



General Assembly

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General Assembly
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18th plenary meeting

Official Records
Monday, 28 September 1998
3 p.m.

President: Mr. Opertti (Uruguay)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Mungra (Suriname), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

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The Acting President: The next speaker is His Excellency the Honourable Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the United Republic of Tanzania, whom I invite to address the Assembly.

Mr. Kikwete (United Republic of Tanzania): ...

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We regret that the situation in the Middle East continues to be characterized by tension and continued denial to the Palestinian people of their right to full self-determination and to a homeland of their own, due to the refusal by Israel to honour its obligations towards the peace process. The Israeli policy of territorial expansion, in utter violation of the letter and spirit of those commitments, stands to undermine the prospects for the permanent status negotiations leading to agreement for peace in the area. We call upon the Israeli Government to abandon its obstructionist policies and to resume dialogue. In this regard, my Government is encouraged by the high-level consultations which are currently taking place between the leaders of Palestine and Israel. We hope they will lead to overcoming the present impasse in the peace process.

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The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I give the floor to Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and elected President of the Palestinian Authority.

Mr. Arafat (Palestine) (*interpretation from Arabic*): For the first time,

Palestine is participating in the work of the General Assembly under the agenda item entitled "General debate". That participation is a result of the resolution adopted by the Assembly on upgrading Palestine's representation at the United Nations, which we consider to be an essential step towards full membership.

I would like, at this time, to express the deep gratitude of the Palestinian people to all Member States that supported this important resolution by an overwhelming majority. They have thus reflected the will of the States and peoples of the world for the need to realize justice for the Palestinian people in order to regain their international status and their seat at the United Nations.

I would like to extend to you, Mr. President, our sincere congratulations on your assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at the fifty-third session. I wish you complete success in your important and noble task during these crucial times in our contemporary world and in our international Organization.

I also extend our gratitude and appreciation to Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko for guiding and presiding effectively over the fifty-second session. I would like in particular to praise his leadership during the resumed tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly on illegal Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territories.

It gives me great pleasure to commend the Secretary-General of the United Nations, our friend Mr. Kofi Annan, for his distinguished and wise leadership, and I congratulate him for the many successes he has achieved in several fields. We had the honour, Mr. Secretary-General, of welcoming you a few months ago in our country, Palestine, where you observed and witnessed first-hand the tragedy of the Palestinian people and the suffering they endure as a result of the continuing Israeli occupation of our homeland, Palestine. It is my hope that we will have the opportunity to welcome you in the future under better circumstances: on the day when the occupation has been terminated and Palestine has been restored its freedom.

As we approach the end of the twentieth century, our world is witnessing - and all of mankind is experiencing - great changes and important events, from globalization and the problems of the international financial market to the technological revolution, satellite communications and the information age. All of the rapid changes that have rocked our contemporary world require the necessary enhancement of our collective work within the framework of the United Nations. This should be done on the basis of the purposes and principles of the Charter and for the bolstering of international cooperation in various arenas and for the acceleration of the North-South dialogue in order to establish a better world where peace, justice and prosperity for all mankind prevail.

Many of the difficult and complicated tasks in this regard have been forced upon us and we must deal with them effectively. We have before us the task of economic and social development - particularly that of the countries of the third world - solving the debt crisis and the problems of poverty, famine, disease and migration in Asia, Africa and Latin America. These challenges require the attainment of international comprehensive measures and equitable

relations that are more rational and more just. Many global problems - such as terrorism, drugs, epidemics and organized crime - require strengthening the rule of international law, as well as the establishment of the necessary institutions and mechanisms within the framework of the United Nations.

In this connection, we also welcome the adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court, which is an important step in the promotion of law and in putting an end to atrocities and crimes against humanity.

All of these challenges and responsibilities should not prevent us from recalling that many of the basic tasks of the international community in our contemporary world have not yet been accomplished. There are peoples who still remain under foreign occupation - including our Palestinian people, who have been and continue to be exposed to one of the gravest injustices. This great people did not commit a crime; they did not commit aggression against anyone nor did they occupy the land of any other people. However, they were the victims of aggression. Their land was occupied and they were dispersed and compelled by military force to a life in diaspora and exile. There are still 4 million Palestinian refugees living in camps awaiting the realization of international justice and the implementation of resolutions of international legitimacy to accord them justice and put an end to more than half a century of the tragedy of living in exile as refugees.

It is also necessary to exert more effort to resolve many of the regional conflicts and problems - including, of course, those in the Middle East; in the Balkan region, particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina; in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Special efforts and additional resources are necessary to solve the problems of the African continent in order to allow that great continent to move forward on the path of development and progress. These should include seeking to restore normal conditions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and achieving peace and stability in the Great Lakes region and the Horn of Africa.

