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**THE RIGHT OF PEOPLES TO SELF-DETERMINATION AND ITS APPLICATION TO
PEOPLES UNDER COLONIAL OR ALIEN DOMINATION OR
FOREIGN OCCUPATION**

**QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE OCCUPIED ARAB
TERRITORIES, INCLUDING PALESTINE**

**Written statement* submitted by the Association for World Education,
a non-governmental organization on the Roster**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[9 January 2004]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

**14 years after the proposal at the UNCHR of a future
'United States of Abraham' (1990)**

1. Forms of regional integration are increasingly considered as the principal methodology for general security, development and the safeguard of human rights. Individual, national and regional security should be accompanied by a spirit of mutual acceptance – with economic cooperation and development as a direct by-product.¹

2. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) provides one model for security – oriented integration to which economic, cultural and human rights dimensions now play an increasingly important role. The European Union and the wider Council of Europe, the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), and the Commonwealth countries are a few examples of close relations involving regional integration and the promotion of human rights, even if much still remains to be achieved there and elsewhere. In the aftermath of the Second Gulf War and the creation of a democratic Iraq, it is time to envisage a form of Middle East regional structure.²

3. Fourteen years ago – inspired by Winston Churchill's historic 1946 Zurich speech which envisaged a future "United States of Europe" – a similar Middle East framework using his terms was proposed at the Commission on Human Rights, to be called: "A United States of Abraham". Since then, that vision of regional integration offering security and human rights within a future Israel-Jordan-Palestine grouping – and beyond – has been echoed at the United Nations and in other circles.³ The statement is reproduced here verbatim, with a few later reflections and parallel remarks by leaders of the region that highlight positive trends on that subject.

4. Oral statement by David G. Littman to the UNCHR delivered on 6 March 1990

"A quarter century after Winston Churchill's passing, I am emboldened to conjure up his historic 1946 Zurich speech on Europe. By adapting it – with the essential aid of sustained metaphor – to the Israel-Jordanian-Palestinian predicament. I would hope that his memorable peace-framework, proposed at a tragic period of Europe's history might yet serve, not only as an inspiration, but as a model for those who have no alternative but to find peace. It is essential to find a way to put an end to all practices relating to ethnic exclusiveness or intolerance. What follows is a positive approach.

"I wish to speak today about the tragedy of the Middle East. This noble ancient region is the fountain of the three Abrahamic faiths. It is the spiritual origin of more than half of humanity. If the Middle East were united in the sharing of its common inheritance, there would be no limit to the happiness, to the prosperity and the glory which its tens of millions of people would enjoy. Yet it is within the Middle East that have sprung frightful nationalist and religious quarrels, which have wrecked the peace and marred the prospects of that vast area of the world.

"Yet all the while there is a remedy, which if it were generally and spontaneously adopted by the great majority of people in these lands, would as if by a miracle transform the whole scene, and would in a few years make all of the Middle East, or the greater part of it, free and happy as Switzerland is today. What is this sovereign remedy? It is to create the "Family of Abraham" – or "Family of Ibrahim," dependent on one's pronunciation of that hallowed personage – and to provide it with a structure under which it can dwell in peace, in safety and in freedom. We must build a kind of "United States of Abraham".

The process is simple. All that is needed is the resolve of millions of men and women to do right instead of wrong and to gain as their reward blessing instead of cursing.

“And why should a future United States of the Middle East not take its rightful place with other great groupings and help to shape the onward destinies of man? In order that this should be accomplished, there must be an act of faith in which millions of men and women, speaking their diverse languages, must consciously take part. With regard to the past, there must be what that great nineteenth century British statesman William Gladstone called: “A blessed act of oblivion.” All must turn their backs upon the horrors of the past. All must look to the future. One cannot afford to drag forward across the years that are to come the hatreds and revenges which have sprung from all the various injuries of the past.

“If the Middle East is to be saved from infinite misery, and indeed from final doom, there must be this act of faith in the concept of a “Family of Abraham” and this act of oblivion against all the crimes and follies of the past.

“Can these peoples of the Middle East rise to the height of these resolves of the soul and of the instincts of the spirit of man? If they can, the wrongs and injuries which have been inflicted will have been washed away on all sides by the miseries which have been endured. Is there any need for further floods of agony? Is the only lesson of history to be that mankind is unteachable? Let there be justice, mercy and freedom. The people have only to will it and all will achieve their hearts’ desire.

