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### **SPEAKERS IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY URGE ISRAEL, PALESTINIANS TO SEIZE NEW HOPE PRESENTED**

#### **BY JANUARY 2005 ELECTIONS FOR WIDER MIDDLE EAST PEACE**

Proclaiming new hope for the Palestinian-Israeli peace process ahead of elections set for 9 January 2005 to choose a successor to late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, United Nations diplomats today urged Israel and its Arab neighbours to take stock of fresh chances for wider Middle East peace.

As the General Assembly concluded its annual consideration of the question of Palestine, and opened its discussions on the overall situation in the Middle East, speakers described these early days in the post-Arafat era as a prime opportunity for the Palestine people to unite and launch democracy from within, which would be vitally important to future peace efforts. Most hoped that once the election was concluded, Israel would move ahead with its planned withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank.

And while delegations from the Arab world acknowledged the profound implications of the coming ballot, they recognized the need to move quickly -- but not arbitrarily -- keeping the ultimate goals in sight: creation of an independent Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital, and securing the right of return for refugees. Israel was urged to live up to its on-the-ground responsibilities and to refrain from undermining the election in any way and to ensure the freedom of movement of all Palestinians wishing to take part in the historic process.

China's representative was among those who declared that the Palestinian people would continue to maintain their unity and ensure a successful ballot. And while the global community should provide the necessary assistance, Israel should facilitate the general public to freely participate in the elections and adopt measures to improve the humanitarian situation. Under the current circumstances, it was necessary for both Israelis and Palestinians to exercise utmost restraint, avoid taking any action that might jeopardize the restart of the peace process, and try to do more to enhance mutual trust, he said.

"We sincerely hope that the political leaders of both Israel and Palestine will demonstrate extraordinary courage and farsightedness by seizing this window of opportunity and working vigorously for the early resumption of peace talks", he said, urging both sides to reiterate their commitment to the Road Map and adopt effective measures to fulfil their respective responsibilities. Now was the time for the international community, especially the diplomatic Quartet -- the United States, the United Nations, the Russian Federation and the European Union -- to be more proactive to accelerate the implementation of the peace plan by both sides.

When the discussions turned to the wider Middle East, the Palestinian Observer said the situation in the region remained a matter of grave concern for the entire international community. "But the core of the problem is, of course, the question of Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict", he

said, stressing that looming over the region were decades of “unprecedented injustices” that had been inflicted on an entire people, with no end in sight.

And the problems did not end there, he continued, spotlighting the situation in Iraq and the many crises on the region’s periphery, coupled with the failures to ensure democratisation and social and economic modernization. The Middle East was also being threatened by “dangerous ideological visions” and policies promoted by powers outside of, but involved in, the affairs of the region, which encouraged such “nonsense” as the existence of a cultural divide between the Arab world and the West, and the notion that terrorism was a product of Islamic extremism and that the only means of eliminating it was by force.

Another “dangerous concept” was that there could only be a negotiated solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, he said. While there was nothing wrong with negotiation on its face, the apparent aim in this case was to negotiate away relevant provisions of international law and to neutralize the United Nations, particularly the Security Council. “All of this is nonsense”, he said, “and we must revert to basics — adherence to international law and engagement by the international community and its institutions in defining, in a clear and binding manner, the broad parameters of the settlement if we want to resolve the question of Palestine and achieve peace in the region.”

Israel’s representative stressed that peace in the region would not be fashioned in New York and Geneva, but in Ramallah and Jerusalem. Israel recognized that it had obligations to fulfil, but it was not alone in that regard. Every peace initiative that had succeeded, had done so only when the rights and responsibilities of all sides had been recognized. Thus, while Israel had been compelled to advance the disengagement plan in the absence of a partner for peace, it continued to hope that the plan could be coordinated and serve to jumpstart the Quartet’s Road Map.

The Middle East had once been a global centre of progress and source of wisdom, he acknowledged, but the peoples of the region had suffered dictatorial rule too long. Democratic reform, tolerance, coexistence and respect for human rights constituted the fundamental building blocks for peace, stability and prosperity in the region. Governments that glorified murder as martyrdom could not at the same time foster peace and good-neighbourliness; only by encouraging a culture of democracy and mutual tolerance would the seeds of peace be sown. There must be a rejection of the tactics of terrorism and the ideology of hate.

As the Assembly considered the situation in the Middle East, the voices of the region’s moderates — individuals who looked for democracy and respect for human rights, as well as peace - - must be heard, he added. Holding that it was in dialogue that hope was born and progress achieved, Israel had always recognized the needs of its neighbours to live in peace and prosperity and had reached out to all those genuinely committed to peace.

In other business today, the Assembly, on the recommendation of its General Committee, added to its agenda a sub-item on providing development assistance to poor mountain countries and allocated it to the Second Committee (Economic and Financial).

Also, the representative of Egypt, on behalf of the Arab Group, introduced two draft resolutions, respectively on Jerusalem (document A/59/L.39), and on the Syrian Golan (document A/59/L.40).