It is also important to consider the issue of sanctions because of its terrible and destructive effects on peoples and on neighbouring States. Here I refer specifically to Iraq, Libya and Sudan. While we call for solutions to these problems and the lifting of sanctions on the basis of the implementation of Security Council resolutions, we cannot but express the feeling of many of us concerning the use of double standards in implementing this principle. In this regard, I would like to express our satisfaction with the progress that has been achieved, in particular with regard to the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

Finally, I turn to an extremely important question: the question of nuclear disarmament, weapons of mass destruction and non-proliferation. While strongly supporting the goals of the international community in this regard, we refer in particular to the immense problem existing in our region of the possession by Israel of such weapons, and its refusal to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and place its nuclear installations under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency. The small size of our region and its nature exacerbate the dangers stemming from the continuation of this situation. What occurred recently in South Asia must encourage us all towards sincere cooperation and a commitment to the application of one standard with regard to this issue.

In order to accomplish all of these things, we need a United Nations that is more effective. We support the efforts exerted by many States and the efforts of the Secretary-General in this regard. At the same time, we feel and believe that our goal must go beyond reducing expenditures, downsizing the Secretariat, streamlining the General Assembly and expanding the Security Council, though all of these are important issues. Our goal must go beyond that to achieve the complete democratization of this global Organization. In this context, it is necessary to enhance the role of the General Assembly and also to find solutions to the veto question in the Security Council, particularly its frequent and excessive use. Transparency and clear rules of procedure must prevail in the Council. At this juncture, I should like to remind the Assembly that since 1973 our question has been subjected to 21 vetoes in the Security Council by one of the permanent members of the Council, the most recent of which occurred in a period of less than two weeks. In short, it is necessary to secure for all Members of the United Nations the ability to contribute effectively on the basis of mutual respect.

Last May, the Palestinian people commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of Al-Nakba, the dispossession and the suffering of the Palestinian people. Despite all of these bitter years, the oldest and largest refugee question in our contemporary world remains unresolved, and our land still suffers under occupation and colonial settlement. Its natural resources are subjected to exploitation, and the city of Al-Quds al-Sharif is still being subjected to Judaization, land confiscation, the demolition of homes, the confiscation of identity cards from its inhabitants, the imposition of a certain demographic composition and artificial administrative measures. There is also the isolation of the city of Bethlehem and the conflict occurring in Al-Khalil - Hebron - and the rest of the Palestinian cities. Eight million Palestinians are still being deprived of their right to exercise sovereignty over their land, a right that the rest of the peoples of the world enjoy.

Despite all of this, despite the long and grave suffering and pain, and with long and legendary steadfastness, our Palestinian people have been able to survive and preserve their national identity. Our people chose the peace option and accepted the will of the international community in this regard. Accordingly, we decided with our Arab brothers to participate in the peace process, which began in Madrid in 1991. Then we took the well-known historical step leading to the Oslo agreement with Israel, which was signed at the White House in Washington, D.C., under the auspices of President Clinton, on 13 September 1993. That development carried the promise of an historic reconciliation and coexistence between the two peoples, the prospect of a new Middle East and the beginning of the establishment of a comprehensive and permanent peace in the region.

Indeed, all parties realized tangible achievements, and the Palestinian people were able to start building their institutions and dealing with the destructive consequences of the long years of occupation. In particular, they held general and democratic elections and established the Palestinian National Authority. Despite all of the difficulties that confronted the process, the general trend to forward progress continued, until the peace process was dealt a severe blow by the assassination of the late Yitzhak Rabin, my partner in the peace process - the peace of the brave - by an Israeli extremist. This was followed by other blows resulting from the bombings and the grave deterioration of the living conditions of our people and deliberate acts to destroy the peace.

When the Government of Benjamin Netanyahu took office in Israel, a new chapter began with its adoption of general political guidelines that were not consistent with the existing agreements. The Government publicly tried to discard the principles of the peace process - Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and the principle of land for peace. It ceased implementation of the existing agreements with the exception of the redeployment in Al-Khalil, which was achieved only after intensive American efforts. The Israeli Government continued to prevaricate and refrained from honouring the obligations of the transitional period, which are of great importance to our people, including the safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the airport, the seaport; the release of Palestinian prisoners and detainees in Israeli prisons, and the industrial zones. Neither the first stage of redeployment, which was supposed to begin on 7 March 1997, nor the second stage, which was supposed to begin on 7 September 1997, were effected. Both of these, along with the third redeployment - the deadline for which has also been missed since the middle of this year - should have led to the withdrawal of the Israeli army from 90 per cent of our land.