“I am now going to say something that will astonish you. The first step in the creation of the Family of Abraham – or Ibrahim – must be a partnership between Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians within that geographical area designated as ‘Palestine’ in the original 1921 Mandate of the League of Nations. The structure of the “United States of Abraham,” if well and truly built, will be such as to make the material strength of a single State less important. Small nations will count as much as large ones and gain their honour by their contribution to the common cause. The ancient Peoples, Nations and modern States of the Middle East, freely joined together for mutual convenience in a federal – or other – system, might eventually take their individual places within this unifying concept, or condominium. I shall not try to make a detailed programme for tens of millions of peoples who want to be happy and free, prosperous and safe. If this is their wish, if this is the wish of so many peoples living in so many lands – comprising the very cradle of the most ancient civilizations of the Near East – they have only to say so, and means can certainly be found, and machinery erected, to carry that wish to full fruition. Time may be short. At present there is a breathing-space. The cannons have ceased firing. There is a lull in the fighting; but the dangers have not stopped. If there is to be a United States of Abraham – or whatever name it may take – work on this concept must begin now.

“I must now sum up. Under and within the world concept of the United Nations Organisation, one must create the Family of the Middle East in a regional structure called, it may be, the United States of Abraham, and the first practical step would be to form a Council of Abraham. If at first all the Peoples, Nations and States of the Middle East are not willing or able to join the Union, one must nevertheless proceed to assemble and combine those who will and those who can. The salvation of all the peoples in the Middle East from war or servitude must be established on solid foundations. In all this urgent work, Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians must take the lead together. The United Nations Organisation, the Twelve-Member States of the European Community, America and, I trust, Soviet Russia – for then indeed all would be well – must be the sponsors of the new

Community and must champion its right to live and shine. Therefore, I say to you: Let Abraham, let Ibrahim arise!

“Winston Churchill’s vision of Europe has taken nearly half a century to become reality. May Arab and Israeli political leaders and intellectuals – and also the representatives of all the region’s minorities – act with determination, so that peace and reconciliation will come at last to the Middle East, in an upsurge of enthusiasm. If this should be the peoples’ desire, surely wise leaders would wish to achieve, within the next decade, genuine peace and reconciliation (Sohl, in Arabic; Shalom, in Hebrew). Was it not written in the prophetic biblical Book of Joel? (2:28): ‘Your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions.’ May the dialogue begin now, perhaps even here at this Commission.”⁴

5. The above 6 March 1990 statement was left by David Littman with Mr Shimon Peres – then in opposition – in his Tel Aviv office (early June 1990). It was published verbatim on 24 December 1990 by the Palestinian Jerusalem weekly, Al-Fajr (“U.S. of Abraham ... Ibrahim”), which printed a second long follow-up ‘opinion’ on 31 May 1993: “A Time to Every Purpose Under Heaven: The Peace Process and New Forms of Regional Integration,” signed jointly by David Littman and René Wadlow – two months before the Oslo Accords was announced and four months before the Declaration of Principles was signed in Washington in September 1993 between Israel’s Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat.⁵

6. In an interview published in Le Monde (2 September 1992), King Hassan II of Morocco spoke about “*that idea for an Israeli-Palestinian-Jordanian Confederation and its positive aspects for peace in that region of the world [and of] the great dream of a multireligious and multiracial peace, which would be an extraordinary thing for the sons of Abraham.*”

7. On 22 September 1992, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin told the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defence Commission: “*I place great importance on the transitory period and on the intermediate agreements with the Palestinians. But I do not exclude the possibility of a union with them which would guarantee Israel’s security and its right to develop within the framework of a confederation or a federation between us, the Palestinians and Jordan.*” (Jerusalem Post, 23 September 1992).

8. In June 1993 – before the Oslo Accords – Shimon Peres, who had just become Foreign Minister, declared: “*I suggest the establishment of an Israeli-Palestinian-Jordanian Confederation.*” (Haaretz, 24 June 1993).