Also addressing the Assembly today were the representatives of Japan, Tunisia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Lesotho, Bangladesh, Namibia, Oman, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Cuba, Norway, Iran, Viet Nam, Guinea, Indonesia, India, Venezuela, Libya, Canada, Bahrain, Netherlands (on behalf of the European Union and associated States), Jordan, Syria, Pakistan, United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, Switzerland, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Russian Federation, Cuba, Australia, Ukraine, Argentina, Kuwait and Burkina Faso.

The representative of the Inter-Parliamentary Union also spoke.

Speaking in exercise of the right of reply was the representative of Iran.

The Assembly will reconvene tomorrow, 1 December, at 10 a.m. to conclude its consideration of matters related to the situation in the Middle East, and to act on a number of draft resolutions.

### Background

The General Assembly met this morning to continue its debate on the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East. (For background, see Press Release GA/10306 issued on 29 November.) It was also expected to take up the fifth report of the General Committee contained in document A/59/250/Addendum 4.

### Statements

KOICHI HARAGUCHI (Japan), expressing heartfelt condolences on the passing of Yasser Arafat, said that the international community must now grasp the opportunity presented by that turning point, and make every effort to move the peace process forward in accordance with the Road Map. In that regard, the most important challenge was ensuring a successful election of the President of the Palestinian Authority, through the cooperation of the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority. He welcomed ongoing consultations between the two parties toward that end and said Japan intended to contribute to the process.

He said it was vital that a new Palestinian leadership, committed to peace, be elected with wide-ranging support from Palestinians and that it establish a responsible governing structure which could control extremists. Israel must cooperate by resolving such issues as voting by residents of East Jerusalem and the lifting of restrictions on movement. He welcomed Israel's plan for disengagement from Gaza and parts of the West Bank, saying it should be done in conformity with the Road Map and in close coordination with the Palestinian side. He reiterated the need for two States coexisting side-by-side and outlined Japan's continued support for efforts to achieve that end.

ALI HACHANI (Tunisia) said he wished to convey his country's sympathy to the Palestinian people on the loss of their President, and reaffirm the importance of the forthcoming elections. The Government of Israel must not hamper those elections, but must remove restrictions on all Palestinians -- including those living in Al-Quds -- so that they could participate in the elections. Regarding the construction of the separation wall, which had caused much destruction, he noted that the construction was contrary to international law, as decided by the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Also noting that the cycle of violence had continued in the region over the past year, he stressed that, without political will, peace would not be achieved. Emphasizing the importance of world solidarity with the Palestinian people, he called upon the international community to intervene to protect the Palestinian people, and to end the unilateral measures imposed against them.

There must also be increased support to find a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, he underscored. A return to peace and recognition of the national rights of the Palestinian people would guarantee the peaceful coexistence of all peoples in the region. The international community, and the United Nations in particular, had an ongoing responsibility to the Palestinian people and must continue to play its political role in resolving the question of Palestine, including for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital. Israel must also withdraw completely from all occupied Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan.

OUNSENG VIXAY (Lao People's Democratic Republic) regretted the lack of progress in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, where the peace process had reached a deadlock. In order to break that impasse and the violence that had gone on unabated, the concerned parties needed the help of the international community, particularly the Quartet, to move forward towards a final peace agreement. In that regard, he called on the Quartet to continue its political and diplomatic efforts that supported and promoted negotiations between Israel and Palestine. He urged the parties to engage in serious dialogue that would lead to the settlement of the conflict and realization of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace within secure and internationally recognized borders.

He said peace and stability in the Middle East would not be achieved unless the Palestinian issues were resolved in a just and reasonable way. In that context, he reaffirmed his support for the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, including the right to their own independent State. The numerous obstacles in the path to peace should not deter efforts to reach the light of peace that was at the end of the tunnel, he observed, adding that he strongly believed that dialogue rather than confrontation would bring sustainable peace and security to all.

LEBOHANG K. MOLEKO (Lesotho) said all the parties to the conflict must adhere to the principles of international law, chiefly the recent decision of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which held that Israel's construction of a separation barrier in Gaza and parts of the West Bank was illegal and must cease. His delegation was concerned by the lack of progress in the peace process, and stressed that the Quartet-backed Road Map was the best way forward. Lesotho would call on the parties to reopen negotiations on that peace plan as soon as possible.

It was also Lesotho's view that Israel's plan to withdraw from areas inside Gaza could not succeed unless it was undertaken in full cooperation with the relevant representatives of the Palestinian Authority. Finally, he said that the best tribute to the memory of the late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat would be for the international community to redouble its efforts and join with the Palestinian people to help them achieve his lifelong dream of a two-State solution to the conflict, and peace and stability in the region.

IFTEKHAR AHMED CHOWDHURY (Bangladesh) noted that the International Day of Solidarity had always been the occasion for deep reflection on the painful tragedy being enacted in Palestine. This year, the observance had been particularly poignant given the recent death of Palestinian President Yasser Arafat. President Arafat had symbolized the causes of freedom and liberty for many people worldwide, and it was sad to note we would now not see his efforts come to fruition. Yet, one should also note that the Secretary-General had called for even greater efforts to bring about a peaceful resolution to the conflict, and Bangladesh wholeheartedly endorsed that call.