Moreover, this Government's policies of economic suffocation, closure and direct oppression of our people - which costs us about \$10 million a day - constitute an economic catastrophe. The Government has continued with the intensification of settlements and the Judaization of Jerusalem, the isolation of Bethlehem and the old city of Al-Khalil, and the disapproval of the operation of the Palestinian airport, safe passage, industrial zones and the seaport, in order to escalate the suffocation and siege of our people and to destroy the peace process.

All of these policies and positions adopted by the Government of Mr. Netanyahu have caused the current dangerous situation and the complete stalemate in the peace process on the Palestinian track, as well as on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, which have been completely stalemated. These policies and positions have also engendered the general tension prevailing in the region and the danger of descending into complete chaos. The whole world has expressed grave concern at this and has called upon the Israeli side to change its policies and positions and to comply with the bases of the peace process and implement the existing agreements.

It is high time for the international community, in adherence with international law and in service to peace, to effectively and tangibly pressure the Israeli side to realize the goals of peace, security and stability - not only in the Middle East but internationally. This means implementing the agreements that were signed at the White House under the auspices of President Clinton by the Russian Federation, the United States of America, the European Union, Norway, Egypt and Jordan and in the presence of Japan. It means implementing Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and the principle of land for peace, which were the bases of the Madrid Peace Conference.

With the hope of halting the deterioration of the existing situation, the Palestinian side, in cooperation with many of the concerned parties, has recently sought to intensify efforts, particularly with the help of the United States co-sponsor - and especially with the help of President Clinton, to whom we express our gratitude. These efforts resulted in the United States initiative, containing all of the important pending issues, that was submitted

to the parties concerned. As delegates are aware, the Palestinian side accepted this American initiative despite the fact that it did not meet our minimum just and legitimate demands. But the Israeli side still rejects this initiative and continues in its attempts to undermine it and pre-empt its contents. President Clinton, thankfully, sent Secretary of State Albright and Mr. Dennis Ross, who have made great efforts to move the peace process forward and protect it.

Despite all these efforts, the Israeli Government has not responded. Hence, we call upon the United States co-sponsor to announce its initiative and to publicly and clearly put the onus on the party that is impeding peace. We also call upon the United States to continue to work effectively in a manner consistent with its responsibilities to the peace process and with its interests and credibility in the Middle East region, and so as to protect the region from the dangers emanating from the destruction of the peace process.

This morning, President Clinton graciously took an important step to save the peace process and to move it forward by convening a meeting at the White House between the Palestinian and Israeli delegations. This was an important meeting to promote and preserve the peace process, and we thank President Clinton for that, particularly as the efforts of the United States will continue to move the process forward and promote the implementation of the signed agreements.

In this context we call upon the other parties concerned, particularly the Russian Federation in its capacity as one of the two co-sponsors of the peace process, as well as China and Japan, to activate and intensify their efforts. We also call upon the European Union, with its economic and political interests and capabilities, to move quickly and effectively to salvage and safeguard the peace process. In this same vein, we call upon all Member States to support the French-Egyptian initiative to convene an international conference of all States determined to save the peace process from the dangerous crisis it has reached.

We have not lost hope for the peace process, and we will continue to honour our obligations in accordance with the existing agreements. At the same time, we will not give up on the necessity of Israeli compliance with those agreements and the need for the Israelis to fulfil their pending obligations. We will not give up our inalienable national rights - the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people.

At this stage, I wish to extend, on behalf of the Palestinian people, our deep gratitude to all the donor countries and to the World Bank for their valuable contributions aimed at alleviating the suffering of our people and at assisting them in building and developing their homeland and at achieving meaningful economic and social development. I reiterate our gratitude to these countries and the World Bank, particularly because they are contributing despite the obstacles and impediments imposed by Israel in this regard.

It is so difficult to separate the United Nations from the question of Palestine, for this international Organization has been dealing with our cause since its inception. It was the United Nations which partitioned Palestine, and to this time it has not ceased to deal with the results of the events that followed, with the repeated and increasing injustices perpetrated against our people, for which no remedy has yet been found. While reaffirming the

permanent responsibility of the United Nations for the question of Palestine, we appeal to all of you to enhance your solidarity and support for our people in the coming period, through these critical circumstances, on the basis of respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter, international law and international humanitarian law.

We expect that the Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 will be convened before the end of this year on measures to apply the Convention to the occupied Palestinian territory, including Al-Quds al-Sharif, in accordance with the recommendations made repeatedly by the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

In this context, we also expect Israeli participation in the work of the fifty-third session of the Assembly to be in conformity with international law, thus ensuring that Israeli credentials do not cover those territories determined by the Security Council and the General Assembly, since 1967, as occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including occupied East Jerusalem. This is a matter on which there is a consensus by the international community.

