



General Assembly

Sixty-fourth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
7 December 2009

Original: English

Second Committee

Summary record of the 22nd meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 27 October 2009, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. Mićić (Vice-Chairperson) (Serbia)

Later: Mr. Mohamed Cherif Diallo (Vice-Chairperson). (Guinea)

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09-57798 (E)



In the absence of Mr. Park In-kook (Republic of Korea), Mr. Mičić (Serbia), Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 40: Permanent sovereignty of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan over their natural resources (A/64/77-E/2009/13)

1. **Mr. Nour** (Regional Commissions New York Office), introducing the note by the Secretary-General on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan, said that the Israeli mobility restrictions and closure system remained a primary cause of poverty and humanitarian crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, restricting Palestinian access to natural resources, including land, health and education services, employment markets and social and religious networks. The Israeli military operation in the Gaza Strip, begun on 27 December 2008, had further exacerbated the situation.

2. In his message in March 2009 to the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian people, the Secretary-General had noted that the situation at the crossings was intolerable, and that Israel must take meaningful steps to ease the closure, without which Palestinian economic recovery could not take place. Only a permanent negotiated political settlement that ended the occupation could provide a sustainable solution to the economic and humanitarian problems of the Palestinian people and lasting security for Israel.

3. **Mr. Hijazi** (Observer for Palestine) said that given the importance of the agenda item, it would have been desirable for the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) to introduce the report. The report was important as a reference when the Palestinians requested reparations. It should therefore be accurate in recording aggression against the occupied territories.

4. Certain approaches had been taken which should be avoided in future. In the report, Israeli aggression was spoken of in general terms, without reference to

specific actions, such as the use of white phosphorus, flash bombs and tungsten, which were prohibited under international law, as well as the use of excessive force and artillery. The emphasis was exclusively on the actions of the Palestinian side in the military action, in an apparent attempt to be balanced in a situation which was not characterized by balance, involving a people under occupation and an occupying force which was totally militarized and highly equipped.

5. Moreover, the report mentioned Palestinian victims from the previous year only, while referring to Israeli victims from the previous eight years. In eight years, 150 Israelis had been killed, while during the same period, some 3,500 Palestinians had been killed, of whom 24 per cent had been children, 5 per cent women and 11 per cent disabled, and over the same period more than 600 Palestinians had been arrested each month.

6. The report had also failed to mention the devastating environmental consequences of the occupation, although previous reports had done so. It was important to indicate the total impact of Israeli aggression in order to provide a full picture.

7. **Mr. Ali** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that he shared the concerns expressed by the Observer for Palestine; the Under-Secretary-General and the Executive Secretary of ESCWA should have introduced the report, in view of its importance, as had been the practice before 2008. Improvements in the report to reflect more accurately the suffering of the Palestinians and Syrians in the occupied lands would be desirable, and he hoped that the language would be improved in future, as in certain paragraphs it equated the killers with the victims and did not convey the impact of the Israeli aggression.

8. He requested clarification as to why the conclusions of the report did not include recommendations which could be implemented and which would contribute to the implementation of the General Assembly resolutions usually adopted in the framework of the issue in question.

9. **Mr. Nour** (Regional Commissions New York Office) said that there had been no request to provide recommendations. The desirability of doing so would be conveyed to the secretariat of ESCWA.

10. **The Chairperson** invited the Committee to engage in a general discussion on the item.

11. **Mr. Daoud** (Sudan), speaking on behalf of the Group of Arab States, said that civilians continued to suffer in the occupied territories as a result of Israel's policies and practices, which were in flagrant violation of all international norms. In December 2008 and January 2009, Israel had undertaken military aggression lasting 22 days, during intensive military operations by air and by sea had led to the death of 1,440 Palestinians, including 431 children. Over 5,000 Palestinians had been injured, and over 3,000 houses had been destroyed. Fifty-two UNRWA installations had been targeted. The main office of UNRWA, where thousands of Palestinians had taken refuge, had been bombarded with white phosphorus.

12. The aggression in Gaza had affected telecommunications and water supply infrastructure. The Israeli closures were the main reason for poverty and the escalation of the humanitarian situation which prevented Palestinians from enjoying their natural resources, social services, employment and access to markets. Israel had imposed restrictions on the movements of Palestinians and the passage of commercial goods, leading to a reduction in access to necessities such as water and electricity, and had dumped all kinds of waste, including nuclear waste, in Palestinian and Syrian territory, damaging water and land and endangering people's health.