An independent Palestinian State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, must be established, he affirmed. Yet, the construction of the separation wall had further problematized the situation. All parties must realize that peace in the Middle East would only come about as a result of a negotiated solution. Finally, he noted that one of the elements common to the experience of all Palestinians and Israelis was a yearning for peace. From the holy lands, the three great faiths of peace had emerged; there was no better moment to adhere to the precepts of peace.

JULIUS ZAYA SHIWEVA (Namibia) conveyed deep sympathy to the people of Palestine on the passing of Yasser Arafat. He said that the basic human rights of Palestinians, including that of self-determination, were being denied by an illegal occupation. Expressing deep concern over the killing of both Palestinian and Israeli civilians, he said the cause of such violence was the repressive laws of the occupation, including disproportionate use of force, extra-judicial killings and construction of the separation wall. The resolution regarding the wall should be implemented without delay.

Commending the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices in the occupied Palestinian and other Arab Territories, he said that Israel was presenting both agencies with enormous difficulties. He reiterated the call for the unconditional implementation of the Road Map as the only viable way toward a peaceful solution to the question of Palestine.

WANG GUANGYA (China) said Chairman Arafat's life-long dedication to the restoration of the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people would forever be remembered by the people of the world. The key to achieving a lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East depended on whether the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people could be restored. History over the past five decades clearly showed that only peace negotiations, and not military means, could lead to a fair and appropriate solution. Presently, the peace process was at an important juncture. Therefore, it was important for the parties to seize the opportunity, make concerted efforts and create conditions for an early resumption of the negotiations.

China believed the Palestinian people would continue to maintain their unity and ensure the successful holding of the elections set for early next year. The international community should provide the necessary assistance for the elections, and Israel should facilitate the general Palestinian public to freely participate in the elections and adopt measures to improve the humanitarian situation. Under the current circumstances, it was necessary for both Israel and the Palestinians to exercise utmost restraint, avoid taking any action that might jeopardize the restart of the peace process, and try to do more to enhance mutual trust, he said.

At the same time, the two sides should reiterate their commitment to the Road Map and adopt effective measures to fulfil their respective responsibilities. "We sincerely hope that the political leaders of both Israel and Palestine will demonstrate extraordinary courage and farsightedness by seizing this window of opportunity and working vigorously for the early resumption of peace talks", he said. Now was the time for the international community, and especially the Quartet, to make greater efforts and to be more proactive in accelerating the implementation of the Road Map by both sides.

He added that comprehensive peace in the region could not be achieved without appropriate solutions to the conflicts between Israel and Syria and between Israel and Lebanon. He hoped the countries concerned would start negotiations as early as possible and seek mutually acceptable solutions in accordance with the principles set out in the Madrid Conference.

ZAWAN AL-AKHZAMY (Oman) said there was no doubt that today's meeting had acquired even more importance in light of the ongoing struggle of the Palestinian people and the cycle of violence that persisted in the wake of nearly 50 years of Israel's oppressive brutality and collective punishment. Israel's practices were beyond all imagining, and the duty of the international community was clear: it must call on Israel to cease such practices and abide by relevant Security Council resolutions and international law.

Peace could not be achieved through violence. It was a strategic option and an expression of the political will of the parties to seek a just and comprehensive settlement. She said that the hopes of Oslo and Camp David had evaporated, and it was time to reinvigorate the peace process, chiefly under the guidelines set out in the Road Map. She called upon the international community to support peace efforts in the Middle East. That could not be accomplished unless the right of the Palestinian people to live in an internationally recognized, independent State was achieved.

AMINU B. WALI (Nigeria) noted that the situation in the Middle East remained one of the most intractable problems on the United Nations agenda. The continued violence clearly violated the Oslo and Madrid Accords. Moreover, given the continued violence, the international community must not allow the wanton destruction of life and property to continue, as nothing meaningful and durable had ever been achieved through violence. Thus, consistent with relevant Security Council resolutions, he urged the parties to back their efforts for peace with concrete action and called upon them to meet their obligations under international law and international humanitarian law.

Also calling upon the United Nations, and the international community, to facilitate the resumption of negotiations, he reiterated support for the vision and engagement of the Quartet in negotiating a workable peace for the parties, and reaffirmed support for Security Council resolution 1515 (2003). He also welcomed the Secretary-General's suggestion to establish a third-party mechanism to help end the violence and foster development in the region. The vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side-by-side in peace in secure and internationally recognized borders, must be realized.

He also reaffirmed the objective of peace between Lebanon and Israel, and Syria and Israel. Deploping recent reports of violations of territorial integrity, he called upon the parties to avoid such violations, and affirmed the importance of implementing the relevant Security Council resolutions as essential to establishing lasting peace in the region.

BERNARD GOONATILLEKE (Sri Lanka), expressing condolences on the passing of Yasser Arafat, read a statement of solidarity with the Palestinian people from the President of his country.

