



# General Assembly

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

### Summary record of the 415th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 31 January 2024, at 10 a.m.

*Temporary Chair:* Mr. Guterres . . . . . (Secretary-General of the United Nations)

*Chair:* Mr. Niang . . . . . (Senegal)

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda (A/AC.183/2024/L.1)**

1. *The agenda was adopted.*

### **Election of officers**

2. **The Temporary Chair** invited the Committee to consider the nomination of Mr. Niang (Senegal) for election as Chair.

3. *Mr. Niang (Senegal) was elected by acclamation.*

4. *Mr. Niang (Senegal) took the Chair.*

5. **The Chair** said that the Committee would meet in March 2024 to elect the other members of the Bureau. Until then, the Vice-Chairs and the Rapporteur elected in 2023 would continue to serve in their personal capacity as acting members of the Bureau.

### **Statement by the Secretary-General**

6. **The Secretary-General** said that the Committee's mandate and advocacy were crucial in addressing the unresolved question of Palestine and the enormous violence and suffering, in particular since the horrific 7 October 2023 attack by Hamas in Israel and the ensuing military operations of Israel in Gaza. The death, destruction, displacement, hunger, loss and grief in Gaza over the previous 120 days were a scar on the world's shared humanity and conscience. He once again condemned the horrifying attacks by Hamas and other groups that had claimed the lives of over 1,200 Israelis and others, and called for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages. There was no justification for the intentional killing, injury, torture or kidnapping of civilians, the use of sexual violence against them or the launching of rockets towards civilian targets.

7. At the same time, nothing could justify the collective punishment of the people of Gaza. The ongoing conflict and relentless bombardment by Israeli forces across Gaza had resulted in the killing of civilians and destruction at a pace and scale beyond that of recent years. He was horrified by the incessant military strikes that had killed and maimed civilians and protected personnel and damaged or destroyed civilian infrastructure. Over 26,750 Palestinians had reportedly been killed in Gaza, more than two thirds of them women and children. Over 70 per cent of civilian infrastructure in Gaza, including homes, hospitals, schools and water and sanitation facilities, had been destroyed or severely damaged. Some 1.7 million people had been displaced and did not know whether they would have homes to return to.

8. No party to an armed conflict was above international law. International humanitarian law, including the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution in attack, must be upheld at all times. The binding decisions of the International Court of Justice must also be complied with.

9. The United Nations had acted immediately following the very serious allegations against staff members of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). He had been horrified by the accusations. The previous day, he had met with donors to hear their concerns and to outline the steps being taking to address them. He had also underscored the importance of continuing the vital work of UNRWA to meet the dire needs of civilians in Gaza and of ensuring the continuity of its services to Palestine refugees in the occupied West Bank and in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. The Agency was the backbone of the entire humanitarian response in Gaza and he appealed to all Member States to guarantee the continuity of its life-saving work.

10. The humanitarian system in Gaza was collapsing. He was extremely concerned by the inhumane conditions faced by the 2.2 million people living in Gaza, as they struggled to survive without basic necessities. All were hungry and half a million were grappling with catastrophic levels of food insecurity. He called for rapid, safe, unhindered, expanded and sustained humanitarian access throughout Gaza, especially in the north, where most missions had been denied access by Israel amid continued insecurity and fighting.

11. Additional crossing points into Gaza were needed to reduce congestion and avoid choke points. He asked all parties to continue their active engagement with United Nations actors on the ground and to work closely with the newly appointed Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza, Sigrid Kaag, to scale up humanitarian aid to Gaza. He counted on full cooperation to ensure continuous humanitarian access. Moreover, he repeated his call for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire.

12. As the United Nations sought to address mounting needs in Gaza, it also remained focused on the deteriorating situation in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. He was extremely alarmed by the high levels of settler violence in the occupied West Bank, as well as Palestinian attacks against Israelis. Such violence must stop and the perpetrators held accountable. Intensive Israeli operations continued, including in Area A of the occupied West Bank, leading

to deadly armed exchanges. Dozens of Palestinians had been arrested, with many detained without charge, including children.

13. The violence had not been limited to the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Rising hostilities across the Blue Line and attacks in the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq and the Red Sea risked triggering a broader escalation that could threaten regional stability. He called for urgent steps to de-escalate the situation to spare the region from more violence.

