



General Assembly

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Official Records

President: Mr. Thomson (Fiji)

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

The members of the General Assembly observed a minute of silence.

Tribute to the memory of His Excellency Mr. Fidel Alejandro Castro Ruz, former President of the Councils of State and Ministers of the Republic of Cuba

The President: Before we proceed to consider the items on our agenda, it is my sad duty to pay tribute to the memory of the former President of the Councils of State and Ministers of the Republic of Cuba, His Excellency Mr. Fidel Alejandro Castro Ruz, who passed away on Friday, 25 November.

I am deeply saddened by the passing of Fidel Castro, and I wish to express my sincere condolences to his family, including his brother, President Raúl Castro, the Government and the people of Cuba. On behalf of the General Assembly, I request the representatives of Cuba to convey these condolences.

Fidel Castro was one of the iconic leaders of the twentieth century. With a great love for his homeland and the Cuban people, he dedicated his life to their welfare and development. A tireless advocate for equity in the international arena, he was an inspirational figure for developing countries in particular. His dedication to their advancement, especially in the fields of education and health, will be long remembered.

I now invite representatives to stand and observe a minute of silence in tribute to the memory of His Excellency Mr. Fidel Alejandro Castro Ruz.

Agenda item 35

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/71/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/71/359)

Note by the Secretary-General (A/71/174)

Draft resolutions (A/71/L.18, A/71/L.19, A/71/L.20 and A/71/L.21)

The President: Today's meeting takes place at a time when the Middle East region is being rocked by instability. Brutal conflicts in Syria and Yemen, a refugee crisis that is flooding neighbouring countries, the virulent spread of extremism and terrorism, and the ongoing construction of settlements on Palestinian territory are combining to create a highly combustible situation across the region. For many, the prospects for peace and security feel desperately out of reach. We are all gravely concerned about the deteriorating security and humanitarian situations in many parts of the Middle East. I call on parties to make genuine efforts to find peaceful solutions and to cooperate closely with the United Nations and humanitarian agencies to enable them to deliver urgently needed humanitarian, food and medical assistance.

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The occupation of Palestinian territory since 1967 continues to violate key United Nations principles, including those relating to territorial integrity, the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war, equal rights and the self-determination of peoples. It is a situation that has reverberations around the region. As the Assembly has said, achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine is imperative for the attainment of comprehensive and lasting peace and stability in the Middle East.

The ongoing role of the United Nations in the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine is clear, with the General Assembly repeatedly affirming that the United Nations has permanent responsibility with regard to the question of Palestine until the question is resolved in all aspects and in accordance with international law. To that end, I call for all involved to urgently take concrete steps to bring an end to the violence, comply strictly with international law, restore political trust, build a climate for peace and resume meaningful negotiations.

That includes all leaders refraining from provocative actions, incitement and inflammatory rhetoric, which are incompatible with advancing a negotiated two-State solution and serve only to perpetuate the cycles of violence and conflict. It includes freezing the building of Israeli settlements on Palestinian territory, which the General Assembly has repeatedly affirmed to be illegal and to have a detrimental impact on efforts to resume and advance the peace process. It includes by respecting the historic status quo at the holy places of Jerusalem, including Al-Haram al-Sharif, in both words and practice. And it includes all parties taking confidence-building measures aimed at improving the situation on the ground, promoting stability, building trust and fostering the peace process.

To that end, I would like to acknowledge the work being undertaken by civil society to promote a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine. Despite the setbacks over the years, I remain hopeful that renewed international efforts can help to pave the way to realizing the two-State solution of Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace, security and prosperity within recognized borders, based on the pre-1967 lines.

I would like to take the opportunity of today's debate to acknowledge the vital work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). For over 65 years, UNRWA has played a critical role in

supporting the welfare and development of some 5 million Palestinian refugees. That includes through education, health, relief and social services, support for camp infrastructure, provision of microfinance and emergency assistance and efforts to eliminate violence against women and girls.

The generational impacts of the work of UNRWA to support Palestinian refugees cannot be overstated, and I sincerely thank the donors and hosts of UNRWA for their support. That support, including the responses to the emergency appeals of UNRWA, have helped to provide education and opportunity for Palestinian youth, and to counter potential radicalization that has affected so many other populations with high levels of youth unemployment.

The mandate of UNRWA originates from the General Assembly, and it is therefore to those present that I turn to express my deep concern at the serious funding gap that has emerged and is threatening the ability of UNRWA to continue its work in providing relief to the Palestine refugees. I urge all Member States to respond generously and expeditiously to the efforts of UNRWA to fill its \$74 million funding gap and to ensure that it has sufficient funds to be able to carry out its activities in an effective and predictable manner.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict may be long-standing and the situation in the Middle East may be complex, but we, the international community, must never let that discourage us or undermine our commitment to finding just, lasting and sustainable peace. As long as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues, it poses a threat to international peace and security. And so long as it continues, the lives of millions of Palestine people, refugees and others across the region will be negatively impacted by unrest and instability. I therefore urge all parties and stakeholders to be courageous and committed to their efforts to finding a lasting, peaceful political solution to bring the conflict to an end.

I now give the floor to the representative of Senegal, who will speak on behalf of the Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to introduce draft resolutions A/71/L.18, A/71/L.19, A/71/L.20 and A/71/L.21.

Mr. Ciss (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): Allow me at the outset to thank all delegations and you personally, Mr. President, for having taken such an active part in the special meeting of the Committee on the Exercise of

the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People marking the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The messages and statements of support we heard this morning, sent by leaders from around the world, testify in one voice to the firm resolve of the international community to support the rights of the Palestinians and to reach a fair and lasting solution to the Palestinian question, that of two States living side by side in peace and security, as demanded for decades by the United Nations resolutions on the issue. I also note that the Committee received messages of solidarity from the Presidents of Algeria and Sierra Leone.

Today, we are here to debate the question of Palestine on the sixty-ninth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 181 (II) on the partition of historic Palestine into the State of Israel and the State of Palestine. However, the second country, the State of Palestine, has seen its independence rejected to this very day. Next year will not only mark seven decades of broken promises by the United Nations to the Palestinian people, it will also be the fiftieth anniversary of the occupation by Israel of Palestinian lands and their inhabitants. Those 50 years of occupation mean 50 years of settlements and colonization; 50 years of annexation of East Jerusalem and 50 years of oppression and collective punishment of Palestinians and their lives, hopes and future. In short, it has been 50 years of the denial of basic human rights, amounting to a refusal to ensure liberty. That is the true heart of the issue of Palestine — rejecting the freedom of Palestinian people.

We all recognize that liberty is a fundamental freedom and that without it, other rights are severely eroded or, worse yet, made meaningless. An occupying Power is not only required to ensure the social and economic well-being of the occupied people; occupation is also meant to be a temporary state of affairs and not an ongoing or permanent regime, and it should certainly not perpetually deprive the occupied people of their freedom and right to self-determination. Furthermore, the occupiers, or colonizers, have always failed in their attempts to use the carrot and the stick to lead the dominated people to surrender, willingly or not. No one should be obliged to surrender and accept imprisonment, however gilded the cage may be. Freedom is not a reward delivered by a benevolent superior. It is the fundamental and inalienable right of all peoples, enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, and it is the right of all nations. It is not subordinate to the desire

of some third party or based on a certificate of good conduct or permit issued by the occupier.

Our Committee shall continue to defend the inalienable rights of the Palestinians, beginning with their right to self-determination. We are pleased to note that Member States, including France, Russia and Egypt, as well as the Middle East Quartet, are also striving to find ways to make progress towards settling the Palestinian issue in all its aspects and in a fair and peaceful manner. We therefore call for every effort to be made, in the name of justice, to end almost half a century of occupation and the drawn-out tragedy of Palestinian refugees and to promote the independence and sovereignty of a Palestinian State living side by side with Israel and all its neighbours, in line with international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative, which have long been the reference points and parameters for a fair and lasting solution.

We know and understand that the international community is facing many pressing problems and crises. One would think the question of Palestine would at least be counted among those crises, as it is a harsh reality for those Palestinians who have abandoned all hope for a solution in the near future, to the extent that they are now seeking refuge throughout the region and beyond — to Europe, Asia and Africa. Yet nothing could be further from the truth. Let us consider for a moment the desperate situation of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip or the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, or of Palestinian refugees in Syria in this period of serious conflict, Lebanon or elsewhere in the region. The absence of hope and political prospects that might mitigate this desolate reality and ensure the realization of rights that have been denied for so long, has had a profound, destabilizing impact and makes the status quo clearly untenable.

Furthermore, when we see violent extremist groups threaten our planet by carrying out attacks throughout the world that provoke flows of refugees to our borders and poison the hearts and spirits of the youth, we cannot doubt that the primary tool used by such groups is the open wound of the serious injustice in Palestine, and that the international community, represented by the United Nations, remains incapable of resolving the situation in spite of all the words spoken and commitments made down the years.

Each day that passes in this climate of injustice; every photo of the colonization and usurpation of Palestinian lands; every video showing an Israeli hit a child or humiliate a Palestinian man or woman; and every extension of the blockade that Israel continues to impose mercilessly on Gaza only fuels the narrative of extremist groups, and helps such groups the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Al-Qaeda to recruit marginalized and desperate young people. The conflict around the Palestinian issue is not an issue related to just a few people and never will be. It is not just a regional issue; it is global problem whose impact is felt by us all no matter where we live.

Beyond the pragmatic questions, allow me to reassert before this Organization, which is responsible at the global level for protecting and ensuring that human rights are respected, that no individual is free unless all individuals are free. The life of Palestinians is priceless, to use a trending slogan. As we commemorate the adoption of resolution 181 (II) and as we approach the fiftieth anniversary of the Israeli occupation and the seventieth anniversary of the partition of Palestine, we must recommit ourselves to implementing the provisions that have been adopted over the decades by the General Assembly and the Security Council to promote the realization of the rights of Palestinian people and a just, lasting, comprehensive and peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People will continue to do its utmost to defend those rights and move towards a peaceful settlement of the conflict. We will do so in cooperation with our partners: Member States, international organizations and members of civil society. We reaffirm that our door is open and that we are happy to hear all points of view. It is through communication, not through confrontation, that we will resolve the Palestinian question.