9. And on 25 July 1994, King Hussein of Jordan declared on the White House lawn: “*For many, many years and with every prayer I have asked God Almighty to help me be a part of forging peace between the children of Abraham.*” Indeed, on signing the Israel-Jordan peace treaty three months later, he stressed: “*This is an honourable peace, a balanced peace, a peace that will last because from the first instance it was our determination to make it so.*” To which Prime Minister Rabin replied: “*I believe this is the most beautiful act, to end not only the state of war, but to establish the structure of peace, to build the relations of peace.*”

10. A Palestinian State is now on the horizon and a new spirit of mutual acceptance will flourish in the region when individual security and dignity for all will become rooted in law. This can happen only when a general process of democratisation and respect for human rights – and also ethnic and religious minorities – becomes the natural bedrock of civil society in all the

11. countries of the Middle East - what is rightly called “*taking the road to democracy*”.

12. As we have affirmed since 1993, just as European integration began with the modest step of the Coal and Steel Community, so water management in the Middle East today could set the stage for more highly developed forms of cooperation and integration. One cannot talk about the crucial water issue from a narrow perspective or in a nationalist context – only scientifically.

13. Regional security will require a more balanced relationship between the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon, aligned to a broad economic and social integration between the Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Israel, and a future Palestine. Although such a vision of the future has still not yet been accepted by the parties, the time is ripe for leadership and concerted action, whatever the plan chosen to achieve this goal. Most historical progress is achieved by leaders who can discern the main currents of their time and give a new sense of direction and ascent to communities and peoples alike. A new spirit of cooperation may be just beyond the current clouds of contention – if democratisation starts to spread throughout the Middle East. As Churchill stated for Europe: “*All must look to the future ... all that is needed is the resolve of millions men and women...*”

Notes

¹ See Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, Regions and Powers : The Structure of International Security (Cambridge :Cambridge University Press, 564 pp.), in particular, the section on the Middle East, pp. 185-215.

² For the security and conflict resolution structures and practice of the OSCE, see Maria Raquel Freire, Conflict and Security in the Former Soviet Union: The Role of the OSCE (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003, 280 pp.

³ This proposal, with biographical references, was published in the September 1993 issue of the Journal of the International Institute for Peace (Vienna) “The Middle East Peace Process and New Forms of Regional Integration” by David Littman and René Wadlow. See also “The United States of Abraham” by British historian Sir Martin Gilbert (*Jewish Chronicle*, London, 31 December 1993, p. 20); he refers to both the 6 March 1990 UN statement – “*a year and a half before the Madrid Conference*” – and the article published in the Palestinian East Jerusalem weekly, Al-Fajr. On 15 November 1994, René Wadlow and David Littman made an official appeal to UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to commemorate an “International Day of Reconciliation between the Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian Peoples” (AFP, 15 Nov. 1994). On 23 Nov. 1994, David Littman delivered a lecture to a crowded room at the University of Lund (Sweden) on “The United States of Abraham.”

⁴ The full statement – including some preceding passages on another theme– was published in Human Rights and Human Wrongs N° 8 (World Union for Progressive Judaism: Geneva, 1990), pp. 36-39. It was recorded at the UNCHR; a much abridged summary record omitted mention of Winston Churchill. (E/CN.4/1990/SR.52).

⁵ This documentation was widely circulated in UN, Israeli and Palestinian circles. Among the correspondence is one of several letters from Eitan Haber, Israel Advisor to the Prime Minister who wrote to David Littman on 5 Nov. 1992: “*I am writing on behalf of the Prime Minister, Mr. Yitzhak Rabin, to thank you for your fax dated September 25 and your warm wishes for the New Year. As you know, peace negotiations are currently taking place, and we are hopeful that an agreement will be reached to the satisfaction of all citizens of this region, which will enable Jews and Arabs to live in peace and security. We also have for acknowledgment copy of your release dated 25 August.*” (The conclusion of Prime Minister Rabin’s historic speech on the White House lawn is from the same passage in Ecclesiastes 3:1 as in the title published in the Al-Fajr weekly of 31 May 1993: “*To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.*”) On 17 August 1993 – before the White House ceremony – Foreign Minister Shimon Peres wrote to Mr. Littman personally: “*Thanks for your fax dated June 30. I have read with great interest the proposal and article which you sent me earlier. I appreciate your words of support and your offer of assistance on behalf of your organization, regarding relevant documentation.. Best wishes. Sincerely, Shimon Peres.*”