13. Israel had illegally confiscated 38 per cent of the land in the West Bank to build settlements and roads. Land in Jerusalem had also been confiscated, and houses had been destroyed. There had been digging and work under holy sites. Despite Security Council resolution 497 (1981) and General Assembly resolution 63/31, illegal settlements were still being built in the Syrian Golan on agricultural land belonging to Syrians. The construction of the wall violated international law, but it was continuing. Its purpose was to deprive the Palestinians of sovereignty over their resources and allow Israel to benefit from them. The ESCWA report indicated that water was being taken from under Palestinian territory and provided to Israeli towns, with the remainder being sold to Palestinians. Syrian farmers could not get the water they needed for irrigation. Water was sold to them at exorbitant prices. Land was confiscated and trees were uprooted. There was discrimination against Syrians in the issuance of building permits.

14. The resulting economic situation, unemployment and displacement of families were devastating. People

in the occupied Palestinian territories were deprived of their basic rights owing to Israeli aggression and violence. The international community must compel Israel to respect its obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law.

15. **Mr. Hijazi** (Observer for Palestine) said that in recent years, Israeli practices targeting Palestinian lives and livelihoods had intensified. However, the Palestinians had defied all attempts aimed at forcing them to leave their ancestral homeland. They would remain and would protect the groves of olive trees from attempts to cut them down.

16. For four decades, the Palestinian people had watched helplessly and with increasing desperation as the Israeli authorities illegally confiscated, exploited and degraded their natural resources, threatening their survival and the viability of their legitimate aspirations for self-determination. Israeli practices and policies had contributed directly to desertification and water deprivation in Palestine. Illegal Israeli settlers had unfettered access to Palestinian water, consuming up to 300 litres a day, while Palestinians had less than the minimum standard set by the World Health Organization, receiving barely 70 litres of water a day, and, in some cases, 20 litres a day. Israel currently exploited 90 per cent of the water resources shared with Palestine, allotting a mere 10 per cent for the entire Palestinian population. Some 9,000 illegal Israeli settlers in the Jordan Valley consumed as much water as one third of the entire Palestinian West Bank population of 2.5 million. Moreover, only 10 per cent of Gaza's water met international safety standards.

17. The occupying Power was also stealing land from Palestinians. Eleven Israeli corporations were illegally operating quarries in the West Bank, using 75 per cent of the output for illegal construction activities and transferring natural resources from the West Bank to Israel.

18. Around 120 illegal settlements in the West Bank deprived Palestinians of their land, crops and livelihood. There were also 17 settlements around and within the Old City of occupied East Jerusalem, connected by exclusive settler roads. The wall, which when finished would be 705 kilometres long, was 58 per cent complete. Its construction was in violation of a ruling by the International Court of Justice. Eighty-five per cent of the wall's route was deep in the West Bank, taking over at least 10 per cent of the total

area of the occupied territory and its most important water resources. There was also an intricate and multilayered system of checkpoints. There were hundreds of roadblocks. Farmers had no access their land, which meant that they had no crops and no income and were destitute. Palestinians were cut off from primary health care and education, which led, inter alia, to high infant mortality rates. Denial of access to agricultural land had led to a loss of 39 million dollars, or roughly 8 per cent of Palestinian agricultural output. There was a deliberate policy to build wealth at the expense of an entire people through the illegal use of their natural resources.

19. The illegal exploitation of Palestinian natural resources had been environmentally devastating. In the settlements, dozens of chemical plants operated unchecked, not even adhering to Israeli environmental rules. They dumped untreated waste and chemical by-products onto Palestinian land, polluting streams and wells, devastating agricultural fields and affecting the health of Palestinians living in the area.

20. The only option was to establish a sovereign and viable Palestinian State. That was the only way to achieve peace in the region and free the land from the era's last occupying power.

21. **Mr. Al-Fayez** (Saudi Arabia) said that the continuation of the Israeli occupation meant that there were multiple foci of violence in the region, because of the suffering of the Palestinian people and the despair resulting from arbitrary detention, excessive force, the demolition of homes, severe curfews and the closure policy. The closure policy restricted Palestinian access to health services, education, employment, markets and natural resources. The economic blockade imposed by Israel and the additional restrictions on the exchange of goods and on travel had also increased Palestinian suffering. Such measures obstructed and halted the operations of agencies attempting to deliver humanitarian aid in Gaza. Israeli settlements continued to expand, and new ones were being created, leading to land confiscation, the depletion of water resources and pollution.