We will also continue to invite to our meetings and events all Member States, including Israel, and civil-society organizations on both sides, Israeli and Palestinian alike. The Committee is proud to help those actors meet, debate and exchange ideas in a secure framework, to work together to promote peace and justice. By failing to take part in our debates, some Members of the Organization only ensure that their points of view will not be taken into account. We therefore call on all delegations to support the diplomatic, legal

and political activities of the Committee in fulfilment of its mandate, rather than spread unfounded lies.

I shall now introduce to the General Assembly the four draft resolutions adopted by the Committee under this agenda item: draft resolutions A/71/L.18, A/71/L.19, A/71/L.20 and A/71/L.21. The approval of the Committee followed consultations with relevant regional groups.

The first three draft resolutions concern the work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat, and the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information. The General Assembly reaffirms therein the importance of the mandates that it has assigned to those entities. As in the past, the Committee seeks to ensure that all resources it is given are used in an efficient manner. Allow me to outline some aspects of the draft resolutions.

As members will note, by draft resolution A/71/L.18, which addresses the renewal of the Committee's mandate, the General Assembly would request the Committee, in the light of the onset of the fiftieth year of the Israeli occupation, to focus its activities throughout 2017 on efforts and initiatives to end the Israeli occupation and contribute to a just peace.

By the second draft resolution, A/71/L.19, the General Assembly would renew the mandate of the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat, and request the Secretary-General to continue to provide the Division with the necessary resources and to ensure that it continues to effectively carry out its programme of work.

In draft resolution A/71/L.20, which relates to the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information, the General Assembly would renew the mandate of the Department and call upon it to continue those initiatives that contribute to the creation of a favourable climate for dialogue and the advancement of peace efforts.

In draft resolution A/71/L.21, entitled "Peaceful settlement of the Palestinian question", the General Assembly would reaffirm its position regarding the essential elements of such a settlement. The draft resolution refers to facts that have come to light in the past year. It stressing the urgent need for efforts to reverse the negative trends on the ground and to restore

a political horizon for advancing and accelerating meaningful negotiations aimed at the achievement of a peace agreement that will bring a complete end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967 and the resolution of all core final status issues, without exception, leading to a peaceful, just, lasting and comprehensive solution of the question of Palestine. The draft resolution urges renewed and coordinated efforts by the international community aimed at restoring a political horizon, welcomes the initiative launched by France, the ongoing efforts of the Quartet and the initiatives taken by Egypt and Russia. It reiterates the demand for the consideration of measures of accountability, in accordance with international law, if Israel, the occupying Power, continues to ignore appeals for a complete end of settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including in East Jerusalem. That is a prerequisite for preserving the possibilities of achieving a two-State solution within the pre-1967 borders, putting a final end to the Israeli occupation and ensuring the realization of the rights of the Palestinian people.

We call on the Assembly to lend its firm and legitimate support for those texts and hope it does so.

The President: I now give the floor to the Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to introduce the Committee's report.

Mr. Inguanetz (Malta), Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People: It is an honour for me, in my capacity as Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, to present to the General Assembly the Committee's annual report (A/71/35). The report covers developments relating to the question of Palestine and details the work of the Committee between 7 October 2015 and 3 October 2016. Allow me to summarize each section of the report.

Following the introduction, chapter II provides a review of the situation relating to the question of Palestine, as monitored by the Committee, in order to draw the attention of the international community to issues requiring urgent attention, such as the impasse in the peace process, dire living conditions, the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, extrajudicial killings, the excessive use of force by the Israeli occupying forces, heightened provocations and tensions at the

Al-Aqsa Mosque compound and other religious sites, ongoing illegal Israeli settlement activities, and increasing house demolitions in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem.

In chapters III and IV, the report outlines the mandate entrusted to the Committee by the General Assembly, and contains information on the organization of the Committee's work during the year.

Chapter V contains the action taken by the Committee, including the Chairman's participation in the Security Council debates and the continued dialogue between the Committee and members of intergovernmental organizations with the objective of mobilizing wide support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and urging action.

Chapter VI provides an overview of the special information programme on the question of Palestine carried out by the Department of Public Information pursuant to resolution 70/14, of 24 November 2015, as well as of activities reported by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the United Nations Development Programme.

The last chapter of the report is devoted to the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee. In view of the stalled negotiations, the Committee would welcome the revitalization of the peace negotiations as well as the efforts of any country that is able to advance the peace process, conceivably with support from a reinvigorated Quartet, in order to reach a comprehensive regional solution. The Committee would also urge the Security Council and the General Assembly to give positive consideration to proposals seeking to find a way out of the current impasse. Allow me to recall additional key recommendations.

In relation to Gaza, the Committee would reiterate its calls on the international community to demand the lifting of the blockade. It would also call upon international donors to fulfil all pledges without delay in order to expedite reconstruction efforts and to secure funding for long-term humanitarian assistance, including for UNRWA.

In connection with Israel's continued policy of illegal occupation and settlement-building in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, the Committee would welcome further measures by the Human Rights Council to expedite the implementation of its resolution

31/36, calling for the creation of a database of all actors conducting business in areas under Israeli military occupation. That is consistent with the stance taken by the European Union on the importation of products from illegal Israeli settlements. The Committee would encourage other organizations and States to adopt and implement policies that guarantee the adherence to international conventions with regard to illegal settlements in occupied areas, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention. It would welcome further steps by Governments and private businesses to dissociate themselves from policies which directly or indirectly support settlements.

The Committee would continue to encourage civil-society partners to work with their national Governments, parliamentarians and other institutions with a view to gaining their full support for the work of the Committee and the United Nations, as a whole.

To ensure that Governments actively support the realization of a peaceful and just settlement of the question of Palestine, the Committee would reach out to all regional groups at the United Nations. Recognizing the growing importance of cooperation with developing countries and regional and subregional organizations in sharing experiences and implementing replicable solutions, it will make a special effort to step up engagement with such countries and organizations in the context of the South-South and triangular cooperation framework.

The Committee would suggest that its programme of international meetings and conferences in 2017 be focused on amplifying international support for the fulfilment of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and bringing the Israeli occupation to a complete end.

The Committee would strongly recommend that the annual capacity-building programme for the staff of the Palestinian Government, managed by the Division for Palestinian Rights, be continued and, where possible, further expanded in the light of the State of Palestine's commitment to fulfilling the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Committee would also request that the Division continue its substantive support for the secretariat, its research and monitoring programmes, as well as publications and other informational activities, in furtherance of the Committee's communication strategy.

Finally, in view of the tragic approach of the fiftieth year of Israeli occupation and the seventieth year since the partition, and to underscore the absolute urgency of achieving a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, the Committee calls upon the entire membership of the General Assembly to join it in that endeavour.

In closing, I would like to express the hope that the report that I have just presented will be of assistance to the General Assembly in its deliberations on the question of Palestine.

The President: I now give the floor to the Permanent Observer of the observer State of Palestine.

Mr. Mansour (Palestine): I thank you, Mr. President, for your principled statement and for the convening of this important General Assembly debate, which coincides with the thirty-ninth annual observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. On this solemn day, as we reflect upon the painful, grave injustice that continues to be borne by the Palestinian people, the messages of support for the just cause of Palestine and the moving expressions of solidarity are not only a source of comfort, but also help to shore up our resilience in these times of diminished hope.

As we approach the date marking 50 years since the onset of Israel's occupation in June 1967, as well as the seventieth year of the Assembly's partition of Mandate Palestine and Al-Nakba that followed and is still suffered by our people to this day, we are compelled to convey our hope that this time next year the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People may be observed with a commemoration of the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, a celebration of the independence of the State of Palestine and a realization of Palestinian freedom and rights and genuine Palestinian-Israeli peace.

This may sound like wishful thinking, considering the harsh realities that overwhelm us and the fatigue felt by the international community after so many years of conflict, setbacks and tragedy, yet it remains our primary, overarching objective, guiding all that we do here at the United Nations and based firmly on the Charter, the rules and principles of international law and the relevant resolutions across the decades. Our conviction in the law, our commitment to peace and coexistence, and the international community's long-standing support nourish this hope and help us

to endure despite immense odds and hardship. The Palestinian people remain steadfast, as shall we, in giving voice to their plight and in calling and striving every day for their rights and justice. We are therefore deeply grateful for the Assembly's solidarity on a day like this day.

Today, we pay tribute to the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, which has for over 40 years exerted efforts in support of the inalienable rights and legitimate national aspirations of the Palestinian people to live in freedom, peace and security in their homeland. These efforts fully conform with the Committee's General Assembly mandate, relevant resolutions, international law and the United Nations permanent responsibility towards the question of Palestine until justly resolved in all aspects. Based on this responsibility, we again appeal to Member States to support the Committee in advancing its noble objectives. Bearing in mind the anniversaries we shall mark in 2017 and the current crossroads, we urge partnership with the Committee to enhance the collective efforts to end the Israeli occupation and make peace.

We thank Ambassador Fodé Seck, Chair of the Committee, for his leadership — a role graciously undertaken by Senegal over the years — and for the statement and introduction of the resolutions under this item that were delivered on his behalf. We also thank the Rapporteur, Ambassador Carmelo Inguanes of Malta, for presenting the annual report of the Committee (A/71/35), the other Bureau members — Afghanistan, Cuba, Indonesia, Namibia and Nicaragua — and all of the Committee's members and observers for their principled support. We also reiterate our appreciation to the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Department of Public Information's special information programme on the question of Palestine for their efforts and support to the Committee.

We reiterate our thanks also to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his report on the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine (A/71/359) and recognize his contribution over the past 10 years of his tenure to promoting peace and leading the United Nations system's efforts on the question of Palestine. In this regard, we express appreciation for the support of Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey Feltman and Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov and their teams. We are also grateful for the tireless efforts of United Nations agencies assisting the

Palestinian people, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), with the generous support of States, organizations and partners from around the world. Such support has helped sustain our people, including 5.5 million Palestine refugees, through decades of conflict and crisis and remains vital until a just, durable solution is achieved.

