand settlements in the occupied territories and at the continuation of the practice of confiscating land and water resources. The situation is unfortunately becoming even more acute because of the increased influx of new immigrants.

This by no means complete list of problems will doubtless become the subject of detailed and, we hope, productive negotiations between the parties to the Madrid conference. It is important that the United Nations should promote that process, which is based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

With the end of the cold war and the emergence of favourable opportunities for resolving complex international problems, new opportunities have now arisen for resolving the Palestine problem, taking account of realistic positions free from narrow national interests.

Our task now, as we see it, is to establish a favourable atmosphere for conducting negotiations in the framework of the Madrid conference, avoiding unnecessary rhetoric and confrontational approaches.

(Mr. Qudovenko, Ukraine)

As was noted on numerous occasions in the recommendations of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, an international consensus has already been achieved concerning the basic principles for working out a solution of the Palestine problem. The main task - of implementing it - still remains to be done.

The future of the Palestinian people will, in one way or another, depend on how well the parties to the conflict comply with the Charter of the United Nations. The Arab countries and Israel must understand that life in peace with their neighbours and in conditions of recognition of the rights of the Palestinians will make possible the emergence of international dedication to the creation of secure and guaranteed borders, which are so badly needed by all States of that region, including Israel, in order to ensure a secure future for themselves.

In conclusion, I should like to quote from a message which Leonid Kravchuk, President of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, who recently spoke from this rostrum, sent to the participants in the international peace conference on the Middle East in Madrid:

"The role played by the United Nations in mobilizing the efforts of the international community to resolve the long-standing and explosive Middle East conflict is universally recognized. Those collective efforts also include the contribution of Ukraine, which for many years has been playing an active part in the work of the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

"In addressing you, the participants to the conference, I should like to emphasize your great responsibility towards the peoples of the

(Mr. Oudovenko, Ukraine)

Middle East region and of the entire world. The fate of peace in the Middle East today is in your hands. For that reason, on behalf of the Verkhovna Rada and of the people of Ukraine, I call on you to demonstrate tenacity and persistence in the search for the balance of interests which is necessary for solving the Middle East problem. In wishing you success, we believe that wisdom and good will on the part of States will make it possible to achieve a lasting peace in the Middle East on the basis of the principles of justice and of due regard given by everyone to the legitimate rights and interests of all the peoples and countries of the region."

Mr. ABDUL GHAFAR (Bahrain) (interpretation from Arabic): The question of Palestine with its twentieth century sad story is a record of conflict between ideology and history. The intertwining of the logic of historical events with the idealisms of ideology often clouds the vision and makes it difficult to understand the philosophy of history or to perceive its wider horizons.

The question of war and peace between Israel and the Arab countries has become entangled in that mix of ideology and history. It has become an unending dialectic without definite beginnings or a clear-cut ending. There are only those historical intermissions that are full of turmoil and violence.

Zionism, the political and ideological philosophy of the Jewish State, rejects the principle of peace based on recognition of the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people. It also rejects the principle of land for peace. It believes in the principle of peace for time, that is the status quo would continue until zionism realizes its expansionist dreams -

(Mr. Abdul Ghaffar, Bahrain)

especially since most of the leaders of Israel believe that time is on the side of Israel, and that time is capable, by its own logic, of imposing a new status quo on the Palestinians and the Arabs with the passage of time.

(Mr. Abdul Ghaffar, Bahrain)

David Ben Gurion's vision of the Jewish State shows quite clearly the intertwining of Zionist ideology and history. He expresses that vision in the following words:

(spoke in English)

"After we become a strong force, as the result of the creation of a State, we shall abolish partition and expand to the whole of Palestine. ... The State will only be a stage in the realization of Zionism and its task is to prepare the ground for our expansion into the whole of Palestine by a Jewish-Arab agreement. ... The State will have to preserve order not only by preaching morality but by machine-guns, if necessary."