22. The only solution was to achieve Arab-Israeli peace and pressure the Israeli side to comply with international resolutions. In terms of its impact on the rest of the region, there was no other crisis like the Arab-Israeli one. If no comprehensive and just solution was found, the Palestinians' suffering would increase.

23. Arabs were committed to a just and comprehensive peace and awaited a serious Israeli commitment. The cessation of all settlement activities was urgent, for settlement activities rendered negotiations meaningless. It did not make sense to impose terms and conditions on the Palestinian people while making concessions to the Israeli occupation authorities.

24. Previous efforts had focused on partial and limited steps or unilateral measures. There had been an overemphasis on procedural issues. A lack of specific, time-bound steps had meant that the previous approach by the Quartet had been lacking in results. The absence of unaligned observers to engage in monitoring and to follow up on the parties' obligations had also been a shortcoming.

25. The Arab Peace Initiative was a unique and historic opportunity to resume the peace process and achieve success. All Arab countries had pledged to end the conflict and accede to a permanent peace agreement on the basis of an Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied since 1967. Arabs had also committed to a mutual, agreed solution to the problem of refugees. Unfortunately, the response from Israel had been rejection, disruption, manipulation and procrastination. It continued to humiliate the Palestinian people daily, building walls, settlements and bypass roads in order to create new facts on the ground. The window of opportunity for achieving a just and comprehensive peace existed, if each party would assume its responsibilities.

26. **Mr. Kleib** (Indonesia) said that the continued Israeli occupation of Palestine and other Arab territories had severe socio-economic consequences for the living conditions of the Palestinian people and the Arab population in the occupied lands, limiting their prospects for development. Illegal settlements and restrictions on the rights of the Palestinian people and the population of the occupied Syrian Golan also denied them access to their natural resources. In addition, there was widespread poverty and unemployment in the affected areas.

27. Obstacles to improving the economic lot of the Palestinian people had been raised in the Economic and Social Council, the General Assembly and even the Security Council. Given that the situation was unchanged, there would probably be further deterioration. The Palestinian people were denied

access to their resources. Mobility restrictions and closure policies had affected them economically and socially, making access to humanitarian assistance difficult.

28. The greatest challenge was the unending growth in settlements, which was aimed at altering the demographic composition, physical character and status of the Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. The settlements were a blatant violation of international law and the greatest obstacle to the establishment of a physically viable, sovereign and independent Palestinian State, and thus to the achievement of peace.

29. The humanitarian situation in the occupied territories was in urgent need of remedial action, particularly in the light of the burden imposed on Palestinian women and children, which must not be allowed to continue. In that regard, Indonesia welcomed the decision by the United Nations to halt and reverse the decline in humanitarian conditions affecting the Palestinian people and the people in the occupied Syrian Golan. It was not only short-term relief that was needed, but also a long-term strategy to improve conditions. The occupation must end.

30. A viable Palestinian State would require continued preparation and planning. In that context, Indonesia, in collaboration with South Africa, had hosted the Ministerial Conference on Capacity-Building for Palestine in Jakarta in 2008. That initiative had aimed to serve as a catalyst to the peace process and a conduit for all parties wishing to contribute to peace and progress in Palestine and the rest of the Middle East. The conference had resulted in a list of commitments, including training assistance for as many as 10,000 Palestinians in such fields as law enforcement and administrative reform. Indonesia was fully committed to training Palestinians over a five-year period.

31. That commitment was not only an expression of faith in the future of the Palestinian people, but also of the firm belief in the need for the early establishment of a Palestinian State with full control of its natural resources and a viable economy. His delegation hoped that the Palestinian people and those living in the occupied Syrian Golan would soon enjoy the prosperity offered by globalization. It would be a tragedy for the Palestinians, the Israelis and other nations in the

region, as well as all humankind, if peace in the region was persistently rejected.

32. **Mr. Lakhhal** (Tunisia) said that most reports and studies carried out by the specialized agencies of the United Nations had clearly established that the Palestinian economy was facing huge challenges. One of the main challenges was the array of constraints on population movement. There were 262 barriers and checkpoints in the West Bank.