While grateful for this support, we cannot conceal our deep disappointment and frustration at the absence of serious efforts to uphold political and legal responsibilities towards the question of Palestine, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict. As the situation further deteriorates and peace remains far from our grasp, we lament in particular the Security Council's failure to uphold its Charter duties and implement its resolutions. Generations after generations of Palestinians have been deprived of their rights and of a life of freedom, stability, prosperity and dignity. The despair and hopelessness of our youth in particular at this moment — whether in occupied Palestine or throughout the Palestine refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria — is a source of vast pain and worry.

As this injustice persists, constituting a bleeding wound in the Middle East, destabilizing the region, undermining peace and stability far beyond, and weakening international law and the international system itself, we must ask: when will the Security Council finally respond to the global appeals to act to heal? How can the international community continue justifying inaction and the lack of accountability as we approach the half-century mark of Israel's military occupation and as the international promise to the Palestinian people remains broken and they continue to be denied self-determination, the most fundamental human right?

What is lacking has not been support or solidarity for Palestine, but rather the political courage and will to respect and ensure respect for the law in the face of Israel's intransigence and disrespect. Resolution after resolution is being violated as Israel — the same Israel created by resolution 181 (II) — blatantly disregards the General Assembly and the Security Council, tramples international law and disrespects the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. Dismissing calls to comply with the law, the Israeli Government instead commits violations and crimes as if it were exempt from the law and as if the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were the exception to every norm and rule intended to

safeguard human rights and peace and security. And yet, the international community fails to act.

For those taking comfort in and indulging complacency about the status quo — including the historic status quo regarding the holy sites in occupied East Jerusalem, including Al-Haram al-Sharif — the reality is that the status quo is being severely undermined and altered every single day by the occupying Power. This is further inflaming tensions, destabilizing the situation, destroying the viability of the two-State solution and obstructing peace, with far-reaching consequences. So, again, we ask: what is the threshold for action?

Reflecting on the past year alone begs this question even more insistently. As international paralysis has continued, Israel has persisted with its systematic, gross violations of international law in occupied Palestine with full impunity, destroying the prospects for peace. Report after report before the Assembly, including, *inter alia*, by the Secretary-General, convey a shocking reality of a vast regime of violations by the occupying Power, intensifying distress among the Palestinian population and their need for protection.

As reflected in recent reports, including the July report of the Middle East Quartet, the past year has witnessed non-stop Israeli colonization activities deliberately aimed at altering the demography, character and status of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. That included the expansion and construction of settlements and the wall; unprecedented rates of home demolitions and the destruction of civilian infrastructure and humanitarian assistance; confiscation of land; the forced displacement and transfer of Palestinians, especially vulnerable Bedouin communities; the imposition of hundreds of checkpoints, impairing freedom of movement and socioeconomic life, including access to lands and livelihoods; the exploitation of natural resources and obstruction of access to water and agricultural lands; and blatant annexation threats by Israeli officials.

The year has also witnessed daily Israeli military raids, causing death and injury to Palestinian children, women and men who have been routinely assaulted and traumatized by the occupying forces; terror and violence on the part of extremist settlers; massive forms of collective punishment; constant intimidation and humiliation; racist, discriminatory policies and blatant dehumanization. The Palestinian people have

been subjected to constant attempts to negate their identity, history and heritage, including provocations and incitement against the holy sites, particularly in Al-Quds and Al-Khalil and especially at Al-Haram Al-Sharif and the holy Al-Aqsa Mosque and Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi, and aggravation of religious sensitivities. Civilians face daily arrest and detention, foremost the young men, with more than 7,000 Palestinians now imprisoned or detained in Israeli jails.

Those actions also include continuing Israeli aggression and threats and the illegal, inhumane blockade of the Gaza Strip, where 2 million Palestinians are being mercilessly besieged and collectively punished, thereby enduring extreme deprivation and isolation for nearly 10 years, which has generated a dire humanitarian crisis and pushed socioeconomic conditions to their lowest point since 1967, with poverty, unemployment, food insecurity and despair rampant. Here I must reiterate our appeal for urgent support to UNRWA, which leads efforts to alleviate the plight of the vulnerable Palestine refugees in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in Gaza, and throughout the region, providing them with sustenance and protection amid widespread crises.

As we bear witness to the global refugee and migrant crisis, it should be recognized that Palestinian refugees are among the millions of civilians fleeing our region, especially due to the grave Syrian conflict. We ask Member States not to forget those who have suffered nearly 70 years of exile, dispossession and misery, and urge Member States to reaffirm solidarity with them and to support a just solution in accordance with resolution 194 (III) of 1948, which enshrined their right to return, a right reaffirmed for all refugees in the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (resolution 71/1).

All of the facts before us confirm that the situation is far from static and that the crisis is unmanageable, contrary to what many, including the Israeli Government, may like to believe. The situation is in constant decline and totally unsustainable and can indeed get worse. In a part of the world already experiencing much turmoil and radicalization, with spillover far beyond its borders, that must be cause for both alarm and action.

There is international consensus that, as reflected clearly in the Quartet report, Israel's policy of settlement construction and expansion is eroding the two-State solution and entrenching a one-State reality that can

only be deemed apartheid. The Quartet has called for serious action to reverse the negative trend on the ground. That must include immediate changes in Israeli policies that are fragmenting our land, undermining our State's viability, violating our people's human rights and denying them their human dignity. Lip service to the cause of peace is not enough; empty promises and claimed commitments, contracted by every action by Israel, must not be accepted in place of actual respect for the law and genuine efforts for peace.

The international community — with the Security Council at the forefront — must consider measures to hold Israel accountable and compel compliance with its legal obligations. Steps must be taken to stop the downward spiral and expedite an end to the illegal 50-year occupation. Action is urgent if there is to be any hope of preserving the two-State solution based on the 1967 borders and creating conditions for meaningful negotiations on all final status issues and tangibly advancing that solution, which, all agree, is in peril.

Continued international appeasement and inaction are indefensible. Current efforts to mobilize the Security Council to act must be supported if we are to confront the main obstacles to peace, particularly illegal Israeli settlement activities, and forge a political horizon in which negotiations based on the long-standing parameters and terms of reference enshrined in the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles and the Arab Peace Initiative and within a set time frame, can be accelerated for achievement of a peace agreement that will bring a complete end to the Israeli occupation and the independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with the State of Israel in peace and security, and a just solution for the Palestine refugee question.

The Palestinian leadership has continually reaffirmed its commitment to peace on that basis and is ready to pursue it in full cooperation with all concerned regional and international partners. We therefore reaffirm our support for France's efforts to mobilize the international community for Palestinian-Israeli peace and to convene an international peace conference. We also reaffirm our support for the efforts of the Arab States to advance the Arab Peace Initiative, including in cooperation with the Quartet members, whose recent efforts are also fully recognized, along with the Russian and Egyptian efforts to promote dialogue and help the parties overcome the deadlock.

Yet none of those efforts can absolve the United Nations of its responsibility. The General Assembly and Security Council must act to ensure that international law is upheld, to thread the collective efforts and chart a viable path forward. On this day — 69 years from the date of the partition of our homeland — I wish to remind the Assembly that, in spite of the grim realities they are enduring, the Palestinian people and leadership are undeterred and remain insistent on the path of peace. Just a few months ago in this Hall, a Palestinian teacher, winner of the Global Teacher Prize, stood here among the United Nations Messengers of Peace proudly representing and reaffirming Palestine's longstanding commitment to peace. Although hopes are diminished, our people hold steadfast to the justness of their cause and still believe in the law and the international community's pledges to achieve peace and ensure the State of Palestine's rightful place among the community of nations.

From this rostrum, we urge once more that no effort be spared to bring the foreign occupation and tragic conflict to an end, to help the Palestinian people finally achieve their long-denied rights, their independence and dignity, and finally to establish peace and coexistence between the Palestinian and the Israeli peoples.

Mr. Danon (Israel): Every year on this date this Hall hosts the same cynical, Israel-bashing festival. Every year we hear speaker after speaker distorting history and promoting a completely one-sided narrative. Every year Member States adopt the same empty resolutions. This year is no different. Let no one be fooled: none of it does anything to help the Palestinian people. It only continues to fuel the Palestinian culture of victimhood.

The reality is that this debate on the so-called question of Palestine avoids the hard questions. Are the Palestinians really ready to make the hard decisions that are needed for peace? Do they really want to end the conflict, to end the decades of terror and violence against the people of Israel and to end their diplomatic warfare here at the United Nations? For all the talk about new initiatives and new resolutions, we must ask the question: do the Palestinians even want a State? History tells us that the answer is no.

Since 1947, the Palestinian leadership has proved time and time again that they do not want a solution for their people. Let us remember what happened 69 years ago. The United Nations voted to partition the land into a Jewish State and an Arab State. We all know what

happened next. The Jews said yes, the Arabs said no. It is as simple as that. And today nothing has changed. After 69 years, the Palestinians still do not want peace. They still do not want a State, and they still do not want to end the conflict. Every time that there is a possibility of progress, an opportunity to choose a better path for their people, they choose the path of violence, rejection, and bloodshed.

Let us not forget that the leaders of the Zionist movement accepted the United Nations plan, despite all the risks and the loud threats of genocide against the Jewish people by Arab leaders. The brave Zionist leaders accepted the plan because they knew that it offered the best hope for the restoration of Jewish independence after 2,000 years and because they believed it was possible to live side by side with their Arab neighbours in the land of their forefathers. However, the Arab leadership was not willing to accept the Jewish State under any conditions. Let us make no mistake: it was not about pushing for a better deal.

A working paper of the Secretariat of the United Nations dated 30 July 1949 stated clearly, "The Arabs rejected the United Nations Partition Plan ... in its entirety." Their goal was clear. It was not about establishing another Arab State. It was, and remains, about the opposition to a homeland for the Jewish people. Let us look at the headlines on the day after the vote: "Assembly votes Palestine Partition, Arabs walk out", "Disavow any partition role". That is the whole story.