He said the continuation of the illegal occupation and its repression were the primary reasons for the continuing violence in the area. He called for the ejection of violence by all parties, Israeli withdrawal, recognition of the rights of Palestinians and the recognition of the right of all parties to live in peace.

Sri Lanka, he said, had long supported the rights of the Palestinian people and the rights of States in the region to secure and recognize borders. He said Israeli practices were of deep concern to the international community. Cooperation on the election was an encouraging sign, however, and he hoped that it could lead to revitalization of the Road Map. He urged the international community to redouble their efforts to assist the parties to follow that peace process, in order to achieve peace in the region.

RODNEY ALEJANDRO LÓPEZ CLEMENTE (Cuba) said that Yasser Arafat's vision would materialize in the creation of a fully independent Palestinian State and in the return of all refugees to their place of origin, from which they had been expelled in an "unpunished genocide" that had persisted for more than 50 years. All those struggling to achieve a better world recognized the noble warrior, Mr. Arafat, the late symbol of the Palestinian people's fight for self-determination. But everyone should be clear that the arbitrary detentions, the razing of homes and the destruction of property continued, intensifying the already desperate situation of the people of the occupied territories.

While Cuba condemned the brutal practices of Israeli forces in and around Gaza, it also condemned the continued suicide bomb attacks perpetrated against Israeli civilians. At the same time, Cuba also opposed the manipulation of such isolated acts to question the legitimate defence by the Palestinian people and to justify the actions against Palestinian people and lands. All parties to the conflict must abide by international norms and international humanitarian law. Even in the face of countless Security Council resolutions and the continued call of the international community — most recently witnessed in the decision of the International Court of Justice, which found that Israel's construction of a separation barrier in the occupied territories was illegal -- Israel continued its attempts to totally destroy the heroic attempts of the Palestinian people to exercise self-determination.

Israel and its main supporter, the United States, continued to ignore international law, he said. Indeed the United States had a "shameful" record, having vetoed some 29 Security Council resolutions on the matter. In order to advance the cause of peace, the United States must cease to use the threat of veto in the Council, and, on the ground, immediately suspend all financial military support to Israel. Cuba, subjected to a 45-year-old economic blockade by the United States, was certain that no wall, no siege, nor the most inhuman atrocities could weaken the aspirations of sovereignty and independence for Palestine.

JOHAN LØVALD (Norway) said he was encouraged by the way the Palestinian Authority had handled the situation following President Arafat's illness and death. The transition of power was taking place in an orderly and lawful manner. He fully supported the process preceding the Palestinian presidential election scheduled for 9 January 2005. He urged the Israeli Government to take necessary steps to make the elections a success. Israel's intention to withdraw from Gaza and four settlements in the West Bank was encouraging, he said, adding that the withdrawal must be coordinated with the Palestinian Authority. It must also be implemented in line with the Road Map and the United Nations resolutions, and support the two-State solution to the conflict.

The peace process' success would also depend on radical improvements in the Palestinian economy, he continued. Donor fatigue was growing and economic normalization would help improve relations with donors. The international community must ensure that Israel's withdrawal was conducive to revitalizing the Palestinian economy. In that regard, abolishing Israel's closure regime was essential. He urged Israel to lift all closures and permit normal trade flows. The Palestinian Authority also had a major responsibility in improving the political and economic situation and must fight terrorism in accordance with the Road Map. The Palestinian leadership had made important headway in the reform process and should continue along those lines, particularly concerning police and security.

The situation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem continued to deteriorate, he continued. Norway respected Israel's security concerns. However, it could not accept the construction in the West Bank of a separation wall, additional Israeli settlements and a separate road network for settlers' access. Such constructions violated international law and impeded a peaceful solution to the conflict.

MEHDI DANESH-YAZDI (Iran) noted that this year's debate on the question of Palestine was being held at a truly critical hour, while the Palestinian people continued to mourn the loss of their President. Also affirming the importance of holding free and fair elections, he said the United Nations, and the international community, must continue to support the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people. The Government and people of Iran thus reaffirmed their solidarity with the people of Palestine in achievement of their inalienable rights, including for the establishment of a national homeland and the comprehensive and just resolution of the Palestinian question in all its respects.

Israel's actions over the past year had resulted in an unprecedented deterioration in the situation of the Palestinian people, he stressed. Breaches of international law and international humanitarian law had continued unabated; more and more Palestinian civilians had been killed, and Palestinian property and land destroyed. The indiscriminate use of force by the Israeli Army and practices of collective punishment, extrajudicial killings, targeted assassination and the expansion of settlements constituted grave breaches of international norms and principles, which served to convince Palestinians that Israel did not truly believe in peace.

More than half a century since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II), and despite various Assembly and Security Council resolutions, the Palestinian people had yet to exercise their legitimate right to self-determination. The question of Palestine continued to constitute the core of the Middle East conflict. Until it was resolved, instability and tension would continue to plague the region. It was high time for the international community to take measures to protect the Palestinian people, and to help bring to an end the brutal occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories by Israel.