33. The ESCWA report underscored the drop in gross national product (GNP) and the increase in the inflation rate, which had doubled between the summer of 2007 and 2008. That had led to 40 per cent unemployment in Gaza, as against 19 per cent in the Golan Heights, compared with 30 and 18 per cent, respectively, in 2007. In Gaza, 80 per cent of families lived below the poverty line, and in the West Bank, that figure was 47 per cent. Since the military action in late 2008 and early 2009, the situation in the Gaza Strip had worsened. Large numbers of houses and institutions had been devastated, and there had been many deaths, as well as increased constraints on population movements.

34. Responsibility lay with the international community. It was time to look again at the reconstruction plans and, in particular, at the issue of support for the emergency situation budget for 2009. A stop must be put to the increase in settlements. To pave the way for an independent Palestine, a situation must be created in Palestine whereby the Palestinians were no longer dependent on international aid. Any Israeli initiative to bring about economic peace should not be a way of bypassing normalization. A Palestinian State should be created, and the Palestinians should be a key player in the preparation of such an outcome.

35. **Mr. Shawabkah** (Jordan) said that the continued construction of the wall by Israel was resulting in the annexation of large areas of Palestinian lands. The settlements were being expanded through land confiscation. The wall had weakened the infrastructure of the Palestinian people and prevented them from creating a stable economy. The closure policy had destroyed the economy and productivity of the Palestinians, prevented freedom of movement and increased unemployment. It had grave repercussions in the agricultural, economic and social spheres.

36. The settlement policy reduced the chances of peace in the region. Israel continued to confiscate

Palestinian lands in East Jerusalem, destroy agricultural areas and expand already established settlements. Such activities were harmful to the environment because most settlements let untreated wastewater run off onto Palestinian lands. It then penetrated the soil, entered the groundwater and contaminated many water sources.

37. Spiralling unemployment had worsened poverty acutely and prompted Palestinians to sell assets and possessions. It was a grave threat to Palestinian human capital. The humanitarian situation would have dangerous consequences as well.

38. He called upon Israel to halt those policies which worsened the humanitarian situation of the Palestinians. The international community should shoulder its responsibilities in regard to the living conditions of the Palestinians and continue to support the United Nations institutions that worked in the occupied territories to reduce economic and social difficulties.

39. **Ms. Loza** (Nicaragua) said that the more than 60 years of Palestinian resistance, two years of a criminal economic blockade and Israel's recent military invasion had turned the Gaza Strip into a concentration camp. The Government of Israel had impeded humanitarian assistance and water supply to the Palestinian people, and strangled the economy, particularly in the Gaza Strip, through its illegal occupation of land and natural resources, denial of the right to free movement, and destruction of infrastructure. Furthermore, the wall being constructed by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory was a mass crime against innocent people.

40. The people in the Gaza Strip could not devote themselves fully to their economic and social development when their prime concern was to survive the shelling by the Israeli army. There was no point in discussing development and economic growth when they had no control over their land, water or other natural resources, and were denied access to their basic rights to health, education and water.

41. Nicaragua, which had itself experienced foreign occupation and aggression at various times in its history, reaffirmed the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people and its resistance to the Israeli occupation until it could have an independent, sovereign homeland with its own Government and territory, and clearly defined borders.

42. The first step towards achieving the sustainable economic development of the Palestinian people was to ensure compliance with the resolutions that condemned Israel and obliged it to recognize the self-determination and sovereignty of Palestine. Nicaragua supported the Palestinian nation and people and condemned the State of Israel's violation of international law and United Nations resolutions, causing the deaths of thousands of Palestinian children and making terrorism part of the daily lives of the Palestinian people.

43. **Mr. Al Dhanhani** (United Arab Emirates) said that the economic and social conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories had deteriorated as a result of the savage military operations launched by the Israeli occupying forces against civilians in Gaza. Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands there and in the West Bank since 1967 and its policies of oppression, closure and siege imposed on the Arab population had caused a sharp rise in poverty, and many serious health risks. Israel continued its unlawful expansionist and de facto policies in spite of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions demanding that it demolish the separation wall and stop the construction of illegal settlements on the occupied Palestinian territories. Its actions violated international law, the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and relevant international resolutions.