They rejected the plan and launched a war of destruction, which was joined by the armies of five Arab nations. Their response was best summed up by Secretary-General of the League of Arab States Azzam Pasha. He promised:

"It will be a war of elimination. It will be a momentous massacre in history that will be talked about like the massacres of the Mongols or the Crusades."

That has repeated itself at every stage of history. Israel makes compromises for peace. The Palestinians reject every offer and every plan, and respond with a wave of violence and terror. From 1948 to 1967, when the territory under discussion was under Arab control, the residents did not go to international forums demanding a State, and the Arab States did not lift a finger to create one.

The founding charter of the Palestine Liberation Organization does not call for a Palestinian State. It calls on Arabs "to repulse the Zionist invasion and to eliminate the Zionist presence from Palestine". Let me read that again: "to repulse the Zionist invasion and to eliminate the Zionist presence from Palestine".

In 1967, Israel was attacked again from three sides but managed to defeat three Arab armies. Again, we extended our hand to our neighbours, appealing to them to end the conflict, to end the bloodshed and to end the suffering on both sides once and for all. The Arab World responded with one unequivocal message of rejection: "No peace, no recognition, no negotiation".

The history of Palestinian rejectionism is alive and well today. In the year 2000, Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Barak made an unprecedented and far-reaching offer for the establishment of a Palestinian State. Believe me when I say that that was very controversial in Israel. It involved very painful compromises on our part. But still, the Palestinian leadership, led by Yasser Arafat, said no. President Clinton urged him to change his mind. Many Arab leaders told him that it was the golden opportunity to establish a State. But he refused. Not only did he say no, but he encouraged the wave of terror and violence that has still not ended.

President Clinton called the decision to reject a State "an error of historic proportions". However, the Palestinians repeated their mistake eight years later. Once again, an Israeli leader, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, offered the Palestinians everything they claimed to want — a State of their own, virtually all the territory in dispute and the uprooting of the so-called settlements. What was their response? President Abbas said, "I did not agree ... I rejected it out of hand".

How many times should we be shocked when the Palestinians will not even consider the most generous offers? How many times do we have to hear no, until we finally believe it? Every time there was an opportunity to move forward, to chart a path to a better future, the Palestinian leadership rejected it.

Israel has tried everything. In 2005, we dismantled entire communities and uprooted thousands of people from their homes in the Gaza Strip, and from parts of Judea and Samaria as well. It was a chance for the Palestinians to prove that their goal was the welfare of their people rather than warfare with Israel. It was an opportunity for the Palestinian leadership, and they threw it away.

Instead of building hospitals and schools in Gaza, instead of investing in the future of their people, Gaza became a launching pad for attacking Israeli towns and cities with rockets from above and tunnels from below. Once again, Israel opened the door to peace, and the Palestinians slammed it shut. To this day, the Palestinians refuse to assume control over the Gaza border crossings. The Palestinian leadership will not even take responsibility for the territory and the people whom they claim to represent, because responsibility requires accountability. It requires a practical policy of action. It means rejecting excuses.

But making excuses is the Palestinian policy. Just think about one of the great lies that, unfortunately, many in this Hall repeat endlessly. Time and time again we hear that settlements are the obstacle to progress. But in 2010, for 10 months, we put a complete freeze on settlement-building as a goodwill gesture to advance talks. For 10 months, not a single apartment, kindergarten or community centre was built in Judea or Samaria. That is a fact. And the Palestinians still refused to even come to the table. That is also a fact. It is not about the settlements. It never was. The Palestinian rejection began before there was a single settlement, and it will continue despite every effort to move forward.

In 2014, United States Secretary of State John Kerry led another round of talks. The Government of Israel made significant concessions and got nothing in return from the Palestinians. We made difficult decisions and even released Palestinian prisoners who had murdered innocent Israelis. Just think about it. Just imagine the pain felt by Israelis when they watched those terrorists receive a hero's welcome from President Abbas.

But then, just as the deadline was about pass, the Palestinian Authority blew up the process by establishing a unity Government with Hamas — an internationally recognized terror organization. The Palestinian Authority faced an important decision: whether to talk peace with Israel or to join forces with a terror organization, and they chose terror — another missed opportunity, another rejection, another embrace of the forces of violence.

Israel has tried everything, time after time — more compromises and more concessions. But the Palestinians have always had an excuse. There was always something missing, always some reason not to sit down and talk with us. If the Palestinians really want peace, why do

they reject every opportunity? If they really wanted peace, they would have responded to Prime Minister Barak and Prime Minister Olmert's far-reaching proposals. And right now, today, they can answer Prime Minister Netanyahu's call for negotiations, at any time, in any place — in New York, in Jerusalem, in Ramallah. Instead, they focus their time and effort on the political theatre that we are witnessing here today. We hear empty resolutions and empty speeches, more promises of support, more new initiatives, more United Nations organizations and, of course, more funding. The Palestinian Authority pays lip service to those initiatives because it pays well.

According to the World Bank, they received \$2.5 billion in international aid in 2014, and \$21.7 billion in development aid since the Oslo Accords were signed in 1993. According to the 2016 *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report*, the Palestinians have been among the top 10 recipients of international funding for over a decade. And they receive 10 times more humanitarian aid per capita than any other people. Year after year, the international community pours billions of dollars into the Palestinian Authority — an organization that is corrupt from top to bottom. Can we be surprised when the money intended to improve the lives of the Palestinian people goes instead to the families and the inner circles of the Palestinian leaders?

But it is not just about widespread corruption. The Palestinians leadership allocates tens of millions of dollars to finance the Palestinian terror industry. In 2012, the Palestinian Authority paid more than \$75 million to terrorists in Israeli prisons, and \$78 million to the families of terrorists, including suicide bombers. Together that accounts for more than 16 per cent of annual foreign donations and grants to the Palestinian Authority budget. They tried to hide that subsidizing of terror by shifting responsibility to the Palestine Liberation Organization, but the money all comes from the same source and has the same purpose — to encourage the murder of innocent Jews. Taxpayers around the world should know that their money is helping to fund stabbings, shootings and suicide bombings.

That is where the funding goes — not to building institutions, but to paying Palestinian Authority salaries, to the black hole of Palestinian Authority corruption and to paychecks for terrorists. The Palestinians are on permanent welfare provided by the international community, and they have no intention of

stopping it. They want the conflict to continue because they know that others will continue to pay their bills, and institutions like this one will continue to conduct a campaign against Israel on their behalf. The Palestinians do not want an agreement. They do not want a State. The responsibilities of statehood would mean making hard choices and delivering on the promises to their people. It would mean investing in their own institutions. It would mean putting an end to terror and incitement. It would mean finally recognizing the connection of the Jewish people to the land of Israel. It would mean making peace. But the Palestinians want easy victories without the responsibilities of governing. And they know that the only way to do that is to perpetuate the conflict.

It is time to put an end to that lie once and for all. If the Palestinians really wanted peace, we could have had peace. The real goal of the Palestinian Authority is to continue to exist as a corrupt entity, living off the goodwill of the international community. For 69 years, the Palestinians have rejected every offer, every compromise and every chance for peace. But the more the Palestinians say no, the more the international community says yes.

If you really want to show solidarity with the Palestinian people, then end this charade. Shut down the grievance industry and the culture of victimhood. Stop the endless stream of resolutions that do nothing to promote peace or help the Palestinian people. And, most important, condemn the culture of hate and incitement and demand that the Palestinian leaders finally return to the negotiating table. Until that time, Israel will continue to stand strong in defence of its country, and the people of Israel will continue to pray for a true and lasting peace.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Mr. Vale de Almeida (European Union): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU). The candidate countries of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania; the country of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina; and the European Free Trade Association countries Iceland and Liechtenstein, members of the European Economic Area; as well as Ukraine, align themselves with this statement.

The European Union is gravely concerned about the trends on the ground that threaten the viability of a two-State solution. In the past few months, we have seen an acceleration of negative trends that directly contradict the Quartet's recommendations. There is a danger that a one-State reality will become entrenched in a perpetual occupation and conflict, which would be incompatible with the realization of the national aspirations of both peoples.

The European Union has a clear position, set out in our Council's conclusions, on pursuing a two-State solution. It is the same two-State solution that has been identified as the objective of all Israeli Governments, the Palestinian leadership and the international community since Oslo — a negotiated two-State solution that meets Israeli and Palestinian security needs and Palestinian aspirations to statehood and sovereignty; ends the occupation that began in 1967; and resolves all permanent status issues in order to end the conflict. To us, our position is clear and objective, and it is not just ours but one that we share with the rest of the international community and the parties concerned.

The European Union is extremely concerned about the escalation in violence and tensions in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. We unequivocally condemn all acts of terror and incitement as unacceptable and unjustifiable. We insist that all perpetrators of crimes or acts of terror, whether against Israelis or Palestinians, must be brought to justice. The response of security forces must be proportionate and consistent, regardless of the perpetrators. Israel must conduct thorough investigations into cases where lethal force has been used. Alleged violations and abuses of international human rights law and international humanitarian law by all sides must be investigated in accordance with international laws and standards. The compliance of States and non-State actors alike with international humanitarian and human rights law, as well as their accountability, is a cornerstone of peace and security in the region.

We are also concerned about the recurring tensions at holy sites. Jerusalem is a city sacred to three religions. We reiterate our call for maintaining the status quo put in place in 1967, in line with previous understandings and bearing in mind Jordan's special role. Any change in the status quo would be deeply destabilizing. The member States of the European Union have never recognized the annexation of the territories occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem. All discriminatory

treatment of Palestinians in East Jerusalem must stop, and a way must be found through negotiations to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of two States.