14. Tangible progress must be made towards a two-State solution, through an end to the occupation and the establishment of a fully independent, viable and sovereign Palestinian State, of which Gaza was an integral part. Only the two-State solution based on the 1967 lines, with Israel and Palestine living side by side, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States, in line with United Nations resolutions, international law and prior agreements, could ensure the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and of just and lasting peace and stability in the region.

15. The international community must not waver in its commitment. All should work together to advance a meaningful peace process that would put an end to the tragic cycles of fear, hatred and violence and to build a more peaceful and hopeful future for Palestinians and Israelis.

#### Statement by the Chair

16. **The Chair** said that he commended the commitment of the Secretary-General to protecting the rights of the Palestinian people and mitigating the effects of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. He also wished to pay tribute to UNRWA staff, who had made extreme sacrifices to protect innocent lives. UNRWA, which had long experienced financial problems, deserved support more than ever. He was therefore deeply concerned by the decision of certain States to suspend their financial support to UNRWA as a result of the serious accusations made against some members of its staff. Noting that the United Nations was investigating the allegations, he urged those States to resume their support. He commended the action taken by the Commissioner-General of UNRWA and emphasized the urgent need for the continuation of the Agency's work.

17. In his statement the previous year (see [A/AC.183/SR.410](#)), he had warned that 2023 could be a particularly difficult year owing to high levels of violence against the backdrop of heightened political tensions and a stalled peace process. The record number of Palestinian deaths since 2005, the intensification of

Israeli colonization and occupation, including in East Jerusalem, increased clashes and Israeli military operations, and illegal unilateral measures demonstrated the collective failure to uphold the rights of the Palestinian people.

18. The Committee had immediately condemned the attacks of 7 October 2023, while calling for de-escalation and the revitalization of peace talks. It was deplorable that, since then, nearly 26,000 Palestinians, the vast majority of them women and children, as well as 142 UNRWA personnel, had been killed. In addition, nearly 85 per cent of the population was displaced. The Committee urged all parties to continue their efforts to ensure safe and unhindered humanitarian access under United Nations supervision.

19. The Palestinian question was sometimes reduced to its humanitarian dimension at the expense of its legal and political dimensions. In that regard, he recalled that international law protected the entirety of the Palestinian population, both in Gaza and in the West Bank, and preserved its right to a contiguous State within secure and internationally recognized borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

20. The Committee welcomed the recent decision of the International Court of Justice requiring Israel to take provisional measures to protect the Palestinian people. The Committee invited Israel and the international community to ensure that the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people were respected. Application of the law required political will, which, regrettably, remained difficult to mobilize when it came to the Palestinian question. For example, 39 days had passed before the Security Council had adopted a resolution on the situation, despite the acuteness of the humanitarian crisis. He hoped that the Council would call for a ceasefire, which was necessary to spare innocent lives.

21. Healing was needed on both sides in order to rebuild confidence and forge a path towards peaceful coexistence. In that context, he reaffirmed the United Nations position in support of the two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security within recognized borders, on the basis of the pre-1967 lines. The Committee would continue to engage with Member States and regional groups to advance the Palestinian cause and would support any initiative aimed at the full realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

#### Update by the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations

22. **Mr. Mansour** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that the Palestinian people were facing a horrific

situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in particular in the Gaza Strip. More Palestinians had been killed than in any global conflict since the Second World War and many more were at risk of dying as a result of injuries, hunger, thirst, the collapse of hospital systems and the lack of fuel. Never before had the Palestinian people faced famine, nor had they needed to beg for food. The crimes being committed against the Palestinian people must be stopped and those responsible must face justice in the international legal system.

23. The war must end immediately. A ceasefire would save the lives of many Palestinians and prevent many more from being injured. Furthermore, the crime against humanity of forcible transfer must be prevented, in particular around Rafah, where more than 1 million people were sheltering. If there was no ceasefire, the buffer zone of defence between Egypt and the Gaza Strip might be destroyed, resulting in a second Nakbah in Egypt that would affect 1.5 million Palestinians. That was part of the plan of the extremist, fascist leadership in Israel, which wanted to destroy and depopulate not only Gaza, but also the West Bank, so that they could revive the biblical past in what they called Judea and Samaria.

24. At the recent summit of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries held in Kampala, Algeria, South Africa, the Group of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries had stressed the need for a ceasefire and humanitarian assistance and had rejected forcible transfer. Work remained to be done by the Council and the General Assembly to implement those objectives. He commended the noble and principled efforts of South Africa before the International Court of Justice and welcomed the provisional measures ordered by the Court as an important element for ending the war.