NGUYEN DUY CHIEN (Viet Nam) said the reports of the Secretary-General and the Palestinian Rights Committee provided an alarming picture. Achieving a final and peaceful settlement on the question of Palestine was imperative for the attainment of comprehensive and lasting peace as well as stability in the Middle East. The present complex situation in the Middle East made it urgent for the concerned parties to end violence and advance the peace process. Regional peace could only be achieved through the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including self determination, national independence and sovereignty of their State. He reaffirmed the solidarity of the Vietnamese people and Government with the Palestinian people in their just cause towards the establishment of an independent State and supported every effort in that direction.

"We endorse in particular, the position of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People that the Quartet and the international community should intensify their engagement as a matter of urgency to help parties to commence their obligations under the Road Map", he said. That would provide a way to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), as well as the principle of two-State solution to the conflict, where Israel and Palestine live side-by-side within secure and recognized borders. He supported the four draft resolutions introduced yesterday on the question of Palestine.

MOHAMED CHERIF DIALLO (Guinea) expressed his country's condolences to and solidarity with the Palestinian people upon the loss of their President. President Arafat's death constituted an enormous loss to all peoples who loved freedom and justice throughout the world. However, the maturity with which the Palestinian people had reacted to their loss should also be emphasized. Urging the new Palestinian leadership to persevere in the path charted by President Arafat, he reiterated the importance of remaining faithful to Mr. Arafat's principles. He also appealed to Israel to facilitate the holding of the Palestinian presidential elections on 9 January 2005, and to help establish and consolidate the new Palestinian Authority.

Guinea had always been among the vanguard concerning themselves with the question of Palestine, he noted, and remained deeply concerned about developments in the region over the past year. It was regrettable that no significant progress had been witnessed in implementation of the Quartet's Road Map in past months. Moreover, he condemned all recourses to violence, and noted that Israel's determination to proceed with construction of the separation wall stood at variance with the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, as elucidated in the Road Map. The Palestinian people continued to be denied their right to exercise full sovereignty in an independent State. It was also regrettable that Israel was dragging the region towards ongoing instability. The Israeli plan to withdraw from the Gaza Strip must be negotiated with the Palestinian Authority, and must constitute an element of the Road Map.

REZLAN ISHAR JENIE ([Indonesia](#)), offering condolences to the Palestinian people on the death of Yasser Arafat, expressed continuing solidarity with them. He said the reports before the Assembly all showed that the situation in Palestine continued to worsen. Israeli practices had resulted in more suffering for Palestinians, exacerbated by the construction of the wall. The Palestinian economy was in tatters and the Road Map had been sidelined.

He said that, for the peace process to be restarted, Israel must submit to the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, abide by international law, halt the construction of the wall, comply with the Geneva Convention and comply with its obligations to protect civilians. The United Nations must move to halt the suffering of the Palestinian people and insist that Israel abide by resolutions. He called on the international community to support free and fair elections and, more importantly, the establishment of an independent Palestinian State in 2005, as projected by the Road Map.

NIRUPAM SEN ([India](#)) said his delegation reaffirmed its solidarity with the fraternal Palestinian people and their struggle towards self-determination. It was therefore deeply concerned at the ongoing violence in the occupied territories during the past four years, which had cost thousands of lives on both sides of the conflict. The economic situation in both Israel and Palestine had been severely affected. The decision to hold elections had been in the best tradition of smooth transition of power. During the critical run up to the ballot, Israel must refrain from actions that could undermine trust, including settlement activity. It must ease restrictions on the movement of persons and goods and ease the humanitarian situation. The international community must also be fully involved with the election process to ensure that the ballot was conducted in the best possible circumstances.

He said that it was clear that most Palestinians and Israelis seemed to be interested in reopening the peace process after four years of violence. With that in mind, Israel's withdrawal plan should seek to achieve the overall aims of a comprehensive and just peace, and should be negotiated in accordance with international law and in coordination with the relevant representatives of the Palestinian Authority. The international community must press for a just solution to the conflict. India also believed that moving ahead on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks was a logical next step in resolving the wider Arab-Israeli conflict.

IMERIA NÚÑEZ DE ODREMÁN ([Venezuela](#)), conveying solidarity with the Palestinian people on the passing of Yasser Arafat, confirmed her country's recognition of the rights of those people to self-determination. She said that they must be allowed to hold transparent elections that conveyed their will. The continuing violence and the failure of peace efforts in the region, she said, were not the fault of President Arafat and the Palestinian people, and were due in part to the inaction of the international community, which now must redouble its efforts to ensure that the Palestinian people were able to exercise their rights to self-determination.

AHMED A. OWN ([Libya](#)) said he wished to commend the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for their efforts since its establishment. Also noting that three generations had now dealt with this issue on the agenda of the United Nations, he deplored that the international community had witnessed the failure of all attempts to find a solution to the question of Palestine. Instead, there had been increased suffering on the part of the Palestinian people, including due to the use of indiscriminate and excessive force by the Israeli Army and the construction of the separation wall.