I now turn to the issue of settlements and recall the European Union's long-held position on that issue, which is that the settlements are illegal under international law, constitute an obstacle to peace and threaten to make a two-State solution impossible. Beginning early this year, and in particular since the publication of the Quartet report (see S/2016/595), Israel's settlement expansion has accelerated steadily and systematically, which goes directly against the report's recommendations. Other related policies are having a negative impact on the socioeconomic development of Area C, which is crucial to the viability of a future Palestinian State. This year, Israel's demolitions of Palestinian structures in Area C, some of which were funded by the European Union and its member States, have vastly increased, leading to evictions and forced transfers, including evictions of Bedouin communities. We are particularly concerned about measures that may amount to collective punishment, such as punitive home demolitions, the sealing off of Palestinian villages and the withdrawal of work permits. In that regard, we would like to recall once again the applicability of international humanitarian law in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the parts of the Fourth Geneva Convention that relate to the protection of civilians.

The European Union and its member States reaffirm their commitment to ensuring the continued, full and effective implementation of existing EU legislation and bilateral arrangements applicable to settlement products. We are also committed to ensuring that, in line with international law, all agreements between the State of Israel and the European Union must unequivocally and explicitly indicate that they do not apply to the territories occupied by Israel in 1967. Settlement activity in East Jerusalem seriously jeopardizes the possibility of Jerusalem serving as the future capital of both States. The EU is also alarmed by the progress being made in the Knesset by a bill on settlement regularization, which would enable the ex post facto legalization of Israeli outposts in the occupied West Bank and the de-facto confiscation of private Palestinian land. The new legislation would enable a dramatic expansion of Israeli settlements, and thereby critically endanger the contiguity of a

future Palestinian State and the prospects for a two-State solution.

Militant activity and the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza fuel general instability and are a recipe for renewed conflict. Fundamental improvements in living conditions are needed, particularly for the most vulnerable, especially children and the elderly. While all international donors should swiftly honour their pledges made at the Cairo Conference, Gaza's humanitarian needs can be properly addressed only through political progress on the following three tracks.

First, all sides must respect the ceasefire. All indiscriminate attacks are illegal and unacceptable and increase the risks of escalation. The illicit arms build-up by Hamas and other militant groups must stop. We urge all parties to work towards the de-escalation of tensions.

Secondly, the European Union urges all Palestinian factions to engage in good faith in the reconciliation process on the basis of the Palestine Liberation Organization platform and the Quartet principles. A single, legitimate and democratic Palestinian Authority, with full control over Gaza, is critical for fulfilling the national aspirations of the Palestinian people and for achieving a viable Palestinian State. In that context, the European Union encourages the prompt setting of a new date for the planned Palestinian local elections, which, if held in line with international standards, could become an important step towards strengthened Palestinian democracy and towards national unity.

Thirdly, we reiterate our call on Israel for an end to the Gaza closure and a full opening of the crossings, while addressing its legitimate security concerns. The lifting of the restrictions on the movement of people, including representatives of the international community, and on the movement of services and goods, particularly those designated as dual-use items, is needed so as to allow reconstruction, service delivery and international infrastructure projects.

Ms. Young (Belize), Vice-President, took the Chair.

In conclusion, the adoption in September of the Israeli-Palestinian electricity agreement was a welcome development. The European Union urges both parties to promote trust and confidence-building measures.

Mr. Salam (Lebanon): In June, Israel's occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip will mark its fiftieth anniversary. We believe that it is high time for

us all to pause and thoroughly reflect on what has been the outcome of that occupation, on our failure to put an end to it and on what ought to be done to live up to our obligations under the Charter of the United Nations, so as to allow the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination.

First, one cannot but be struck by the ongoing systematic and deliberate expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, particularly in and around East Jerusalem, since 1967. As a matter of fact, in the past 50 years the Israeli Government has established 131 settlements in the West Bank, excluding East Jerusalem. In total, there are now nearly 800,000 Israeli settlers on Palestinian lands, more than 400,000 in the West Bank and more than 350,000 in East Jerusalem. It is worth noting that the number of settlers has tripled since the peace process began, and it is now estimated that the number could reach 1 million by the end of the decade, according to the Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem.

It is hardly necessary to remind the Assembly that all of those settlements are in flagrant violation of international law. Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention explicitly prohibits an occupying Power from transferring any part of its own civilian population into the territory that it occupies. Moreover, article 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court defines such acts as war crimes. Numerous Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 446 (1979), 452 (1979) and 465 (1980), have stressed that those settlements are illegal and constitute a serious obstruction to peace. Of course, Israel attempts to legalize the so-called outposts, that is, the settlements that have been established since the 1990s without Government approval and which are considered illegal according to Israeli law and which are also all in blatant breach of international law. The number of such so-called outposts, excluding East Jerusalem, has reached 97, and their locations appear as strategic front lines making it possible to expand the settlement areas of control. Therefore, we note the very serious danger that they represent.

Turning now to East Jerusalem, we need to note that, since it was illegally annexed in 1967, Israel's primary goal has been to create a de facto demographic and geographic situation in order to frustrate any future attempts to challenge alleged Israeli sovereignty over the city. In order to achieve that goal, the Israeli Government has been seeking to alter the historical

identity of many landmarks and quarters of the city, along with taking actions to increase the number of Jews and reduce the number of Palestinians living in the city, such as by imposing broad restrictions on construction inside Palestinian neighbourhoods, yet allowing Jewish settlers to move into the heart of those neighbourhoods and live there while expelling Palestinians from their homes and demolishing them.

In June 2002, the Israeli Government began to construct a wall to encircle the West Bank. Once completed, the length of that wall is projected to be more than twice the length of Israel's border with the West Bank, as it snakes deep inside the West Bank to encompass many Israeli settlements on the western side. In fact, 85 per cent of the wall runs inside the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, rather than along the Green Line.

The advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice — *Legal consequences of the construction of a wall in the occupied Palestinian territory* — issued on 9 July 2004, states that the construction of the wall was “an attempt to annex the territory contrary to international law” and that

“[t]he de facto annexation of land interferes with the territorial sovereignty and consequently with the rights of Palestinians to self-determination.”
(A/ES-10/273, para. 115)

When finished, the wall and the Israeli settlements, Israeli-only highways, closed military zones and so-called nature reserves are projected to cover 46 per cent of the occupied West Bank, effectively annexing them to Israel.

The 50 years of Israeli occupation have also witnessed numerous other illegal policies and human rights violations, including, inter alia, the demolition of Palestinian homes and other civilian structures, the confiscation of Palestinian land and the forced eviction and displacement of Palestinian families, the discriminatory allocation of water and restrictions on access to land and natural resources and on movement.

With regard to those policies and violations, the facts and figures speak for themselves. According to the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, 48,488 Palestinian homes and civilian structures have been demolished by Israel since 1967, either as a form of punitive measure or as collateral damage in military incursions, such as in the attacks on Gaza, and also

as a result of the fact that Israel has refused to grant building permits to Palestinians, who are then forced to build illegally on their own land and face demolition.

Since 1967, Israeli authorities have confiscated 1,018,127 dunums of land, which represents 20 per cent of the area of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. In that regard, it is worth noting that, on 15 April 2015, the Supreme Court of Israel reaffirmed the application of the Absentees' Property Law, which allows for the continued confiscation of property in East Jerusalem when its owners reside in other parts of the West Bank or in Gaza.

Most of Palestine's natural resources are located in Area C, which constitutes over 60 per cent of the West Bank. According to the World Bank, if Palestinians were able to freely and fully exploit their natural resources in that area, they would boost their economy by an estimated \$3.4 billion annually. Maybe then the Palestinian Authority would no longer need to rely on development or humanitarian aid.

As for water, Israel controls 100 per cent of the Jordan River basin and 80 per cent of water reserves in the West Bank — accounting for over 25 per cent of its water consumption. Since it laid its hands on the water resources of the West Bank in 1967, thousands of Palestinians have been prevented from developing their water infrastructure and have become dependent upon Israel for water. It is very telling to note that while on average each Israeli settler in the West Bank has access to 240-300 litres of water per day, Palestinians in the West Bank have access to only 73 litres.

Movement is restricted in the West Bank by almost 600 permanent checkpoints, roadblocks and earth mounds, let alone the hundreds of flying checkpoints — not to mention the bypass road network, defined by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs as

“a network of roads that are primarily for Israeli use and which connect Israeli settlements and other infrastructure to each other and to Israel. Palestinian vehicular access into these roads is either restricted or prevented and ultimately diverted. Consequently, these roads have become barriers.”

No wonder some non-governmental organizations have qualified those roads as “apartheid roads”. We also note that approximately 41,000 acres of Palestinian land

have been confiscated in order to sustain that network of 1,661 kilometres of apartheid roads.

Since 1967, an estimated 750,000 Palestinians — up to 20 per cent of the Palestinian population — have at some point been detained by Israeli authorities, including over 95,000 children, of whom 59,000 are likely to have been subjected to some form of physical violence. Acts of terrorism and violence by Israeli settlers, including harassment and intimidation against Palestinian civilians, have also escalated in recent years. However, impunity prevails when it comes to such acts, as only 1.9 per cent of complaints submitted by Palestinians with regard to settlers' attacks have resulted in any form of conviction.

We must now admit that our condemnations of all those illegal acts for 50 years in the Assembly, even when expressed in the strongest terms, have all failed to put an end to the continued Israeli occupation of the State of Palestine. It is high time that the United Nations move beyond mere condemnations in the Assembly. The Security Council should shoulder its responsibilities by enforcing its own resolutions relating to the illegality of the settlement activities and by calling for concrete measures to put end to the occupation of the State of Palestine, according to a clear and binding time frame.

To turn that into a reality, I would like to ask everyone to reflect on the following words of great wisdom, uttered by a great man, Bishop Desmond Tutu:

“If apartheid ended, so can the occupation, but the moral force and international pressure will have to be just as determined.”

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): Our debate on the Palestinian question, which is the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, coincides with the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People's celebration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. I welcome the work of the Committee to proclaim 2017 as the “International Year to End the Israeli Occupation” in the Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.

I also wish to thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his report (A/71/359) on this agenda item, entitled “Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine”, which sheds light on the suffering of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories owing to the flagrant and gross violations of international humanitarian law,

international law and human rights, and other practices by the occupying Power.