25. His delegation was tired of reiterating the need for a two-State solution while no practical steps were taken in that direction. Once the war was ended, the international community should pursue two main objectives. First, the State of Palestine must become a full member of the United Nations. In that connection, friendly European countries should recognize the State of Palestine as soon as possible so that the issue could be put before the Security Council. Second, an international conference should be convened on the implementation of the two-State solution. His delegation intended to work towards the adoption of a resolution that would give the Secretary-General the authority to convene such a conference, on the basis of global consensus, international law, the Arab Peace Initiative and the relevant United Nations resolutions, to

begin the process of implementing the two-State solution.

26. Much work remained to be done. First and foremost, the war must end. Afterwards, practical steps must be taken to ensure that the Palestinian people could exercise their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and statehood.

#### **Briefing by the Permanent Mission of South Africa to the United Nations**

27. **Ms. Joyini** (South Africa) said that her Government had instituted proceedings against Israel before the International Court of Justice under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, to which both South Africa and Israel were parties, concerning Israeli conduct in the conflict in Gaza. Article 3 of the Genocide Convention prohibited conspiracy to commit genocide, direct and public incitement to commit genocide, attempt to commit genocide and complicity in genocide. South Africa had requested the indication of provisional measures to prevent further irreparable harm to the people of Palestine as a result of the carnage carried out by Israel in Gaza.

28. The ruling on the provisional measures, issued on 26 January, stated that a dispute existed between the parties relating to the interpretation of the Genocide Convention. The ruling also established that the Court had jurisdiction to entertain the case, and that South Africa had standing to submit the dispute. Finally, the ruling established that the rights claimed by South Africa were plausible and that there was risk of irreparable prejudice to the rights of the Palestinians in Gaza. On the basis of those considerations, the Court ruled that Israel must take measures to prevent the commission of genocide; ensure, with immediate effect, that its military forces did not commit genocide; prevent and punish direct and public incitement to commit genocide in relation to the people of Gaza; enable the provision of humanitarian assistance in Gaza; and ensure the preservation of evidence related to the allegations of acts of genocide. The Court also ruled that Israel must provide a report within one month on all measures taken to give effect to the Court order. While the Court had stopped short of ruling for a ceasefire, as requested by South Africa, the provisional measures effectively required a ceasefire if they were to be implemented.

29. It was widely recognized that Israel was behaving in a manner contrary to the Court order. However, before the examination of the merits of the case could begin, Israel had indicated that it would file preliminary

objections regarding the Court's jurisdiction and the admissibility of the case, under article 79 of the Rules of Court. At the merits stage, States having an interest of a legal nature that might be affected by the decision in the case could submit a request to the Court to be permitted to intervene, pursuant to article 62 of the Statute of the Court. Pursuant to article 63 of the Statute, States parties to the Genocide Convention also had a right to intervene in the proceedings.

30. Israel had indicated that it did not intend to comply with the Court's order. If it did not, South Africa would invoke any legal provision at its disposal, including Article 94 of the Charter of the United Nations. South Africa encouraged States to consider making interventions under articles 62 and 63 of the Statute of the Court to further bolster the case. Alternatively, given the costs associated with international legal processes, States lacking resources could make official statements declaring support for the case.

#### **Briefing by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East Representative Office in New York**

31. **Ms. Gunnarsdóttir** (Director, UNRWA Representative Office, New York) said that UNRWA was, first and foremost, a human development agency, which, under normal circumstances, provided education to over 500,000 children and vocational training for 8,000 young people. It provided health-care services at more than 100 centres, as well as social services to poor households and microfinance loans to entrepreneurs. Those activities were carried out in accordance with the Agency's mandate, which had always been supported by the vast majority of Member States.

32. It was worth mentioning that UNRWA was a part of the United Nations family, as it sometimes seemed as though it was viewed as separate from the Organization. One reason for that was that UNRWA headquarters had been moved from Vienna to Gaza following the signing of the Oslo Accords. Another reason was that the Agency had a small presence in New York and participated in discussions or processes only when directly affected. Nevertheless, UNRWA implemented the decisions of the General Assembly, thereby directly contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the realization of the economic and social rights of Palestine refugees. If UNRWA became unable to continue its services because of underfunding, the impact would be felt immediately on the ground, not only in Gaza, but also in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon.

