



General Assembly    Security Council

Distr.  
GENERAL

A/39/231\*  
S/16527\*  
30 May 1984

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
Thirty-ninth session  
Item 33 of the preliminary list\*\*  
QUESTION OF PALESTINE

SECURITY COUNCIL  
Thirty-ninth year

Letter dated 2 May 1984 from the Permanent Representative of Malta  
to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to refer to your letter of 9 March 1984 on the question of convening an international peace conference on the Middle East and to thank you for the process of consultations that you have thereby initiated in response to General Assembly resolution 38/58 C.

My Government believes that the central objective of this proposed conference should be directed towards a peaceful and fair solution to the present unacceptable plight of the homeless Palestinian people.

In an ideal world, they should never have been subjected to the tribulations that they have had to undergo - but they have.

In a less than ideal world, the problem caused by the displacement of the Palestinian people should have been settled by now - but it has not.

In the real, contemporary world, the United Nations inherited the problem of the Palestinian people practically on the day the Organization was established; it is only proper that a peaceful resolution should be promoted under the auspices and encouragement of the United Nations.

In its near 40-year history, the Organization mainly has had to respond post facto to the events on the spot, in an attempt to contain their adverse effects.

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\* Reissued for technical reasons.

\*\* A/39/50.

The historical record is clear. The situation has always been grave, tense and violent, constantly deteriorating, with no equitable solution in sight under present militaristic methods and circumstances. It has had world-wide military, economic and political repercussions which have been calamitous. To allow the situation to fester unresolved is to court catastrophe.

The time is overdue for a change in attitude and in action. A significant process in this direction was initiated by the United Nations when, for the first time, in 1975, the Palestinian question was treated as a political issue. After a whole year of intense concentration, recommendations were drawn up in 1976 by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, by consensus and free from the pressure of immediate events, for a peaceful and comprehensive solution, based on an international approach guaranteed, if necessary, by the Security Council. The recommendations fully respected all previous decisions taken by the Council and the General Assembly.

Over the past several years, these recommendations have steadily gained international support. Abundant opportunity has been provided to all States to amplify or to amend the recommendations. They were in fact further refined, to take into account all other peace initiatives so far proposed on the Middle East, at the International Conference on the Question of Palestine held last year at Geneva. There the declaration of principles was adopted by acclamation by all participants. This could be refined and updated even further at the proposed conference.

It is anomalous that, in this day and age, four million Palestinians are still denied the opportunity to exercise freely their right to self-determination. It is unthinkable that all the efforts, both inside and outside the United Nations, should be frittered away by one more lost opportunity. These efforts should therefore be consolidated in one major, concerted approach.

Striving to bring peace and co-operation to the entire Mediterranean region, the Malta Government, for all these reasons, favours the holding of the Conference and has worked assiduously for its peaceful objectives. It believes that the current exchanges of views among concerned States are already helpful in identifying the positions of the protagonists, and these efforts should consequently be pursued until the right time, correct modalities and positive climate for the Conference are determined.

The Malta Government has a vested interest in a successful outcome, and is consequently willing to continue to provide, in practical terms, a modest but maximum contribution to that end. All other countries are urged to do the same.

The potential benefits of such an approach cannot be over-emphasized. In particular, the present sense of drift and despair in the Middle East could be transformed into an energetic momentum for a concerted search for peace. That in itself, and by itself, would be a significant development on the fortieth anniversary of the United Nations.

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But, more important, if, as we hope, the Conference succeeds and, by universal agreement, the rights of the Palestinian people are attained in a practical way, and the rights to security of all States in the Middle East are guaranteed, then one of the most dangerous areas of tension in the world would become transformed into a peaceful region for the primary benefit of the countries concerned, and for peace throughout the world.

Mention is often made, and continues to be made, of the need for direct negotiations among the parties concerned. Malta has always shared this conviction, but, on the other hand, points out that practical difficulties have stood in the way of such negotiations for several years; these difficulties still remain, and in fact become progressively more complicated. There is therefore no reason to believe that direct negotiations are likely to commence spontaneously in the foreseeable future.

The process of consultations already under way would therefore serve to stimulate interest, encourage contacts and promote a comprehensive dialogue between the parties directly concerned, aided and enhanced by the wider membership of the Security Council, where all the parties can be heard.

The contacts would thus have been initiated in a neutral but practical way. Malta believes participation in the actual Conference should initially be limited, for practical reasons, to those directly concerned, including all the permanent members of the Security Council. The outcome of the Conference should however, subsequently, be endorsed unanimously by the international community.

Another paramount factor to be taken into account is that the outcome of such an international conference could hardly be challenged subsequently as unrepresentative, and its recommendations, based on the internationally recognized principles that have already been identified to apply to the Palestinian dimension within the Middle-East complex, would therefore most likely be honoured and thus prevail, backed if necessary by guarantees provided by the Security Council.

I have the honour to request the circulation of this letter as a document of the General Assembly, under item 33 of the preliminary list, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) V. J. GAUCI  
Ambassador  
Permanent Representative of Malta  
to the United Nations

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