44. The United Arab Emirates reaffirmed its solidarity with the Palestinian people and Government, and supported their inalienable rights to their natural resources and self-determination and the establishment of an independent State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. It also supported Syria's right to recover the occupied Golan. The international community must take the necessary measures to compel Israel to immediately stop its hostilities, lift its siege of the Arab populations and withdraw fully from all the occupied Arab territories in Palestine, the Syrian Golan Heights and the rest of southern Lebanese land in accordance with the principle of land for peace, relevant international resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, and compel it to stop building settlements and the wall, demolish what it had already built and halt its actions against holy places in Jerusalem.

45. The recommendations in the report of the United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict (A/HRC/12/48) and other relevant international reports must be implemented, and the principles of

international human law and international justice applied to those responsible for the war crimes committed against civilians in Gaza. The international community and the relevant financial institutions must provide the necessary assistance to the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian people to enable them to meet their basic living needs and rebuild their economic and social institutions which had been destroyed by the Israeli military, until a lasting, just and comprehensive settlement was reached.

46. **Mr. Ali** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the facts and numbers in the ESCWA reports submitted to the Committee over the years were proof of the continued deterioration of the situation of the Palestinian people and the Syrians suffering under the Israeli occupation since 1967. The reports showed that Israel continued to violate General Assembly resolution 63/201 (2008). The report under consideration shed light on aspects of the unbearable economic and social suffering of the Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory and the Syrians in the occupied Syrian Golan resulting from the practices and policies of the Israeli occupation authorities, and reflected the hegemony of the Israeli occupation and Israel's non-respect of international law and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. The Israeli military leaders who committed war crimes and crimes against humanity and practiced collective punishment of the Palestinian people, as reflected in the report, must be held accountable and immediately brought to justice. Israel's war against the defenceless and besieged Palestinian people in Gaza Strip in December 2008 was a war crime and a crime against humanity and involved serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law, according to the report of the United Nations Fact Finding Mission.

47. Israel had been applying its rules and laws in the Syrian Golan, in violation of Security Council resolution 497 (1981), which declared the Israeli decision to annex the occupied Syrian Golan as null and void and without international legal effect. Yet as various examples in the ESCWA report showed, Israel continued to carry out its policies and practices of strangulation against the Syrians in the occupied Golan, depriving them of their rights under international rules and laws; its actions included the building and expansion of settlements in villages and agricultural lands, the ongoing threat of landmines and minefields, and the imposition of Israeli nationality through illegal and inhuman practices, thus preventing

Syrians in the occupied Golan from access to job opportunities and preventing them from keeping their Syrian Arab nationality.

48. The objections some countries made with regard to the Report of the United Nations Fact Finding Mission reflected a double standard; such reports were important even if, for reasons of disequilibrium in political power, the United Nations was unable to implement its resolutions on the Israeli occupation of Arab territories. Those countries still had a legal and moral responsibility vis-à-vis the people under foreign occupation. The United Nations and its Member States must assume their responsibilities and take all the necessary measures to ensure that Israel implemented the relevant United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), put an end to its heinous occupation of the Arab territories, and compensated the Palestinian and Syrian peoples for the damages sustained as a result of decades of occupation and exploitation of their natural resources.

49. **Mr. Resnick** (Israel) said that the agenda item under consideration, the only one on the Committee's programme of work addressing a particular country and group, bore no relation to the important matters forming the Committee's substantive agenda, and it was regrettable that some delegations had used the Committee as a forum for irresponsible slander and false accusations and claims. Israel and the Palestinians, as neighbours, shared common interests in the use and safeguarding of natural resources in the region, and worked in close coordination and cooperation, as illustrated by the bilateral cooperation initiated under the Oslo Accords of 1993 and the numerous agreements Israel and the Palestinian Authority had reached on Israel's conferring jurisdiction over many natural resources to the Palestinians. It was regrettable that the debate had made no mention of that. Numerous joint Israeli-Palestinian committees regularly convened, including the Joint Water Committee, which had held several meetings in 2008 and had met three times in 2009. Those meetings on water management had produced such achievements as the establishment of a rapid clearance mechanism for humanitarian projects and approval for numerous sewage treatment plants throughout the West Bank. Israeli-Palestinian cooperation included coordination on the establishment of energy infrastructure and joint agricultural projects

led by an Israeli international development organization. Therefore, the impressions conveyed in the Committee's current deliberations on Israel's conduct with regard to natural resources were nothing more than a thinly veiled political diatribe against Israel rather than a true reflection of the positive developments on the ground. The Committee's continuous inclusion in its agenda of an item which singled out one country, Israel, for discriminatory treatment did a disservice to the many issues genuinely worthy of its attention, and was a disservice to the cause of peace. He hoped that such distortion of information and manipulation of the agenda for political motives would cease.