33. The scale of the death, injury, displacement, destruction of infrastructure and hunger in Gaza was unprecedented. In the north, the population was on the verge of famine. Although UNRWA had not been able to provide updates on certain issues in its recent situation reports because of the deteriorating security situation and Internet connectivity problems, it nevertheless remained one of the very few actors on the ground that managed to convey information about the operational environment and the plight of the people it served.

34. The Agency was, by far, the largest humanitarian actor in Gaza. Of its 13,000 staff in Gaza, 3,000 were core staff who reported to work every day, providing their communities with a lifeline. In addition to operating shelters and distributing food, UNRWA oversaw transportation logistics, which other humanitarian actors relied on to deliver their own assistance in Gaza. If UNRWA collapsed owing to underfunding, the entire humanitarian operation in Gaza would collapse.

35. Women in Gaza were deprived of dignity and privacy. The shortage of menstrual products meant that women were unable to leave their makeshift tents, which were tiny and unsanitary. Sanitation was inadequate in most cases and some people owned only one set of clothes. Some women were restricting their food and water intake so that they would not have to use the toilets at night in unsafe conditions. Women-headed households were at significant risk of being left behind in terms of aid.

36. Young children had been stripped of their innocence at a time when they should be in school and playing with their friends. Instead, they were in the streets, looking for scraps of food or material for shelters. The constant communication blackouts had resulted in soaring levels of unaccompanied children. Before Khan Yunis had been engulfed in heavy fighting, a group of children at Al-Nasr Hospital had approached an UNRWA staff member with a single request: a ceasefire.

37. From the very beginning, the Agency and the United Nations had addressed with appropriate seriousness the allegations that several UNRWA staff members had participated in the 7 October crimes. The Commissioner-General had immediately, without first conducting an investigation, terminated the contracts of eight staff members on the basis of information provided by the Israeli authorities, which had been a departure from the usual procedure but had been warranted by the seriousness of the allegations. Of the other four individuals alleged to have taken part in the crimes, two had been confirmed dead and two had yet to be

identified. An investigation had been launched by the Office of Internal Oversight Services, and it was hoped that the facts would be swiftly ascertained. The Agency could not address additional allegations that had appeared in the media regarding crimes or neutrality breaches by UNRWA staff, as it was unable to examine the dossiers being referred to. As a result, there could be a misperception that the Agency was not being transparent. It should be noted that UNRWA provided the host authorities and Israel with a list of all staff members on an annual basis and had never received negative feedback.

38. The Agency had sufficient funds for its operations until the end of February. If UNRWA collapsed, operations in all five fields would collapse. Member States were aware of the importance of the programme budget, which funded staff salaries and operational costs. She appealed to those donors that had suspended funding to reverse that decision so that UNRWA could prioritize the dire humanitarian needs on the ground. She also appealed to other Member States to intervene to ensure that the Agency could continue to provide services. She was grateful for the recent expressions of confidence in UNRWA that had been received from Member States, sister agencies and civil society organizations.

39. She reiterated that UNRWA called for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire; unhindered access to all parts of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including northern Gaza; the provision of sufficient and meaningful humanitarian aid; and the protection of civilians and United Nations installations. Moreover, the warring parties were called upon to respect international humanitarian law.

40. **Mr. Nasir** (Indonesia) said that his delegation commended South Africa for instituting proceedings against Israel concerning alleged violations of its obligations under the Genocide Convention. Regarding the serious allegations against 12 UNRWA staff, his delegation welcomed the swift action taken by the Secretary-General. There must be a thorough and transparent investigation and those found guilty must be punished appropriately. Nevertheless, it was important to contextualize the allegations, which concerned a few individuals out of thousands of UNRWA employees, and ensure that the response was proportionate and measured. The people of Gaza would not survive without sustained humanitarian assistance from UNRWA. Regardless of whether the allegations were true, innocent Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon, Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic should not be punished. His delegation urged Member States that had suspended their contributions to UNRWA to

reconsider. Indonesia was committed to continuing to provide assistance and had sent food and medicine to Gaza. Indonesia would triple its contribution to UNWRA and would be disbursing its 2024 contribution in February.

41. The actions of the occupying Power had turned Gaza into a hell on Earth. The Committee must redouble its efforts to mobilize the international community, with a view to achieving an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, ensuring the delivery of increased humanitarian aid and preventing forced displacement. At the same time, work must begin on the pathway to peace, through an international peace conference, beginning with the immediate full membership of Palestine in the United Nations, with a view to realizing a two-State solution, within a clear time frame.