(spoke in Arabic)

Ben Gurion explains in his memoirs to those Zionists who rejected the idea of the partition of Palestine that his acceptance of the establishment of a Jewish State and a Palestinian State did not imply that he had abandoned his vision of Greater Israel. In a letter to his son, he wrote the following:

(spoke in English)

"A partial Jewish State is not the end, but only the beginning ... I am certain that we will not be prevented from settling in the other parts of the country, either by mutual agreement with our Arab neighbours or by some other means ... [if the Arabs refuse] we shall have to speak to them in a different language. But we shall only have another language if we have a State."

(Mr. Abdul Ghaffar, Bahrain)

(spoke in Arabic)

Ben Gurion told the truth. On 10 March 1949, Jewish forces occupied the Port of Eilat in the Gulf of Aqaba just after the ratification of the Armistice Agreement in February 1949.

The events which we have witnessed since then have shown the true nature of the Israeli expansionist intentions which some thought were mere conjecture that had no relation whatever with the political realities of the region.

Worse still is the denial of the very existence of the Palestinian people whose cause has continued to be addressed both within and outside the United Nations since the establishment of Israel.

Golda Meir, one of the former Israeli premiers, believed that there was no such thing as a Palestinian people. She voiced this belief in a statement to the London Sunday Times on 15 June 1969 wherein she said:

(spoke in English)

"It was not as though there was a Palestinian people in Palestine considering itself as a Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them. They did not exist."

(spoke in Arabic)

The intertwining of ideology and history in contemporary Palestinian political thought is characterized by concepts and dimensions that differ from the Zionist philosophy of expansion and settlement.

Initially, the goal of Palestinian policy was to rid the Palestinians of the injustice and dispersion they suffered in 1948. In a later stage, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) called for the establishment of a secular democratic State. Then there was the stage of accepting the solution

(Mr. Abdul Ghaffar, Bahrain)

of establishing two States, a Palestinian State and a Jewish State. At the 19th meeting of the Palestine National Council held in Algeria between 12-15 November 1988, the Palestinians accepted Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). They also recognized Israel's right to exist. At the end of the day, the PLO and the Palestinians in the occupied territories agreed to attend the Madrid peace conference and even accepted the arbitrary Israeli conditions as the price for the participation of the Likud Government in the peace process.

The Palestinians have demonstrated political realism and flexibility by adopting positions which have greatly facilitated the convening of the international peace conference. Movement from one stage to the next was not an easy matter for the Palestinian national movement. It was full of suffering, oppression, murder, the displacement of the Palestinian human being, in whom the spirit of defiance to the Israeli occupation would not be quenched.

The next stage of the peace talks between Israel, the Palestinians and the Arab States will not be an easy one. It will be arduous and full of suffering and frustrations, especially since the Israelis have not been able as yet to draw a clear line between expansionist Zionist ideology and the need and requirements of a just and comprehensive peace.

Professor Yehoshafat Harkabi, of the Hebrew University, told Haaretz, the Israeli newspaper, in an interview which was quoted by the PLO's Voice of the Homeland on 13 February 1989 that the outstanding feature of the Arab-Israeli conflict is the sharp contradiction between the two sides' perception of historic Palestine. He said:

(Mr. Abdul Ghaffar, Bahrain)

(spoke in English)

"The main feature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is that one cannot convince the Palestinians that Haifa and Jaffa are not part of Palestine, and one cannot persuade the Jews that Judea and Samaria are not part of Greater Israel. ... The Palestinians believe that the Israelis do not need a State, and the Israelis are convinced that the Palestinians should be satisfied with autonomy."

(spoke in Arabic)

Here, one would be justified in asking the following question: how can peace be achieved on the basis of the partition of Palestine? Harkabi believes that this can be achieved if a clear line is drawn between political reality and ideology.

The Palestinians have demonstrated political realism at the 19th meeting of the Palestine National Council held in Algeria in November 1988 by deciding to accept Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). They showed the same realism when the Palestine National Council, in its emergency session of 24 September 1991, decided to accept the participation of Palestinians in the occupied territories in the peace process in Madrid, under the co-sponsorship of the United States and the USSR.