Any attempt to impose a fait accompli upon the Palestinians would not serve to provide a solution to the question of Palestine, he said. Faced with such attempts, the Quartet's Road Map would come to the same end as all other attempts to resolve the conflict; Israel would bulldoze the Road Map as it had bulldozed Palestinian roads. The ideal solution to the question of Palestine constituted the establishment of a democratic State of Palestine in which Arabs and Jews could coexist, as in South Africa after the end of apartheid. That was the only solution for the two peoples, both of which insisted on inhabiting the territory of Palestine.

ALLAN ROCK (Canada) said the prospects for peace were rapidly opening up in the Middle East, and even though there had been outbreaks of violence and loss of life, there was hope for real progress on the peace front. Canada appealed to both Israel and the Palestinian Authority to focus on the goals of peace. The international community must likewise be prepared to act so as not to miss this burgeoning opportunity. Canada was pleased with the actions of both sides to put in motion the process for the holding of free and fair elections and an overall resumption of the broader negotiation process.

Detailing Canada's policy on the situation in the occupied territories, he said the international community must recognize Israel's right to live in peace and security with its neighbours. Canada supported Israel's right to protect itself but stressed that such actions must be proportionate means and in line with international law, particularly international humanitarian law. At the same time, Canada supported the Palestinian people's right to self-determination, as well as their aspirations to live in a secure, peaceful and independent State. He added that a just solution to the Palestinian refugee issue was also central to the overall settlement. Still, violence on both sides continued to undermine efforts to achieve overall peace. All acts of violence — both those associated with Israel's continued construction of a security barrier in parts of Gaza and the West Bank, as well as continued suicide bombings and killings of civilians — would never lead to a comprehensive settlement.

Canada had long-standing concerns on many of the resolutions that annually came before the Assembly on these matters, he said. The texts did not contribute to furthering dialogue or to enhancing trust between the parties. Indeed, the objectives appeared more rhetorical than results oriented. And those objectives appeared to be divisive, no matter how artfully they were written. Indeed, Israel's security concerns were often overlooked, as were calls for the Palestinian leadership to reign in extremists, or to make concrete efforts to reform Palestinian political and administrative institutions. Canada sought a more innovative approach in the drafting of the texts, ensuring that they were reality-driven and contained concrete follow-up mechanisms.

Canada would oppose two of the drafts under consideration today — respectively on the Special Committee Investigating Illegal Israeli Practices and on The Palestinian Rights Committee. The value added by consideration of the texts was questionable, and for many years, neither had enjoyed the broadest support of the international community. Canada believed that the time had long since come -- especially given the renewed hope for the peace process -- to determine whether United Nations efforts to promote that process should be re-evaluated and if more could be done to foster trust and dialogue between the parties. The Organization could play a greater role in the spirit of collective effort and cooperation, he said.

F.M. VALLERSNES, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Committee on Middle East Questions, called on all Middle Eastern parties to end all violent attacks that had resulted in numerous civilian deaths. He further condemned targeted assassinations and suicide bombings, which encouraged violence and diminished prospects for reconciliation, and called on Israelis and Palestinians to resume political negotiations for a common future. He also called on Israel to stop building settlements in the occupied territories, erecting barriers on Palestinian territory, policing the civilian population, and conducting extrajudicial killings. While affirming Israel's unequivocal right to live within secure borders, he called for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State.

In January 2001, he said, his Committee had facilitated direct political dialogue between the two concerned parliaments, the Palestinian Legislative Council and the Israeli Knesset. Since then, the Committee had organized parliamentary delegation meetings in the region and at IPU

headquarters. Last year, the concerned parties had created a working group representing political parties in each parliament to address specific issues at each meeting. During a recent trip to the region, the IPU Secretary-General had received clear indications that both the Legislative Council and Knesset were ready to intensify dialogue, and looked forward to organizing meetings in the early part of next year. Stressing that no solution could be found to the conflict through arms, he said only direct political dialogue could achieve real peace.

#### Statements on Situation in Middle East

AMR ABOUL ATTA (Egypt) introduced draft resolutions related to the status of Jerusalem and the occupation of the Syrian Golan, deploring that tension and conflict continued to characterize the "hotspot" of the Middle East. It was regrettable that the cradle of religion continued to suffer from foreign occupation of its lands, since 1967. The Israeli occupation of Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese lands had contributed to a worsening of the regional situation. The international community must deal with the situation with the maximum seriousness in order to settle the Arab-Israeli conflict.

On the drafts specifically, he noted that the first concerned the status of Jerusalem, referencing relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions. The second draft concerned the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan and Israel's continued violation of Security Council resolution 497 (1981). Noting that all Arab leaders had confirmed that peace had become their strategic option, and that the Arab side had chosen to pursue a peace based on justice, he stressed that the international community must redouble its efforts to implement the Quartet's Road Map.

A failure to solve the region's problems today, he concluded, would only lead to more problems down the road. It was regrettable, he added, that Israel continued to reject serious Syrian offers to resume negotiations.