50. **Mr. Taguri** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that the ESCWA report under consideration showed no signs of a change in Israel's attitude vis-à-vis Palestinians; it only continued with its policies of killing, its blockade and its terrorist acts, and continued to disregard international rules and regulations. Israel's disregard of General Assembly resolution 63/201 was evident from the subsequent aggressive attack it had launched against Gaza, involving the use of internationally prohibited weapons, which had left more than a thousand dead, including children, elderly and women, and destroyed homes and power and communications infrastructure. The Israeli occupying forces continued to arrest and imprison Palestinians. As the report indicated, Israel continued to exploit natural resources, confiscate Palestinian lands and establish settlements, uprooted their trees and prevented them from using their water. It continued to construct its wall in the occupied Palestinian territory in violation of General Assembly resolution ES-10/15 which acknowledged the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice of 9 July 2004 (A/ES-10/273). That wall fragmented the Palestinian territories into small pockets, hindering Palestinians' work commutes and preventing access to health services, through security measures that were not humanitarian. As a result, thousands of Palestinian families suffered economic and social consequences, and were faced with poverty and hunger. Moreover, Israel continued to cut the Palestinian population off from fuel and electricity and prevented humanitarian services from reaching Gaza. The Palestinian people were thus in need of basic elements like water and food. Those policies continued to have harmful economic and social repercussions, negatively affecting the standard of living of the Palestinian people and paralysing their productive

sector, leading to high unemployment rates. In the occupied Syrian Golan, Israeli authorities prevented residents of the Golan from returning, continued building settlements and bulldozing agricultural land, and tried to control their water sources. Clearly, Israeli policies continued to violate international rules and regulations and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, and disregarded all international resolutions confirming the rights of the Palestinian people over its resources.

51. His country supported the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and the return of refugees, and called on the international community to shoulder its moral responsibility and support the rights of the Palestinian people enshrined in international rules. The occupation authorities were responsible for their policies which flouted international legitimacy and must provide compensation for the damage caused in all occupied Arab lands.

52. **Mr. Al-Badi** (Qatar) said that the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian question were at the forefront of the conflicts which the international community must urgently resolve, given the accelerating deterioration that characterized them. They exemplified the suffering of peoples deprived of their political, economic and social rights as a result of the tyrannical and inhumane practices of the Israeli occupying army. The occupation thwarted efforts to achieve sustainable development and create a healthy economic environment in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, and in the occupied Syrian Golan. The result was degradation of the economic and living conditions of both their peoples, the situation of the Palestinians being aggravated still further by Israel's building of the separation wall. Those practices were in flagrant violation of internationally binding resolutions and the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice of 9 July 2004, on the legal consequences of the construction of a wall in the occupied Palestinian territory. The dire humanitarian and economic situation had been aggravated still further by Israel's "closure" of the Gaza Strip since January 2007, which had resulted in the near-total collapse of the private sector and shortages of food, electricity and fuel.

53. The Israeli military operation "Cast Lead", carried out against Gaza in December 2008 and January 2009, had caused the deaths of 1,440 Palestinians, including 431 children and 114 women,

and the injury of 5,380, according to the Secretary-General's note (A/64/77-E/2009/13). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) had reported that during the operation, 3,345 homes had been totally destroyed and 11,112 damaged. According to the non-governmental organization Al-Mezan Centre for Human Rights, by 15 January 2009 at least 200,000 people had been rendered homeless. Buildings of UNRWA containing food and medicine had also been struck by Israeli missiles, some of them loaded with white phosphorus.

54. More recently, the Israeli authorities had demolished 124 buildings in the West Bank, making 435 more Palestinians, including 124 children, homeless. In February 2009, 7,951 Palestinians, including 374 minors, were in Israeli prisons. Palestinian labour-force and poverty statistics, especially with regard to women and women-headed households, were equally dire.