Thus it can be stated today that the Palestinians, under the leadership of the PLO, have been able to break out of the dialectic of ideology and history by achieving a pattern of harmony between theory and practice.

It remains for Israel to demonstrate the credibility of its desire for peace, by recognizing the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, by withdrawing from all the occupied Arab territories, and by complying with all Security Council resolutions in this respect.

(Mr. Abdul Ghaffar, Bahrain)

If Israel wishes to impose coexistence and peace on its own terms, if it wants to steer the very movement of history in this region in line with Zionist logic, peace will not be attainable.

Mr. SNOUSSI (Morocco) (interpretation from French): The General Assembly this year is considering the question of Palestine in the light of positive and major developments on the international scene. These developments afford unique opportunities for breaking the deadlock in the Middle East and for dealing with one of those hot-beds of tension which are the most precarious and the most threatening to international relations in this day and age.

In political terms the world is currently experiencing a relaxation of tensions and witnessing a number of manifestations of reconciliation between the two major Powers. They have opted for cooperation rather than confrontation, and are strengthening this cooperation day by day throughout the world, promoting peace in the process.

This improvement in international relations has fostered a growing awareness of the need to initiate dialogue and negotiations for the settlement of disputes instead of indulging in one-upmanship and confrontation.

This positive approach has already borne fruit to the extent that it has made it possible to make tangible strides in settling most regional conflicts which for a long time have been upsetting relations between States. The situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine in particular, have finally benefited from the positive by-products of this turn of events. The question of Palestine, at the core of the Israeli-Arab conflict, has been of concern to the United Nations ever since its inception. We are talking here about the tragedy of a people stripped of its land, its dignity and the most elementary of human rights, with contempt shown for the principles of international law, as well as countless resolutions and decisions adopted by our Organization.

(Mr. Snoussi, Morocco)

Throughout this time of travail the Palestinian people have suffered and continue to suffer all kinds of humiliation and repression. None the less, torture, intimidation, inhuman acts of violence perpetrated against defenceless people have not broken that heroic resistance and its iron determination to decide its own future. Intifadah, one of the most moving expressions of that resistance, has won the backing of the entire international community and shown that a people devoted to freedom and independence cannot be perpetually held in chains. Above and beyond the human sacrifice made by the Palestinian people, its leaders have throughout the last several years made constructive overtures to bring about dialogue and promote peace.

From that perspective the National Council of Palestine, in 1988, took its historic and courageous initiative to accept, among other things, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) as a basis for settlement. This gesture of good will, alas, has never drawn any positive response from intransigent Israeli leaders. More recently still, the Palestine National Council, adopting a decision at its latest meeting to promote the Madrid Conference by all means at its disposal, showed that, if indeed there was a need for further proof, the sincere political readiness, imbued with moderation and wisdom, of the Palestine Liberation Organization and its desire to find common ground for a just and lasting solution to this question.

The most recent Palestinian statements of position are merely the latest manifestations of a readiness for peace and of the different initiatives proposed throughout the development of the Palestinian question and the Israeli-Arab conflict.

(Mr. SNOUSI, Morocco)

Thus, Morocco was privileged to host the twelfth Arab Summit Conference in Fes in 1982, at the end of which a peace plan was adopted unanimously. This peace plan, approved by the National Committee, in fact marks a remarkable contribution to the search for a just and equitable solution.

Clearly, these peace initiatives have encouraged the dialogue started recently under the aegis of the two major Powers now determined to settle once and for all the problems of the Middle East and in particular the Palestinian question.

Despite the willingness of the Arab States to cooperate fully and in good faith, Israel continues to display inflexibility and an obstructionist attitude. This is seen particularly in the policy of speeded-up and methodical settlement of the occupied Arab territories. This policy, aside from being a violation of law, constitutes a serious obstacle to the peace process recently set in train, inasmuch as it is rejected by the entire international community and aims above all at imposing a fait accompli on the ground, by the physical and demographic modification of the occupied Arab territories, including Al-Quds al-Sharif.