Today's report describes a regrettable humanitarian situation in the occupied territories, which should prompt us to act swiftly to help the Palestinian people, who are victims of the occupation, injustice and the belligerent policies of Israeli authorities attempting to change the demographic and geographic composition of the Palestinian territories through forced displacements, the confiscation of land and property and the flouting of international customs, including attacks on the sanctity of tombs.

Kuwait supports the efforts of the international community to reach a lasting and comprehensive solution to the Palestinian question based on the Arab Peace Initiative, international law and the relevant resolutions of international legality. We welcome France's initiative to convene an international peace conference that would lead to an international multilateral mechanism to eliminate the illegal settlements and Israel's occupation of Palestinian land, in the framework of the right of Palestinians to self-determination, thereby making it possible for the Palestinian people to establish an independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital, within the pre-1967 boundaries.

We must understand that the practices and policies imposed upon the defenceless Palestinians by the Israeli authorities in the occupied territories are illegal, as are the blockade on the Gaza Strip, which has been in force since 2007, the restrictions that prevent the free flow of persons and goods, and the confiscation of land. Those are all policies aimed at undermining a two-State solution and at entrenching the occupation.

In that regard, I would like to recall the State of Kuwait's principled position. The question of Palestine has always been a priority item at the United Nations, as it reflects the cause of a people who have suffered for decades from the occupation and have been deprived of their most fundamental rights, their dignity and their freedom. We pay tribute to the Palestinian people's stoicism and their struggle to secure their legitimate political rights, in particular the establishment of an independent State on their territory with East Jerusalem as their capital. We are in favour of setting a deadline for ending the Israeli occupation in the Palestinian territories.

Secondly, we condemn the continuation of the inhumane and illegal blockade imposed on the Gaza

Strip, which is a violation, among so many others by Israel, of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, in particular Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and Israel's obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. We call for the immediate end of the blockade.

Thirdly, we call for the freeing of imprisoned and detained Palestinians and the setting up of an international commission to establish the facts and conduct investigations on the situation in Israeli prisons in order to verify that Israel is respecting international law.

Fourthly, we are in favour of Palestine's request for full membership in the United Nations, as a step that would promote a lasting and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestine conflict. We also support Palestine's determination to accede to international organizations and conventions, as is its right.

Fifthly, we call on the international community, in particular on the Security Council, to provide international protection to the Palestinian people, who are defenceless against the Israeli war machine.

Sixthly, we call on all parties, especially those that sponsor the peace process in the Middle East, to continue the efforts that have been agreed on and to ensure that Israel abides by the norms of international law. In that context, we recall the responsibility that the United Nations and its bodies shoulder with regard to the Palestinian cause, including the equitable and comprehensive settlement of all relevant issues, in particular that of Palestinian refugees.

In conclusion, we urgently call on the Security Council to assume its responsibility, uphold its resolutions, hold Israel to its obligation to end its flagrant violations of international humanitarian law in the occupied territories and implement the relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), so as to achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Ms. Bahous (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the Chair and members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their important role and their ongoing work over the years in drawing international attention to the rights of the Palestinian people and their cause, while highlighting the injustice and suffering that they face.

Every year, we gather here in this Hall to draw the attention of the United Nations and the international community to the question of Palestine as we renew our commitment of continued support to ensure that the Palestinian people are able to exercise their inalienable rights, in particular their right to self-determination and the return of Palestinian displaced persons and refugees to their territory and property. Despite the importance of today's meeting, we are nevertheless preoccupied by the poignant situation on the ground and Israel's violation of the rights of Palestinians in the Palestinian occupied territories. I believe that requires something more substantial than celebrating a Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Rather, concrete measures should be taken to end the Israeli occupation and stop ongoing violations that threaten the viability of a two-State solution and undermine any possibility of achieving a lasting and comprehensive peace in the region. Settlement activities pose one of the major risks to such a peace that must be addressed, not to speak of the demolitions of homes, the displacement of Palestinians and the raids on holy sites. That is not only a red line for Palestinians and Jordan, but a set of issues that impedes a two-State solution.

I would like to renew our unconditional commitment to continue our legal and historical right to provide protection to the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Al-Haram Al-Sharif in coordination with our brothers in the State of Palestine on the basis of the historic Hashemite custodianship carried out by His Majesty Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein over Islamic and Christian holy sites in Al-Quds, and of Jordan's right to provide them with protection. We must stress the importance of today's meeting, because it confers political importance to effectively reaching a peaceful solution with regard to the Palestinian cause. That is especially relevant given that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is at the heart of tensions in the region and requires a lasting, just and comprehensive peace based on a two-State solution, as well as on international resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Despite the increasing international support for the Palestinian cause, Israel continues to ignore and remain indifferent to the determination of the international community to end the settlement activities, lift the blockade on the Gaza Strip and halt daily violations of Palestinians' rights. Owing to the current stalemate, we must redouble efforts and consider new proposals to ensure that Israel ends its occupation of Palestinian

territories. That is the only path that will lead to Israel's security and acceptance in the region. In that context, Jordan supports concrete international efforts, including measures aimed at building trust between the Palestinian and Israeli parties and a peaceful environment conducive to resuming substantive negotiations with the goal of achieving peace for both peoples.

We reaffirm the importance of providing protection to the Palestinian people, and we endorse the proposal that 2017 should be declared as the International Year to End Israeli Occupation. We reiterate the importance of Palestinian unity and reconciliation among the various Palestinian factions, which would eventually fulfil the requirements voiced by the international community, enabling independence and a viable future Palestinian State within the pre-1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The Palestinian cause does not mean only establishing a Palestinian State or ending the settlements. In fact, the destiny of an entire people is at the heart of the Palestinian question. We have to speak about their value and dignity as human beings, which deserve to be upheld. Jordan believes that the usurped rights of Palestinians must be recognized and restored to their legal owners. Every year we make further efforts in the various international forums to restore the rights of the Palestinian people and to put an end to their suffering. There is no denying the fact that the absence of justice, the ongoing occupation and oppression of the Palestinian people and the deprivation of their legal rights are some of the main causes of the spread of extremist ideologies that lead to terrorism.

Our support for the Palestinian people will not stop short on this International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The defence of their rights is at the heart of our regional and international efforts at all levels. Our solidarity with the Palestinian people, as we draw the attention of the world to their suffering and oppression, is not limited to those people who have remained in place. Attention must also focus on the millions who were forced from their homes and displaced from their lands and who became refugees or were displaced for decades. With that in mind, the international community must assume its responsibility and its ethical and humanitarian duty by ending the suffering of the Palestinians and ensuring their right of return and their entitlement to reparation, and by ending the Israeli violations and breaches of international law

and inducing Israel to implement the relevant United Nations resolutions.

Mr. Lal (India) I thank the President for convening this important discussion on the question of Palestine as we mark the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

May I draw attention to the message from the Prime Minister of India, Mr. Narendra Modi, which he issued on this important occasion. In his message, Prime Minister Modi reaffirms India's support for the cause of Palestine and its solidarity with the Palestinian people in their struggle for a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine living within secure and recognized borders, side by side and at peace with Israel and with East Jerusalem as its capital. He stated that India will continue to support the development and nation-building efforts of Palestine by extending technical and financial assistance. India has been actively helping Palestine in its reconstruction process through various kinds of project assistance. India also contributes annually to the fund of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). India recently increased its contribution to UNRWA to \$1.25 million. In addition, five projects undertaken in Palestine are being funded from the India-Brazil-South Africa Fund.

India reiterates its advocacy for a peaceful dialogue between Palestine and Israel, and is hopeful of its early resumption. On this important day, the Prime Minister has furthermore conveyed that our best wishes will remain with people of the State of Palestine on their journey towards achieving the objectives of a just cause.

Earlier this month, India's Minister of State for External Affairs, Mr. M. J. Akbar, visited Palestine for the first meeting of the India-Palestine Joint Commission. The Joint Commission will facilitate further cooperation in a range of sectors, including information technology, security, youth affairs and sports, education, health, agriculture, tourism and culture. During his visit, a foundation stone was laid for a \$12 million Palestine-India Techno Park project in Ramallah. The project aims to contribute to Palestine's economy, create jobs for Palestinian youth and facilitate expertise in the digital sector.

India appreciates the commendable work done by UNRWA over the past seven decades. India contributed \$4 million to the National Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan for Gaza. The Government of

India also helped set up two vocational training centres in Yatta and Hebron. The India-Palestine Centre for Excellence in Information Communication Technology and Digital Learning and the Innovation Centre in Al-Quds University, Abu Dees, and its satellite Centre in Ramallah are fully functional now and, in July 2016, the first group of students graduated from the Centre.

More than 12,000 Palestinians have so far graduated from Indian universities. India offers 100 training slots in a range of sectors annually to Palestinians. That is in addition to 25 scholarships for higher education. India has also offered training to Palestinian security forces, Palestinian customs officials and diplomats.

Regrettably, the security situation continues to deteriorate. The imperative need is for restraint and moderation. We firmly believe that dialogue is the only viable option in the search for a just, durable and comprehensive peaceful solution of the Palestinian issue. We hope that both sides will demonstrate the necessary political will to return to the negotiations.

Mr. Fazeel (Maldives): The Republic of Maldives expresses its continued appreciation to Mr. Fodé Seck, Permanent Representative of Senegal to the United Nations and Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, as well as to the Committee itself for the commendable work in the discharge of its mandate.

The Republic of Maldives expresses its grave concern regarding the escalating tensions in Palestine following the report (A/71/35) of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. The report covers the further deterioration of the security and humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, during the reporting period, from October 2015 to October 2016. The report also raised serious concerns about the protection of civilians, including children.

We have observed a series of worrying events and trends emerging since the upsurge in violence that began in October 2015 in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. During the escalation of violence, more than 230 Palestinians and 32 Israelis were killed. In addition, the report (A/70/836) of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict issued in April highlights the increasing number of Palestinian children arrested and detained by the Israeli occupying forces and prosecuted by juvenile military courts in the West Bank. At the end of 2015, 422 Palestinian minors under

18 years, of whom at least 116 were between the ages of 12 and 15, were being held in detention by the Israeli authorities. The response of the Israeli authorities to offences by Palestinian minors is frequently carried out with disproportionate and deadly force.