Finally, he stressed that the draft on Jerusalem confirmed the terms of reference of preceding General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, and referenced the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the construction of the separation wall. He also read out several revisions to the text on Jerusalem.

TAWFEEQ AHMED ALMANSOOR (Bahrain) said that for more than four decades, the Assembly had been dealing with the same question. There was clearly a stalemate in the Middle East, which was continuing to get worse because of the Israeli occupation of Arab territory and Israeli terrorist practices. Despite international calls for Israel to end those practices and the occupation, it continued to daily, in a blatant manner, commit brutal acts using helicopters and tanks in an indiscriminate manner.

It was clear, he said, that Israel had its own norms that differed from international norms and was creating a fait accompli through the use of force. In that way, over the decades, it had generated more hatred than any other entity in the world. The spread of settlements, in particular, increased the brutality of the occupation, as Israel continued to impose its will on the Syrian Golan and parts of Lebanon. It had been reaffirmed again and again that there was no legal status to the settlements, and Israel's actions were a blatant violation of international law. Arab States had chosen peace as a route to resolving the question of the Middle East and ending the Israeli occupation.

DIRK JAN VAN DEN BERG (Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the European Union and associated States, welcomed the Knesset vote on 26 October to support an Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and part of the northern West Bank. The European Union had expressed its willingness to support such a withdrawal as a first step in the overall process, in accordance with the conditions laid out by the Union in March 2004, including that it take place in the context of the Road Map.

The European Union had endorsed the short-term programme of action in the fields of security, reforms, elections and economy proposed by the High Representative. It underlined in

particular its readiness to support the electoral process in the Palestinian territories. "We call on the Palestinian Authority to organise elections in accordance with international standards under the authority of an independent electoral commission, and upon Israel to facilitate these elections", he said. Those initiatives would need full cooperation from and between parties, as well as coordination with other partners involved, especially in the region -- particularly with Egypt and within the Quartet. "We reiterate our readiness to support the Palestinian Authority in taking responsibility for law and order", he said.

In the current difficult circumstances, the Union would work with Israel, the Palestinian Authority and the international community to contribute to realizing the aspirations of the Palestinian people and achieving a two-State solution, with both Israel and Palestine living side-by-side peacefully with secure and recognized borders. He stressed that both parties could count on the undiminished support of the Union on the path towards a peaceful, durable and just settlement of conflict.

DAN GILLERMAN (Israel) said that, as the General Assembly considered the situation in the Middle East, the voices of the region's moderates -- individuals who looked for democracy and respect for human rights, as well as peace -- must be heard. Holding that it was in dialogue that hope was born and progress achieved, Israel had always recognized the needs of its neighbours to live in peace and prosperity and had reached out to all those genuinely committed to peace. On the basis of those principles, peace had been concluded with Egypt and Jordan.

Peace in the region would not be fashioned in New York and Geneva, he stressed, but in Ramallah and Jerusalem. Israel recognized that it had obligations to fulfil, but it was not alone in that regard. Every peace initiative that had succeeded, had done so only when the rights and responsibilities of all sides had been recognized. Thus, while Israel had been compelled to advance the disengagement plan in the absence of a partner for peace, it continued to hope that the plan could be coordinated and serve to jumpstart the Quartet's Road Map. The international community must recognize that its every step must be judged on the basis of whether they pushed the parties closer to the negotiating table; once more this year, the draft resolutions had not done so. Israel would be forced to vote against them.

The Middle East had once been a global centre of progress and source of wisdom, he acknowledged, but the peoples of the region had suffered dictatorial rule too long. Democratic reform, tolerance, coexistence and respect for human rights constituted the fundamental building blocks for peace, stability and prosperity in the region. Governments that glorified murder as martyrdom could not at the same time foster peace and good-neighbourliness; only through encouraging a culture of democracy and mutual tolerance would the seeds of peace be sown. There must be a rejection of the tactics of terrorism and the ideology of hate.

The obstacles on the road to a peaceful and prosperous Middle East were many, he concluded, and his country could only make peace with those countries open to it. Organizations such as Hezbollah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, as well as their State sponsors -- Syria and Iran -- continued actively to support terrorist activity in violation of their most basic legal and moral obligations. They had worked to turn the region's worst fears into reality. As Lebanon continued to flout its basic obligations to prevent cross-border attacks, and as Syria continued to exert control over Lebanon, Hezbollah became a more potent force. It continued to intensify efforts to undermine the emergence of a stable and responsible Palestinian leadership.

Furthermore, he continued, Iran's support did not just pose a regional threat, but a global one. Iran's malignant nuclear intentions threatened London, Paris, Berlin and southern Russia, as well as Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. The nexus between terror and tyranny, between terror groups, State sponsors and weapons of mass destruction must not be ignored; the international community must confront those opposed to peace. Without such action, moderates in the region would have no chance to succeed.