In this connection we may recall resolution 476 (1980) in which the Security Council deplored Israel's persistence in changing the physical nature, the demographic composition, the institutional structure, as well as the status of that Holy City.

In the same vein, a number of United Nations resolutions have stated that all legislative and administrative measures taken by Israel with regard to Al-Quds, are contrary to international law and hence are null and void. For its part the Al-Quds Committee, set up by the Organization of the Islamic Conference and chaired by His Majesty King Hassan II of Morocco, has been

(Mr. Snoussi, Morocco)

striving tirelessly to preserve and safeguard the identity of the holy city, cradle of the three divinely revealed religions.

Stressing the unique status of that city, His Majesty the King asked these questions: Does its name not resonate in the heart of every Muslim? Does it not give rise in their hearts to feelings of religious, ethnic and human solidarity? Al-Quds, is it not etched in our collective memory as a city where the three religions, bequeathed from Heaven, live side by side? Is it not there where the sons of Abraham - may he be blessed - live side by side, or rather more precisely, used to live side by side as brothers? Al-Quds, is it not now the city which the occupiers wish to seize for ever and want to keep for themselves, subjected to their hegemony, thus forgetting the rights of the followers of Islam and of the faithful of various Christian churches and denying, by this very attitude, the profound, true philosophy of Judaism?

In any case, Israel as the occupying Power is bound to respect the Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949 relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and to refrain from any measure that would change the juridical status and geographic nature of the occupied Arab territories, including Al-Quds al-Sharif.

The King of Morocco welcomes the initiative taken by the United States, in close cooperation with the Soviet Union, to convene a peace conference on the Middle East, the Conference which met in Madrid last month and which started a dialogue and negotiations between all the parties to the conflict.

The holding of that Conference, which has been the ardent wish of the international community, marks an unprecedented historic turning-point in the evolution of Middle East affairs and in particular those of Palestine.

(Mr. Snoussi, Morocco)

On this occasion, Morocco wishes to congratulate United States Secretary of State, Mr. James Baker, on the invaluable efforts he has constantly made to organize such a conference. Morocco also wishes to encourage him to pursue a sustained campaign to guarantee results acceptable to all.

We have high hopes that this Conference will lead to a just and lasting settlement of all the problems involved in the Israeli-Arab conflict and will start a political dynamic which will allow the Palestinians to exercise their inalienable political rights, including their right to establishing a State on their own territory.

Without underestimating the difficulties which will most certainly emerge in the course of the future work of that Conference, Morocco wishes to emphasize that this process is unfolding on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), a trend that in itself is positive and encouraging.

We are pleased to see that the organizers of that Conference have reaffirmed their commitment to the principle of non-acquisition of territory by force and to the principle of land for peace.

We are convinced that the acceptance of these basic principles by all participants will create a climate of confidence which will allow them to deal positively with the other crucial issues, notably that of the right of all State in the region to live within secure and internationally recognized boundaries.

It goes without saying that today the best guarantee for the security of all States in the region is the establishment of relations based upon respect, mutual confidence and good-neighbourliness. Need I recall that an end to Israeli occupation is the prerequisite for the establishment of such ties of confidence?

(Mr. ENOUSSI, Morocco)

Since time immemorial the Middle East has been a land of coexistence. A cradle for religions divinely revealed and a seed-bed for the flowering of human civilisation, th' s region should be a haven for peace and serenity rather than the theatre of bloody conflicts which threaten international peace and security.

(Mr. Snoussi, Morocco)

Morocco, which has always deplored the distrust and hatred that the tragic events in the Middle East have spawned - events that have been exacerbated for more than four decades - cannot but welcome the process of dialogue that is now under way and express the hope that peoples in that part of the world will at last be able to live in harmony and, through their common genius, to build upon and enhance mankind's patrimony.