Violence begets violence. Situations of hopelessness, desolation and despair can breed only contempt, which will eventually be manifested in violence. Lasting peace will not, and cannot, be assured unless the hope of a peaceful future is secured now for all the children of the region.

Maldives condemns the continued use of administrative detention, punitive demolitions, movement restrictions and other measures that negatively affect the human rights of the Palestinian people on a continuous basis, as reported by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories. The Israeli occupying forces continued to carry out frequent military raids and incursions injuring and killing hundreds of Palestinians, including children, with more than 6,000 Palestinians held in Israeli prisons and detention centres.

Furthermore, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences has noted that specific groups of women in Israel, including women from the Palestinian minority, asylum seekers and refugees, face multiple forms of discrimination and heightened risk of violence. Israeli authorities have repeatedly rejected the request by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967 to conduct a mission to the occupied Palestinian territory. In addition, the Special Rapporteur notes in his report (see A/71/554) that the two preceding mandate-holders were similarly refused access. Maldives affirms that the missions of the special rapporteurs are essential for the comprehensive and independent fact-finding that is required for a true analysis of the human rights situation on the ground.

Maldives notes with concern the increasing number of house demolitions being carried out by the Israeli military offensive in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, and the development of new Israeli legislation to permit the confiscation of privately owned Palestinian lands and to enable more than 100 outposts in the occupied West Bank to be legally repurposed for Israeli settlement activity. Enacting that legislation could violate international law, while

undermining Palestinians' right to self-determination and violating their rights to property, freedom of movement and development.

Similarly, the situation remains dire in Gaza, where there is an urgent need to repair and rebuild the thousands of houses that have been damaged and destroyed. However, the continuing Israeli blockade of Gaza has prevented the long-overdue reconstruction there, and it continues to obstruct the movement of persons and goods, including access for critical humanitarian aid. Maldives therefore urges the United Nations community to identify concrete measures that could be taken to lift the blockade and allow the situation to improve.

Maldives welcomes the continuing work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in providing emergency humanitarian assistance in spite of serious financial challenges. In the past year, relief was provided to over 1.2 million refugees, primarily in the occupied Palestinian territory and in Syria. We urge the international community to support the agency in its humanitarian work.

Twenty-three years ago the first Oslo Accord was signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. Both entities recognized each other and laid the groundwork for a solution based on two independent States. However, the reality is that two years have passed since the process of negotiation was interrupted, and an indisputable marginalization of the two-State solution has ensued. Maldives calls on all the parties involved to work consistently to unblock the peace process. In order for the two States to coexist, progress towards reconciliation without preconditions is essential. Maldives is a firm supporter of the two-State solution and the recognition of a sovereign and independent State of Palestine based on the pre-1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, and it encourages the parties to resume direct negotiations in order to achieve lasting peace.

On 29 November, the countries of the world come together to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Maldives urges the international community to move beyond rhetoric, to take steps towards a genuine, lasting peace in the region and to steadfastly support the Palestinian people.

Mr. Rivero Rosario (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Before beginning my statement on the topic of this

meeting, I wish to express deep appreciation on behalf of my delegation, my Government and the Cuban people for the moving words and respect expressed with regard to the former President and leader of the Cuban Revolution, Head of State and Commander Fidel Castro Ruz. He was not only a friend, but a tireless warrior for self-determination and for the rights of the Palestinian people. I also wish to express our appreciation to the President of the General Assembly and to everyone present for the message and respect addressed to the Cuban people.

We wish to thank His Excellency Ambassador Fodé Seck, Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, for preparing the report (A/71/35) and for the opportunity to hear a statement by the Rapporteur of the Committee, Ambassador Carmelo Inguanez.

The numerous violations of international law, in particular humanitarian law and human rights law, committed by Israel, the occupying Power, since 1967 in its almost 50 years of foreign military occupation of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan, continued and increased during the period under consideration. Israel has deliberately and systematically maintained all of its illegal policies and practices, which have led to widespread human suffering and destabilized the situation. They have caused deaths and injuries among Palestinian civilians in a sustained cycle of violence; the arrest and detention of Palestinians, including children; the displacement and forced relocation of Palestinians; provocations and instigations, particularly in occupied East Jerusalem; and a wide-ranging network of collective punishment.

Israel has continued its campaign of establishing illegal settlements throughout the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Over the past year, the construction and expansion of settlements and the wall, the relocation of Israeli settlers and the confiscation of land and natural resources, the demolition of houses and the forced displacement of the Palestinian civilian population continued as before, and even intensified, which has contributed to the fragmented nature of the Palestinian territory and seriously affected the viability of the two-State solution based on pre-1967 borders.

The critical situation resulting from the blockade of the Gaza Strip by air, land and sea is mentioned in the report, which reflects the fact that the blockade is responsible for the near-total isolation and grave

privation of the 2 million Palestinian civilians who reside in the area. A serious humanitarian crisis persists in Gaza, and socioeconomic conditions are at their lowest levels since the occupation began in 1967, resulting in an extremely difficult and unsustainable situation that requires an immediate solution.

Cuba has historically maintained its firm support for, and solidarity with, the just cause of the Palestinian people, based on clear and unequivocal principles in favour of self-determination. We vigorously support all efforts aimed at promoting a just and lasting solution to the conflict between Israel and Palestine, which inexorably demands the genuine exercise of the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to build their own State within the pre-1967 borders with East Jerusalem as their capital.

Cuba reiterates its call for an end to the prolonged and illegal Israeli occupation of the occupied Palestinian territories, the immediate, unconditional and complete lifting of the cruel and illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip and the opening of border crossings and checkpoints, to give free access to humanitarian aid and to allow the movement of goods and people to and from the Gaza Strip. Israel's illegal actions constitute a grave violation of international law and again reaffirm the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and other Arab territories under Israeli occupation since 1967, requiring Israel's acceptance of the *de jure* applicability of the Convention. Israel's continuing implementation of such policies runs contrary to the objectives of the peace process.

In this scenario, it must not be forgotten that situations related to geography require solutions and can also affect the possibility of achieving peace. We need a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of the city of Jerusalem that takes into account the legitimate concerns of the Palestinian and Israeli sides, and that Israel's imposition of its legislation, jurisdiction and administration in Jerusalem and the occupied Syrian Golan is not only null and void, but contrary to a successful peace process. In that context, we consider it extremely necessary to continue working with the United Nations in seeking greater clarity within the international community regarding the persistent and growing dangers in Palestine and the Middle East of the failure to find a just and lasting solution to the conflict between the two countries.

The commendable work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People must continue. The Secretariat's Division for Palestinian Rights must maintain its useful and constructive contribution to forging an international consensus on the question of Palestine and the urgency of reaching a peaceful settlement of the issue. As our Minister for Foreign Affairs proposed today in his message in solidarity with the Palestinian people, the international community must therefore not remain impassive to such abuses and violations. We call on all States Members of the United Nations to make every possible effort to resume and support a process guaranteeing a comprehensive, just and lasting peace based on the two-State solution, within the internationally recognized pre-1967 borders and based on the Arab Peace Initiative.

Moreover, as the Cuban Minister indicated in his message, the Security Council must take practical steps without further delay to ensure that Israel ends its aggression against the Palestinian people and is held accountable for the crimes of violence, collective punishment, arbitrary detention, mass incarceration and genocide committed against that people. It must forthwith take action and accept the request for recognition as a State Member of the United Nations submitted by Palestine in 2011, in line with the desire expressed by the great majority of States. The historic debt to the Palestinian people is enormous and must be settled.

Cuba reaffirms its indefatigable solidarity with the Palestinian people and its determination to continue supporting them in their legitimate struggle for justice and dignity and in defence of their inalienable right to self-determination and sovereignty in the independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mrs. Rubiales de Chamorro (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the people and the Government of Nicaragua and President Commander Daniel Ortega Saavedra, we greet this day of 29 November, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Nicaragua associates itself with the statement made on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the report (A/71/35) introduced by Ambassador Carmelo Ingunez, Rapporteur of the Committee.

Following the triumph of our revolution in 1979, Nicaragua officially recognized the State of Palestinian, established diplomatic relations with its authorities, and strengthened the fraternal relations of cooperation and solidarity between our peoples, who have spent many years fighting for national liberation. We are proud to celebrate over four decades of friendship and solidarity in which Nicaragua has recognized the struggle of the Palestinian people as its own. We share the same suffering and the same oppression, and ever since Nicaragua attained peace we have committed ourselves to corresponding with the Palestinian people, continually recalling that in our most difficult times, they were always with us.

I should like to quote from the greeting of our President, Commander Daniel Ortega Saavedra, on the day of the anniversary of the independence of Palestine on this International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People:

"I take this opportunity to renew our vows of solidarity with the struggle of the heroic Palestinian people, which has stoically resisted aggression and the violation of their rights. We are confident that, with the help of God, it will very soon be possible to establish, through dialogue and negotiation, the basis for a lasting solution, the international recognition of Palestine and its full membership of the United Nations."

In solidarity, commitment and brotherhood, we welcome the Palestinian leaders' initiative to declare 2017 the year of the end of the occupation of Palestine, and reiterate our support for initiatives to ensure Palestine its right to a sovereign State, within the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and to enable the two States, Palestine and Israel, to coexist in peace, harmony and prosperity.

Nicaragua welcomes the initiatives of the Russian Federation, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Egyptian initiative and the French initiative. We regret Israel's refusal to participate in the peace conference, which demonstrates its lack of interest in a negotiated, just and lasting solution. It is imperative to put an end to the occupation and demand the immediate cessation of settlement construction, an end to the criminal blockade of Gaza and the total release of all Palestinian prisoners. The Security Council, obstructing the two-State solution through the use and abuse of the veto on the part of one of its permanent members, and

promoting Israel's impunity, continues to perpetuate the suffering of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories and of more than 5.5 million Palestinians refugees worldwide, whom we offer our full solidarity.

