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COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE OF THE INALIENABLE
RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 239th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 4 August 1998 at 10.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. FARHADI (Afghanistan)
(Vice-Chairman)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.50 a.m.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

1. The agenda was adopted.

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN ON THE LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN SEMINAR AND NGO SYMPOSIUM, SANTIAGO, 26 TO 29 MAY 1998, AND THE NORTH AMERICAN NGO SYMPOSIUM ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE, NEW YORK, 15 TO 17 JUNE 1998

2. The CHAIRMAN presented the Chairman's report on two major regional events, the first held in Santiago, Chile in May and the second at the United Nations headquarters in June. The first event was the Latin American and Caribbean Seminar and NGO Symposium. It was particularly gratifying in view of Chile's prominent role in the region and in international bodies, the presence of a large community of Palestinian descent in the country and the Government's support for the people of Palestine, as demonstrated by the recent opening of a consular office in the territory under the Palestinian Authority. The theme of the Seminar and NGO Symposium was "Achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting solution of the question of Palestine - the role of Latin America and the Caribbean", and it was well attended by representatives of the diplomatic corps, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the media and academic institutions, together with numerous special guests from the host country.

3. The current political situation and the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories was reviewed and analysed by several panels. A workshop on "NGO mobilization and cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean in support of a just and comprehensive solution to the question of Palestine" was also featured. The participating NGOs adopted a plan of action and elected a new coordinator. In addition, a regional open-ended NGO coordinating committee on the question of Palestine was established to maintain cooperation with the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights.

4. The second event, the North American NGO Symposium, "Fifty years of dispossession of the Palestinian People", reflected profound concern over the continuing lack of a solution to the Palestinian question. Six workshops were organized to give NGOs the opportunity to make specific proposals for action on the main issues: settlements, closures, East Jerusalem, refugees, mobilization of North American public opinion and the Fourth Geneva Convention.

5. The report of the two events would be issued as publications of the Division for Palestinian Rights and a summary of the proceedings would be included in the Committee's report to the fifty-third General Assembly.

6. The CHAIRMAN said that he took it that the Committee wished to take note of the report by the Chairman.

7. It was so decided.

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS AND THE SITUATION IN THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY, INCLUDING JERUSALEM

8. Mr. AL-KIDWA (Observer for Palestine) said that the adoption of A/RES/52/250 on 7 July on the participation of Palestine in the work of the United Nations was a very important step on the road to attaining full membership in the Organization. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was always ahead of the General Assembly and other United Nations organs in its acceptance of Palestine and it might be in order for the Committee to respond positively to the sense of the resolution by seating Palestine in alphabetical order among its members at the next session.

9. As a follow-up to the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly at the Tenth Emergency Special Session, especially the recommendation to convene a conference on measures to enforce the Fourth Geneva Convention in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, the Government of Switzerland had chaired a closed meeting between representatives of the two sides and of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). As expected, the meeting had not led to any progress because the Israelis rejected the applicability of the Convention. The meeting was part of a package presented by the Swiss Government to both Palestinians and Israelis.

10. Moreover, at the beginning of July, the Swiss Government distributed a note to the High Contracting Parties proposing a meeting of experts in Geneva on 27-29 October 1998 to consider general problems, especially in the occupied territories, and seek solutions. His delegation was trying to deal positively with Swiss efforts whilst upholding the need to implement the General Assembly's recommendations; it was willing to participate in the October meeting, but insisted on the need to convene the previously mentioned conference. The Arab Group had decided to respond collectively by mandating the Chairman of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries to send a note echoing that position and he trusted that the Committee would be ready to pursue the same path. The convening of a conference was of great importance to ensure compliance with the Fourth Geneva Convention as it applied to Occupied Palestinian Territory.

11. Commenting on the Middle East peace process, he referred to Israel's continuous violations of current agreements and the negative reaction of the Israelis to recent proposals by the United States that they withdraw from an additional 13.1 per cent of the West Bank in the second redeployment of the three redeployments agreed upon to be activated during the period of transition. Indeed, Israel had tried to trade off acceptance of certain proposals against cancellation of the third withdrawal; it had also tried to create a new category of Palestinian land that would make Israeli withdrawal more difficult. His delegation felt that the Israeli Government had run out of justifications for its obstructionist tactics and it was increasingly clear that its basic position remained refusal to implement the agreements and unwillingness to accept Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 238 (1973).

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12. Mr. QADRUD-DIN (Department of Public Information) said that, since his last report to the Committee, the Promotion and Public Services Division had organized several activities on the question of Palestine. Two media seminars had been held, the first in February 1998 for the Asian region in New Delhi, India, and the second, in June 1998, in Prague, Czech Republic, for the European region. The meetings were attended by regional journalists and their colleagues from the Palestinian Authority and Israel, as well as by NGOs and local representatives of Member States. Both events were hosted by the respective Governments, which had provided full assistance and excellent facilities.

13. The trainee programme for journalists and broadcasters would be organized again during the fifty-third session of the General Assembly and the Committee would be informed as the programme developed. In 1997 10 trainees had participated in an eight-week session. Lastly, the Division would be issuing the publications representing the outcomes of the seminars.

The meeting rose at 11.30 a.m.