The PRESIDENT (interpretation from French): I call on the representative of Iraq, who wishes to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

May I remind members that, in accordance with General Assembly decision 34/401, statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. MOHAMMED (Iraq) (interpretation from Arabic): We have become accustomed to the statements that are made repeatedly by the representative of the Zionist entity - his allegations and his persistence in following the aggressive and expansionist policies of the Zionist entity. However, the statement made this morning was full of flagrant contradictions. It unmasked the truth of the Zionist positions.

One of the most prominent contradictions in the Zionist representative's statement is his insistence on rejecting any return to the 1947 or 1967 borders, because time travel, or the return to the past as he puts it, is an impossibility that would run counter to reality. However, a few seconds after making that statement and after distorting the history of the region he allowed us to journey to the past, to travel in time. It was not a simple journey of two or four decades; he took us back, in an arbitrary fashion, to ages long gone - gone 4,000 years. This glaring contradiction in evaluating

(Mr. Mohammed, Iraq)

the element of time reveals the invalidity of the most important basis of the Zionist racist theory, which contradicts the tenets of the Jewish faith itself. We are all aware that large sections of the Jewish people totally reject zionism.

What else did that representative say? He totally ignored the Palestinian people. He ignored the reality and the character of that people and denied it the right to resist occupation and injustice, as well as its right to self-determination and to the establishment of its own independent State. He circumvented the reality that is indeed the crux of the conflict, and then he moved on to repetitious talk about separate deals under arbitrary conditions.

The solution lies in dealing with the very essence of the problem, namely the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. This is the basis of a comprehensive settlement, just exactly as the international community has indicated in all the resolutions adopted by the United Nations and by other international and regional organizations. The representative of the Zionist entity even attacked this Organization and instead of showing respect for its resolutions, as international legality demands, he called for the repeal of such resolutions, foremost among which is the General Assembly's just resolution 3379 (XXX) which, quite rightly, considers zionism a racist movement.

The Israeli representative ignored another fact, namely that the Arab nation is one and indivisible. The Arab nation is a living, inveterate nation that is steeped in history, a nation that rejects foreign occupation and domination and resists injustice, like every other nation on earth.

The statement made today by the Zionist representative is yet another reason for condemnation of that entity, which rejects peace, refuses to end

(Mr. Mohammed, Iraq)

its occupation or to halt the establishment of settlements, rejects the decisions of the international community and tries to distort facts and history. In all this, it depends on its nuclear superiority, its policy of terrorism and repression and the unlimited American support extended to it through the infamous policy of double standards.

The road to peace is clear and simple. It is a question of applying international legality. The Palestinian people must regain its inalienable rights, foremost among which is the right to self-determination and to the establishment of its independent State on its native soil, with Holy Al-Quds as its capital.

The PRESIDENT (interpretation from French): The Observer of Palestine has asked to be allowed to reply to a statement made by one of the speakers in the debate. I shall call on him on the basis of General Assembly resolutions 3237 (XXXIX) of 22 November 1974 and 43/177 of 15 December 1988.

Mr. AL-KIDWA (Palestine) (interpretation from Arabic): As the Palestinian people is the main party involved in the question of Palestine it is necessary that we respond to the statement of the Israeli representative. Shortly after the beginning of the statement of the representative of Israel, it was sad to note that there has been no movement, however limited, in the Israeli position. There has been no change in Israel's position of rejection and no change even in language, despite a major international effort, despite the peace process that was launched in Madrid, and despite the series of flexible positions adopted by the Palestinians, the latest of which was embodied in the statement made in the Assembly yesterday by Mr. Farouk Kaddoumi.

(Mr. Al-Kidwa, Palestine)

I must say that as I listen on to the statement I began to feel real anger at the Israeli representative's contempt for international law, rejection of international legality, forgery of history, arrogance and feelings of superiority that, most regrettably, has reached the limits of insolence. The Israeli voice in the United Nations appears to be the only voice that comes from the past. It is a voice that holds on to myths, the logic of force, the logic of victor-and-vanquished and appears not to have heard of the developments that have been taking place in the world or of the new world order that is being built on the debris of the cold war.