42. **Ms. Güven** (Türkiye) said that the occupying Power continued to attack the civilian population of Gaza, resulting in further casualties, displacement and destruction. In the West Bank, settler violence had reached record levels. Fears of regional spillover had become a reality, with incidents in the Red Sea, Yemen, Lebanon, Iraq, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan. Since the start of the conflict, her delegation had called for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire, unimpeded humanitarian aid and respect for international law.

43. Over the previous four months, Israel had committed serious crimes. Those responsible must be held accountable in order to restore faith in international law. Her delegation therefore welcomed the application filed by South Africa before the International Court of Justice and the provisional measures indicated by the Court, which should be implemented immediately and in full.

44. With over 2 million people at imminent risk of famine and the health system on the brink of collapse, the number of deaths from starvation and disease could soon equal the number of civilians killed by strikes. UNRWA staff were working tirelessly in ghastly conditions to meet the vital needs of Palestinians. Over 150 UNRWA staff had been killed in Gaza to date. As Chair of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA, Türkiye was concerned by the decision of some Member States to suspend funding to UNRWA, which amounted to collective punishment of the Palestinian people. Her delegation urged those States to reconsider and reverse their decision. It was the joint responsibility of the international community to support UNRWA until a two-State solution was reached, which was the only way to achieve lasting peace and security.

45. **Mr. Peñalver Portal** (Cuba) said that the international community was witnessing the genocide of the Palestinian people. Through its philosophy of dispossession, Israel had brought about a humanitarian catastrophe. His delegation condemned the killing of civilians, in particular women, children and humanitarian workers, the indiscriminate bombings, the destruction of homes, hospitals and civilian infrastructure, and the deprivation of basic services, in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law. Nothing could justify such barbaric acts. His delegation called for an immediate and permanent ceasefire and the delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza without conditions.

46. The forced displacement of Palestinians from their land must be stopped. The actions of Israeli forces in the Occupied West Bank had led to increased repression and killings of Palestinians. Israel must not be allowed to continue operating with impunity, confident that it would not be held accountable for its actions because of the support of the United States of America and other members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). It was unacceptable that the Security Council had failed to uphold its own resolutions intended to put an end to the crimes committed by Israel. The United States was complicit in those crimes because it had repeatedly used its veto power to prevent the Council from taking action. At the nineteenth summit of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, Cuba had proposed that an international protection mission, authorized by the General Assembly, be dispatched to Gaza to guarantee the security of the civilian population and facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

47. His delegation supported the proceedings initiated by South Africa against Israel, which should be understood as an urgent call to stop the horrific crimes, including genocide and apartheid, being committed against the Palestinian people. His delegation also supported the convening of an international peace conference and the admission of the State of Palestine as a full Member of the United Nations. Cuba would continue to support a broad, just and lasting solution to the conflict, on the basis of a two-State solution that would allow the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination in an independent sovereign State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, along pre-1967 lines, and that would guarantee the right of return of refugees.

48. **Mr. Hermida Castillo** (Nicaragua) said that Nicaragua had always supported Palestine. In December 2023, the President of Nicaragua had written to the President of the State of Palestine to express his country's solidarity with the Palestinian people and their just struggle, and a Nicaraguan delegation led by the

Minister for Foreign Affairs had visited Ramallah. In January 2024, a major road in Managua had been renamed Gaza Avenue, while a park had been renamed Palestine Park.

49. Nicaragua, a party to the Genocide Convention, supported the proceedings initiated by South Africa against Israel before the International Court of Justice. With the Palestinian people facing tremendous suffering, the Committee must redouble its efforts. It was time for Palestine to be recognized as a full Member of the United Nations. His delegation supported the convening of an international peace conference.

50. **Mr. Abd Karim** (Malaysia) said that his delegation had full confidence in UNRWA, which was a lifeline for Palestinian refugees. The Agency's work had become even more important since the outbreak of the war in Gaza. Malaysia had pledged \$1 million to UNRWA for the period 2021–2025 and had made an additional contribution of \$2.2 million since the start of the war.

51. It was deeply regrettable that the entire Agency was being penalized because of allegations against a few staff members. An investigation by the Office of Internal Oversight Services was ongoing, and due process must be allowed to take its course. UNRWA must continue to receive the funding it required. Millions of innocent Palestinians depended on UNRWA, and they should not be further victimized and punished. Malaysia supported the State of Palestine in its bid to become a full Member of the United Nations.