At the moment when the implementation of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Objectives are urgently needed, Palestine, like every other State, has every right to receive development aid and investment. But if we allow Israel's endless, vicious cycle of mass destruction and massacres to continue, the help of the international community will serve only to help that people eke out a survival. We encourage Member States to secure the necessary funds for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and to support the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in its efforts to meet the costs of the occupation.

Nicaragua and the State of Palestine recently signed in 2016 a memorandum of understanding to strengthen actions that benefit both peoples and Governments with a view to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and to strengthen peace and the rule of law, enhance communication and information technology, and promote health, education and the exchange of experiences among young people of both nations, which are very important.

We will continue to fight until Palestine enjoys its independence, sovereignty and freedom and is recognized, as it deserves to be, as a full Member of the United Nations.

Mr. García Moritán (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): Argentina wishes to make a statement concerning agenda items 34 and 35, "The situation in the Middle East" and "The question of Palestine", respectively, which my country follows with great concern.

Almost 70 years have passed since the establishment of the State of Israel and the adoption of resolution 181 (II), which established the Palestine Plan of Partition, and almost 50 years since the beginning of the occupation of the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Since then, we have seen numerous peace initiatives, from the Madrid Conference in 1991 to the failed attempt to resume negotiations in 2013, none of which have achieved a just, comprehensive and lasting peace on the basis of a two-State solution, with a State of Israel and a State of Palestine coexisting side by side in peace and security, on the basis of the 1967

borders and whatever the parties may determine in the negotiation process.

Despite the efforts made during these years, the situation continues to be characterized by recurring cycles of violence and intolerance, without a short-term horizon for progress. That is why it is urgent to renew efforts aimed at reversing the current negative trends on the ground through actions taken by both parties, as well as responsible and committed action taken by the Security Council.

Argentina reaffirms its support for the right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent and viable State recognized by all nations, as well as the right of the State of Israel to live in peace with its neighbours within secure and internationally recognized borders.

Argentina reiterates its concern about the persistent and continuing growth of illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories and calls for an end to their expansion. As the General Assembly has repeatedly indicated, the settlements are contrary to international law, obstruct peace, weaken the prospect of a two-State solution of States living in peace and security, and therefore promote the perpetuation of an unsustainable status quo.

Argentina considers it unacceptable for Hamas and other Palestinian groups to launch attacks against Israeli civilians. The launching of rockets against Israel from the Gaza Strip must cease immediately. My country strongly condemns all terrorist acts and is convinced that there is no military solution to the conflict, nor is there a solution that can be imposed by terrorist means. Palestinian leaders must sincerely address Israeli security concerns. At the same time, we note with concern that Israel's response to the situation is almost exclusively focused on the security dimension, including cases of excessive use of force by Israeli forces in the context of attacks and alleged attacks conducted by Palestinians and in combat, as well as in the continued violence of the settlers.

With regard to the situation in East Jerusalem, Argentina reaffirms the special status of Jerusalem in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions, and in that regard rejects any unilateral attempt to modify it, in particular with regard to the Old City, which has a special meaning for the three great monotheistic religions. My country believes that the Holy City should be a place of convergence and peace, and that free access to holy sites must be guaranteed for

faithful Jews, Muslims and Christians. Any attempt to deny or relativize the historical link and the profound meaning of those places for the three religions is completely unacceptable, does not contribute to the objective of finding a peaceful solution to the conflict, and reinforces negative prejudices and mistrust between the parties.

In a world that continues to witness cross-border terrorist acts, we believe that achieving a lasting solution to the Palestinian question would contribute significantly to providing stability to that part of the world, which is in such upheaval. That is why we deplore the inflammatory rhetoric of extremists on both sides.

Collective efforts are required for a two-State solution, as set out in the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and of the Security Council, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

My country's identity has been shaped by interaction among communities of different origins, ethnicities and religions, where Christians, Jews and Muslims live in harmony. It was Maestro Daniel Barenboim, an Argentinian-Israeli musician and a Palestinian by adoption, who in 1999 founded the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra to promote intercultural dialogue through music. In February, the Secretary-General designated the Orchestra as a United Nations Global Advocate for Cultural Understanding in recognition of its contribution to breaking down barriers and building bridges between communities. The Orchestra is proof that dialogue among different communities and cultures is possible and necessary.

Aware that nothing is easy and that nothing happens overnight, Argentina wishes once again to call on Palestinians and Israelis to resume peace talks, acting in good faith, with flexibility and in accordance with international law, with a view to reaching an agreement on outstanding issues concerning the final status of Palestine in all its aspects.

Mr. Paolino (Paraguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): As we commemorate another anniversary of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, Uruguay echoes the wish expressed by other Members of the Organization that we shall soon witness the long-sought peace that will allow that people to enjoy their legitimate right to be part of a sovereign and independent Palestinian State.

Almost 70 years ago, the General Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), which sought the partition of Palestine and the creation of an Arab State and a Jewish State. Uruguay strongly supported that solution and was convinced that it would allow Israel and Palestine to live in peace within secure borders. Today, Uruguay wishes to reaffirm once again the right of Israel and Palestine to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized borders, in an environment of renewed cooperation and free from any threat or action that could undermine peace. Uruguay also reiterates its support for a solution consisting of two independent States. We are convinced that this is the only way that will allow for the peaceful coexistence of Israel and Palestine.

Uruguay has strong ties of friendship with the State of Israel and with the State of Palestine. Their full membership in the Organization and their full enjoyment of the self-determination of their people are the logical consequences of the process that has been under way since it was recognized as a full-fledged State. It is a full-fledged State capable of completely eliminating terrorism from its territory and living in peace with the State of Israel and other States in the region.

In that belief, very early on Uruguay recognized the State of Israel and later, when we determined that the inconclusive process could not continue to drag on, the State of Palestine. Many other Latin American States did the same. Today, our country has embassies in Israel and Palestine, and both countries have embassies in Uruguay. It is crucial for the international community to step up its efforts, assist in the process and encourage the parties to return to the negotiating table in order to achieve a peaceful, fair, negotiated and lasting solution that is in line with international law and takes the interests of both nations into account.

In that regard, the parties must create the conditions necessary for the implementation of the recommendations of the most recent Quartet report aimed at resuming negotiations among them, as well as actions and policies that demonstrate their firm commitment to the two-State solution. In the same vein, the parties must refrain from adopting unilateral decisions that hinder dialogue and honour their obligations under international law.

Uruguay remains concerned about the decision of the Israeli authorities to pursue settlement construction.

Under international law, the settlements are illegal and run counter to the recommendations of the Quartet for Middle East Peace. Uruguay encourages the State of Israel to stop building illegal settlements, confiscating land and destroying Palestinian homes. Incitement to violence and the glorification of terrorist acts are equally worrisome. It is crucial for Israeli and Palestinian authorities to send clear political signals in order to break the vicious circle of misunderstandings and violent clashes that have plagued the region time and again.

More than two years since the last military conflict in the Gaza Strip, which ended tragically with thousands dead and injured amid widespread destruction of catastrophic proportions, the humanitarian situation remains intolerable and aggravated by a blockade that exacerbates the violence arising from the impatience and expectations of almost 2 million inhabitants who languish in poverty and unemployment and have very little hope for the future. Uruguay is concerned that if the current trend continues, the two-State solution will no longer be viable. For that reason, Uruguay reaffirms its willingness to continue working in order to resume the peace process through all existing initiatives to break the status quo and, in that way, make progress in the peace talks.

Mr. Dehghani (Islamic Republic of Iran): While we commend the United Nations system, the Secretariat and helpful and supportive Member States for their tireless efforts to reduce the plight of the Palestinian people, we note with grave concern the latest disturbing developments in the occupied Palestinian territory, as reflected in the documents under consideration today. We regret that the efforts made so far by the international community have mostly failed or proven inadequate due to the intransigence of the Israeli regime and its continued unlawful and criminal acts and policies against the people of Palestine.

For decades, year after year, the United Nations has condemned Israel for the various crimes it commits against Palestine and its people in the occupied Palestinian territory. But that occupying regime, which enjoys undeserved support from a handful of allies, continues to disregard and disrespect the persistent demands of the international community to abide by international law. It is unfortunate that a host of criminal practices and policies are being perpetrated by Israel with impunity and that the international community is yet to take any measure to address them.

The systematic violation of the rights of the Palestinian people, including the demolition of homes, the forced displacement of Palestinian civilians, the arrest and detention of Palestinians, including children and incessant violence, terror and provocations by Israeli settlers and extremists, including at sensitive religious sites, particularly Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, have persisted unabated. At the same time, the imposition of the illegal blockade on the Gaza Strip continues to cause massive deprivation and hopelessness and is fuelling a grave humanitarian crisis. As such, Israel deliberately and systematically violates each and every basic norm of international law, including international humanitarian law.

The increasing number of illegal settlements in Palestinian territory, which constitute not only grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention but war crimes, have long demonstrated that the Israeli regime has never had any interest in peace with the Palestinians. The adverse impacts of the Israeli occupation and violations of the rules and principles of international law are immense and have inflicted unbearable hardships on all aspects of the lives of the Palestinians, including from a socioeconomic perspective.

As in the past, the situation in Palestine requires urgent international attention and action. The continued illegal and brutal Israeli occupation not only causes much misery for the Palestinian people, but also lies at the origin of various tensions in the Middle East and dangerously inflames them in the region's volatile situation, with far-reaching and serious consequences for international peace and security. While Israeli criminal acts and policies are worsening and can trigger further crises at any moment, the extremely fragile situation on the ground must be seriously addressed to avert further destabilization.

Regrettably and despite the clear global consensus on the illegality of Israeli policies and practices on Palestinian territory, the Security Council continues to be paralysed, failing to uphold its obligations. That should change. The Security Council should shoulder its responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations and international law to compel Israel to respect the norms of international law, including international humanitarian law, and to end its war crimes and human rights violations against the Palestinian people and its illegal occupation of the Palestinian land and the plight of the Palestinian refugees.

I would like to conclude by reiterating the unwavering support of the people and Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the oppressed Palestinian nation. Once again, we assure them that we will do everything in our power to help them realize the cause of a free and prosperous Palestine.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker on this item for this meeting.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.