Furthermore, he has completely missed the point and has not addressed the issue. The item before us today is the question of Palestine and how to settle that question. As usual, he has tried to evade the issue by defaming the Arab States instead of dealing with the substance of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the question of Palestine. The name of the Palestinian people was not mentioned even once in his statement.

Taking the 10 minutes limit into consideration, I should like to point out a number of specific points in reply to that statement.

The Israeli representative stated that Israel will not go back to the borders of 1967 or 1947, as if the matter should be left to the generosity of Israel and not decided by international law as required by Security Council resolutions and, indeed, dictated by the very basis on which the Madrid Conference was convened, namely Security Council resolution 242 (1967), which embodies a basic principle of international law: the inadmissibility of the acquisition of the land of others by force. The Israeli representative stands here today to demolish all that.

(Mr. Al-Kidwa, Palestine)

Even the borders of 1947 set out in General Assembly resolution 181 (II) must not be held in contempt and made the subject of ridicule as in the statement of the Israeli representative. General Assembly resolution 181 (II), as he knows full well, is the only birth certificate that Israel has. He knows that even the declaration of Israel's independence clearly stipulated that General Assembly resolution 181 (II) is incontrovertible. That was the cornerstone of that declaration of independence.

In addition, let us mention Israel's own undertakings to implement General Assembly resolution 181 (II) when it applied for United Nations membership. It was on the basis of those undertakings that the General Assembly granted Israel United Nations membership.

The Assembly can compare all this with what it has just heard from the Israeli representative. He has invoked geography and security as justification for the acquisition of the lands of others by force in the name of security. That is pure Nazi logic. And who knows? Maybe, in the name of security, there shall be a call for the occupation of yet more land once we accept that logic even for one second.

The Israeli representative also informed us that the building of settlements will continue. He informed us that the building of settlements is the natural right of Israelis. He completely ignored the unanimous - I repeat, unanimous - position of the international community that those settlements are illegal.

He even tried to confuse the issue by alleging that that principled position is anti-Semitic. That is something we totally reject. Settlers are rejected by us not because they are Jews but because they are citizens of

(Mr. Al-Kidwa, Palestine)

the occupying Power. They are prohibited from settling occupied land according to the Fourth Geneva Convention. We reject them because they are confiscating our land and stealing our water and for no other reason, as the Israeli representative claimed.

He also condemned the United Nations. In fact, he condemns anyone who does not agree with him. In addition, he called for the repeal of the General Assembly resolution equating Zionism with racism.

We still believe that the substance of Zionism is indeed equated with racism. However, that does not prevent us from accepting coexistence with Israel, shared existence with Israel. While we feel that this is not the time to go into the arguments that substantiate one point of view in detail, we find that it is our duty to say that as long as the Israeli position remains as is, and as long as the peace process has achieved nothing, the time is not right to deal with such issues. We call upon all Member States to take that position.

One can talk at length of Israel's racism. Israel is a State without a constitution and without clear citizenship criteria, a State that grants citizenship automatically to any Jew even though he has never set foot in that land, while a Palestinian who, with his forbears, was born there, is denied the right to return and sometimes even denied the right to visit.

This is a much repeated falsification of history that ignores the Canaanite Palestinians who were the first known inhabitants of that region, and confuses Islamic conquest with Arab presence. These are absurd attempts whose aim is to embellish that massive lie of Shamir's in his Madrid statement, a lie which insults the intelligence of everyone who is conversant with the realities of 4,000 years of history.

(Mr. Al-Kidwa, Palestine)

Everything that the Israeli representative has said in his statement is further indication of Israel's position. The question now is what the response of the General Assembly will be to that position, which is a humiliation for us all. For our part at least, we believe that that statement shows that the Palestinian people still needs the principled political support of the General Assembly. It is further proof that the Palestinian people still needs the protection of the General Assembly from the consequences of that position of rejection that comes from the dark caverns of the cold war.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.