From this venue, I would like to call upon all of you, the source of international legitimacy and peacemaking, the guardian of freedom, security and stability and the source for the achievement of justice and prosperity for humankind, to stand by our people, especially as the five-year transitional period provided for in the Palestinian-Israeli agreements will end on 4 May 1999. Our people demand that we shoulder our responsibilities, and they await the establishment of their independent State. This independent Palestinian State must be established as an embodiment of the right of our people to self-determination. I assure you that our people will continue to pursue and protect the peace of the brave in the Middle East. We appeal to you to continue your support for us, as always in the decisive moments of the history, the present and the future of our people. Help us to achieve the national goal of our people in the establishment of their State.

It is not admissible for Israel to continue dominating the Palestinian people. Everyone is aware that 100 per cent peace means 100 per cent security and 100 per cent freedom. One hundred per cent freedom. I repeat - 100 per cent peace, 100 per cent security and 100 per cent freedom. One hundred per cent freedom. If the Israeli Government wants reciprocity, I declare from this podium my demand of them for mutual compliance with the signed agreements, especially in the fields of security and the protection of Palestinians and Israelis against all forms of violence and terrorism and its sources. I invite the Israeli Government to engage in common, serious work between us to address that. There is no alternative to peace. Help us to achieve it.

In the year 2000, the past and the future will meet in Palestine, joined by a global vision of hope and peace for all peoples of the world. On that occasion, the world will celebrate the second millennium of the birth of Jesus Christ - peace be upon him - and the beginning of a new millennium. It is a religious and spiritual occasion of great importance not only for the Palestinian people and the region, but also for all the believers in the world, as well as for the entire international community. The Palestinian people have actually begun serious preparations to celebrate this important religious, historic and international occasion, with the cooperation of many religious, political and social institutions concerned. We call upon you to

join us in bearing the responsibility of these preparations, and we invite you to participate directly in the forthcoming celebrations to start together, God willing, a new march.

In this regard, we appreciate the addition by the General Assembly of a new item on its agenda entitled "Bethlehem 2000". We also extend our thanks to the Chairman and members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their initiative in this regard. I also take this opportunity to thank its sister Committee, the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People.

I look forward to speaking to you once more when Palestine will have taken its natural place in the community of nations, as an independent State, and when peace will have prevailed in the land of peace and in the entire Middle East.

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The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ahmed Attaf, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Algeria.

Mr. Attaf (Algeria) (*interpretation from Arabic*): ...

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The Israeli Administration, by reneging on commitments made in Oslo and Washington, by abandoning the principle of land for peace, by continuing its settlement policy and by repeatedly attacking the integrity and sacredness of Al-Quds Al-Sharif, has led to the undermining of the peace process, rekindling the frustrations and anger of the Palestinian people and threatening the entire region with a return to the era of confrontation which prevailed there for more than 40 years.

In order to deal with this perilous situation, we must recall that the just, comprehensive and lasting settlement to the conflict in the Middle East requires the full and unconditional withdrawal of Israeli forces from all the Palestinian and occupied Arab territories and the exercise of the right of self-determination by the Palestinian people, including the establishment of its own State with Al-Quds as its capital.

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The Acting President: I call on His Excellency Mr. Momodou Lamin Sedat Jobe, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the Gambia.

Mr. Jobe (Gambia): ...

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About the Middle East, we are disappointed that the peace process, which gave so much hope, has virtually collapsed. This undesirable state of affairs does not diminish our faith in the peace process. We recognize the right of all peoples to self-determination. We therefore respect the rights of the Palestinian people to emerge fully as an independent sovereign State. In this

context, we welcome the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 52/250 on the participation of Palestine in the work of the United Nations. We look forward to the day when Palestine joins the ranks of other States as a fully-fledged Member of the United Nations.

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The Acting President: The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan, His Excellency Mr. Muratbek Imanaliev, on whom I now call.

Mr. Imanaliev (Kyrgyzstan) (*interpretation from Russian*): ...

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Kyrgyzstan is seriously concerned by the armed conflict that has lasted for almost two decades in Afghanistan. We are also seriously alarmed at the military confrontation and the grave humanitarian situation in Kosovo, the situation in Africa and the absence of progress in the Middle East, Cyprus and the Korean peninsula.

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The Acting President: I now call on the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, His Excellency Mr. Choe Su Hon.

Mr. Choe Su Hon (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) (*spoke in Korean; English text furnished by the delegation*): ...

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The delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea appreciates the efforts of the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America to develop regional and subregional cooperation in the spirit of collective self-reliance. We also support Syria and other Arab countries in their just struggle to seek a fair and comprehensive solution to the Middle East problem and appreciate the efforts of the countries of Africa to promote peace, security and development there.

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The meeting rose at 7.35 p.m.