55. To help offset the effects of the aggression, Qatar had contributed hundreds of millions of dollars to rebuild and repair infrastructure in the Gaza Strip and support Palestinian efforts to achieve sustainable development and create a favourable economic and social environment in the occupied Palestinian territory.

56. **Mr. Escalona Ojeda** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that his Government shared the concern of the United Nations with regard to Israel's destruction of agricultural land and orchards in the occupied Palestinian territory, as that was a unilateral action which affected the self-determination and integrity of the Palestinian territories and hindered the Palestinian people's capacity to exercise fully its legitimate rights to work, food and to access its natural resources. Overcoming that situation was a *sine qua non* for achieving peace and justice in the Middle East.

57. The General Assembly and Security Council had adopted a number of resolutions asserting that Israel's policies and practices in the Palestinian territories and other territories occupied since 1967 had no legal validity and seriously impeded the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East. Israel had violated the Fourth Geneva Convention and some two dozen Assembly resolutions. The international community must ensure that Israel's continued arbitrary illegal actions, systematic human rights violations and crimes against humanity ceased.

58. Venezuela strongly supported the Palestinian people's right to political self-determination without any outside interference and to achieve economic, social and cultural development, and maintain territorial integrity, in line with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations. It also firmly supported the Palestinian people's right to build their own State.

59. **Mr. Hijazi** (Observer for Palestine), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the Israeli delegation's routine assertion that the item under consideration was unrelated to the Committee's competence was regrettable. He wondered what other forum or venue the Israeli Government would deem appropriate for discussing its exploitation of Palestinian natural resources, when Member States had agreed that the United Nations was the appropriate venue for discussing and resolving problems diplomatically and in a civilized manner. The accusation that deliberations on the issue were politicized was also regrettable, as was Israel's hope to be immune from being held accountable before the international community. Israel's forty years of occupation over Palestinian land was the reason for continued discussions on the issue; they would cease if Israel put an end to its occupation of the Palestinian homeland and its illegal exploitation and degradation of Palestinian natural resources.

60. He wondered whether the coordination and cooperation the representative of Israel had mentioned in his statement also extended to the confiscation and degradation of land, the uprooting of trees, and the exploitation of over 47 per cent of the land occupied in the West Bank and placing it under total Israeli control.

61. Israel was trying to portray itself as being at the forefront of advances and innovations and coordination and as seeking peace, but its actions on the ground showed the contrary. Israel must be told that its illegal colonial actions would be combated and eliminated. The occupying Power must know that the international community would not tolerate such deplorable actions in the future, and that its commitment to the principles of international law would outweigh any other consideration that had so far made a mockery of the international system. The item would thus continue to be brought to the consideration of the Committee and to all other relevant bodies of the United Nations until the Israeli occupation and exploitation of natural resources ceased.

62. **Mr. Ali** (Syrian Arab Republic), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the Israeli delegation's objection to the Committee's discussion of the agenda item under consideration and its accusation of politicization of the Committee reflected the aggressive and criminal mentality of the Israeli occupying Power, which disregarded the international legitimacy represented by the United Nations. It committed crimes and violations of international rules, and continued its occupation of others' lands, yet did not tolerate any criticism. An illustration of the State of Israel's criminal logic was the fact that, just a few days previously, the Israeli Prime Minister had in effect asked his cabinet to change the rules of international law in order to prevent Israeli army leaders from having to stand trial for their criminal acts. The agenda item on the Israeli occupation was of prime importance and would continue to be on the Committee's agenda until Israel ended its occupation of Arab lands and implemented all relevant United Nations resolutions.

63. *Mr. Mohamed Cherif Diallo (Guinea), Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.*

Agenda item 50: Information and communication technologies for development (A/64/64-E/2009/10)

64. **Ms. Dong Wu** (Chief, Science and Technology Section of the Division on Technology and Logistics, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the World Summit on the Information Society outcomes at the regional and international levels (A/64/64-E/2009/10), highlighted its main points and said that the next steps towards an all-inclusive information society needed to address universal information and communications technology (ICT) access in both rural and urban areas and among men and women and across generations, and the availability of content in local languages, so as to increase the potential contribution of ICTs towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). All relevant United Nations entities and agencies had pledged to continue to work with Governments, the private sector and civil society and to explore more ways to meet the goals established during the World Summit on the Information Society.

The meeting rose at 5.50 p.m.