52. **Mr. Pérez Ayestarán** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that while his delegation welcomed the provisional measures indicated by the International Court of Justice, it was regrettable that the Court had stopped short of calling for a ceasefire. It would be difficult to implement those measures without a ceasefire. Although the statements made by Israel suggested that it would ignore the measures, his delegation remained hopeful that the international community would have enough influence to promote their implementation.

53. His delegation had full confidence in UNRWA, which continued to provide assistance to Palestine refugees, despite the ongoing conflict and the Agency's challenging financial situation. The Agency's role in Gaza was irreplaceable. Member States should not play politics with UNRWA. The punitive measures taken by certain donors would only prolong the collective punishment of the Palestinian people and put millions of Palestinian lives at risk. All the specialized agencies were in agreement that what Gaza needed was more, not less, humanitarian assistance.

54. Several of the States that had suspended funding for UNRWA were providing Israel with the means to continue perpetrating crimes against the Palestinian people, despite ample evidence that such means were being used to continue the genocide, as demonstrated by the South African legal team at the International Court of Justice. Such hypocrisy and double standards must stop.

55. In order to preserve the two-State solution, the State of Palestine must be admitted as a full Member of the United Nations and an international peace conference should be convened to define specific steps. In addition, with the consent of the State of Palestine, measures could be adopted to put the Palestinian people under international protection, as proposed by Cuba. His delegation supported the establishment of an independent and sovereign State of Palestine, within the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

56. **Mr. Zhuang** Youyi (China) said that the situation in Gaza was a humanitarian disaster, an affront to the human conscience and a violation of international law, for which there was no justification. The international community should make every effort to facilitate a ceasefire in Gaza. Israel must cease its indiscriminate military attacks and the collective punishment of the people of Gaza. The provisional measures indicated by the International Court of Justice must be implemented immediately. All parties should support the work of UNRWA and take measures to ease the humanitarian disaster. Israel should immediately remove the barriers to humanitarian access, open all crossing points and ensure the safe and unhindered access of humanitarian supplies.

57. A broad-based international peace conference should be held to expedite the development of a timetable and a road map for the implementation of the two-State solution. His delegation supported the application of the State of Palestine for full membership of the United Nations. China, which had provided financial and humanitarian aid, fully supported the just cause of the Palestinian people to restore their legitimate national rights and would work to facilitate a ceasefire, ease the humanitarian crisis, implement the two-State solution and realize a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement.

58. **Ms. Persaud** (Guyana) said that her delegation was gravely concerned about the deteriorating situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the disregard for international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Her delegation condemned the ongoing attacks on hospitals, refugee camps and United Nations facilities

and urged Israel to stop killing innocent civilians and to adhere to international law. Indiscriminate bombing had led to widespread death and destruction, with women and children accounting for the majority of fatalities. Survivors were living in inhumane conditions, in desperate need of food, water, shelter and health care.

59. Guyana was committed to defending the rights of the Palestinian people, in particular in the Security Council, and to working towards a ceasefire in Gaza, the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid and the unconditional release of all hostages and detainees. Her delegation would promote the implementation of the legally binding provisional measures indicated by the International Court of Justice and the relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular those adopted since the start of the war in Gaza.

60. Her delegation was deeply concerned about the allegations against a number of UNRWA staff and looked forward to the conclusion of the Organization's investigation and to appropriate action being taken, if necessary. Nevertheless, it was concerning that some Member States had suspended funding for UNRWA because of those allegations, which concerned 12 staff members out of a total workforce of 13,000, and urged those States to reconsider. The continued functioning of UNRWA was critical to the survival of the Palestinian people. Guyana would shortly be disbursing \$150,000 to UNRWA for humanitarian relief in Gaza. The Palestinian question should remain on the international agenda and efforts should be accelerated to secure a comprehensive, just and peaceful solution. The situation in Gaza was an opportunity to advance the two-State solution and the admission of the State of Palestine as a full Member of the United Nations.

61. **Ms. Abdelhady** (State of Palestine) said that her delegation welcomed the provisional measures indicated by the International Court of Justice, which were intended to protect the Palestinian people from acts of genocide, incitement to genocide and further irreparable harm. The measures were binding and must be respected. Continued defiance by Israel, the occupying Power, must be met with consequences. The international community was witnessing war crimes, crimes against humanity and acts of genocide being perpetrated against Palestinians and had an obligation to act. Her delegation urged Member States to support the advisory proceedings, due to begin on 19 February 2024, on the legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, during which the Court would examine the prolonged violation of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and the legality of the Israeli colonial occupation and



apartheid regime. The study commissioned by the Committee on the legality of the Israeli occupation was an important contribution to the legal assessment of the situation.

62. Her delegation was grateful to all UNRWA staff for their continued dedication. It had been heartening to hear expressions of support for UNRWA at a time when some donors had decided to suspend funding owing to allegations against a few staff members. The suspension of funding was inhumane and reckless as it would affect the life-saving humanitarian work done by UNRWA and be disastrous for Palestine refugees, resulting in more hunger, suffering and despair. The independent investigation launched by the Secretary-General was the right way to ensure accountability. Collective punishment could not be justified. Her delegation hoped that those donors would reconsider, and was grateful to all Member States that contributed to UNRWA. The Committee must remain at the forefront of international efforts to achieve a ceasefire, uphold international law and bring an end to the prolonged injustice.

63. **Ms. Rios** (Plurinational State of Bolivia) said that a ceasefire was needed in Gaza to stop the genocide. Not only was the occupying Power bombing and killing Palestinians, but it was also depriving them of food, water and medicine. Those responsible for the genocide must face international justice. Her delegation welcomed the application filed by South Africa before the International Court of Justice and the provisional measures indicated by the Court, and would follow the case closely.

64. Her delegation urged Member States that had suspended their contributions to UNRWA to reconsider. The Palestinian people were already suffering the atrocities of war and must not face further collective punishment.

65. Her delegation supported the admission of the State of Palestine as a full Member of the United Nations and the convening of an international peace conference to bring about lasting peace and stability. The self-determination of the Palestinian people could not wait. Her delegation supported the two-State solution and the establishment of an independent and sovereign State of Palestine on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

66. **Ms. Gunnarsdóttir** (Director, UNRWA Representative Office, New York) said that she was grateful to the members of the Committee for their political and financial support of the Agency.

### **Adoption of the programme of work for 2024 (A/AC.183/2024/L.3)**

67. **The Chair**, introducing the draft programme of work for 2024 (A/AC.183/2024/L.3), said that section I of the document outlined the mandates of the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights, as set out in General Assembly resolutions 77/22 and 77/23, respectively. Section II contained an overview of the activities of the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights, including the mobilization of the diplomatic community, raising awareness of the question of Palestine, cooperation with intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and United Nations system entities, and the capacity-building programme for staff of the Government of the State of Palestine. Section III dealt with the continuing review and assessment of the programme of work.

68. He took it that the Committee wished to adopt the draft programme of work.

69. *It was so decided.*

### **Recent and upcoming Committee activities**

70. **The Chair** said that a number of events had been held in New York and overseas in observance of the 2023 International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. He welcomed the messages of solidarity received from Heads of State and Government.

71. On 23 January 2024, a statement had been delivered on behalf of the Committee at the Security Council's quarterly open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. In the statement, the Committee had called for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, safe and unimpeded access of humanitarian aid, the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages and detainees, and the full adherence by all parties to their obligations under international law and to all relevant United Nations resolutions. The Committee had also called for the convening of an international peace conference and a new negotiating process aimed at resolving the question of Palestine in all its aspects, including the admission of the State of Palestine as a full Member of the United Nations.

72. The Division for Palestinian Rights issued monthly bulletins on action by the United Nations system and intergovernmental organizations relevant to the question of Palestine, weekly newsletters on activities carried out by non-governmental organizations, and annual compilations of United

Nations reports and resolutions on the question of Palestine, which were available on the website of the Committee.

73. On 27 February, the Division for Palestinian Rights would hold its annual briefing session for new delegates on the mandate and work of the Committee. On 13 March, the Committee would hold an event on the margins of the sixty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women. On 3 and 4 April, the Committee would convene an international conference of civil society organizations working on the question of Palestine at the United Nations Office at Geneva. The Bureau would continue its outreach to Member States to advocate a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine.

#### **Other matters**

74. **Mr. Tamburi** (Director, Division for Palestinian Rights) said that the study on the legality of the Israeli occupation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, which had been commissioned by the Committee and prepared by the Irish Centre for Human Rights, was available in English, Arabic and Spanish on the website of the Committee.

*The meeting rose at 12.15 p.m.*