ZEID RA'AD ZEID AL-HUSSEIN (Jordan) expressed his condolences to the Palestinian people for the loss of President Yasser Arafat, and reaffirmed his country's commitment to realizing the vision of United States President George Bush, of two independent States, Israel and Palestine,

living side-by-side in secure and internationally recognized borders. In order to attain that goal, the forthcoming elections for the presidency of the Palestinian Authority must be conducted in an appropriate manner, and both parties must respect their commitments under the Quartet's Road Map peace plan. Israel must stop construction of the separation wall, as well as all other actions contrary to the Geneva Conventions, while the Palestinians must further reform their institutions and security structure.

The international community, he added, must facilitate implementation of those commitments. It was time to resume the path to peace outlined in the Road Map. Jordan would support Israel's plan for disengagement from Gaza, on the condition that it be coordinated with the Road Map and include a withdrawal from the West Bank. Finally, all Member States should respect the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice concerning the separation wall.

FAYSSAL MEKDAD ([Syria](#)) said Israel's continued occupation of parts of Palestine and the Syrian Golan was a gross challenge to international law and the inadmissibility of seizing land by force. The failure of the international community to end the Israeli occupation of Arab territories and the violation of international law threatened world peace. No desired peace could be achieved unless Israel withdrew from the occupied Syrian Golan. But instead of complying with the logic of rights and peace, Israel had used all methods to confiscate lands and evict people. It had also imposed its administrative and legal jurisdiction on occupied lands, colonized the Golan Heights, brought in settlers from all over the world and deprived Syrians of their fundamental rights and freedoms. Some 500,000 Syrian refugees were still waiting to go back to their homes. Israel had occupied 96 per cent of the Golan and, among other things, buried chemical and nuclear waste on it.

Syria had extended its hand to Israel on many occasions to resume the peace process, in accordance with United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace, he said. Israel, however, had hampered the peace process that had emanated from the Madrid Conference by its continued occupation of Arab territories. "Why is this peace eluding us? Who is responsible for the barriers? Which party shirks from the serious steps towards peace and just resolutions? ...Which party fabricates pretexts?" he asked. Which party was trying fervently to annex and organize occupied territory, as well as change natural history? Arabs had demanded nothing more than the implementation of United Nations resolutions.

But what had Israel done? It had continuously refused to implement any of those resolutions, he said. The United Nations had made considerable efforts to find a just solution to the Arab/Israeli conflict and had adopted hundreds of resolutions that had all been defied by Israel, who instead occupied territory in Lebanon and Syria and wreaked havoc and mayhem against the Palestinian people. While some were ready to take immediate action when any facet of international law was violated, nothing had been done in the face of Israel's violations. Those double standards were not acceptable. Many now believed that Israel was a State that was above the law. Peace could only be achieved by Israel's withdrawal from all Arab territories and adherence to all relevant United Nations resolutions, as well as the principles of the Madrid Conference.

NASSER AL-KIDWA, Observer for Palestine, said the situation in the Middle East remained a matter of grave concern for the entire international community. That region — the cradle of civilization, filled with historical and religious importance — continued to suffer instability and wars. It was a situation that threatened to ignite a confrontation of civilizations and religions. The core of the problem was, of course, the question of Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict, he said, stressing that looming over the region were decades of "unprecedented injustices" that had been inflicted on an entire people, with no end in sight.

Other serious dilemmas had flourished in the shadow of that core problem, including the occupation of Arab territories, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the escalation of tensions and the rise of extremism. And the problems did not end there, he continued, spotlighting the situation in Iraq and many crises on the region's periphery, coupled with the failures to ensure democratisation, and social and economic modernization. With the overall situation in the Middle East continuing to deteriorate, as the policies and actions of important powers seemed to be controlled by dangerous "ideological visions", there must be a serious discussion of those concepts with a view to finding solutions to the region's problems.

One of those “dangerous concepts” was that there could only be a negotiated solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, he said. While there was nothing wrong with negotiation on its face, the apparent aim in this case was to negotiate away relevant provisions of international law and to neutralize the United Nations, particularly the Security Council. Another dimension of that problem was the insistence that the Palestinian side build democratic institutions and “clean house” as a prerequisite for progress on the peace front. That concept aimed at changing the nature of the conflict from one of national liberation to one of an internal Palestinian matter. Moreover, of course, it constituted the “mission impossible” of building State institutions while under foreign occupation.

“All of this is nonsense”, he said, “and we must revert to basics — adherence to international law and engagement by the international community and its institutions in defining, in a clear and binding manner, the broad parameters of the settlement if we want to resolve the question of Palestine and achieve peace in the region.” Another dangerous concept was that there existed a cultural divide between the Arab world and the West, and that Muslims and Arabs hated the West, particularly the United States, “simply because of what the West is”. That was also nonsense, he said, but it was dangerous nonsense used by certain forces to push towards a clash of civilizations and religions. What was urgently needed was a serious reconsideration of policies relating to the Arab-Israeli conflict in order to address that problem.

Another dangerous concept was that terrorism was a product of Islamic extremism and that the only means of eliminating it was by force. The phenomenon of terrorism was an old one, which fed upon itself, and religious extremism was not just among Muslims. A victory over those phenomena could not be achieved without addressing the surrounding environment and depriving extremists of the reasons for mobilization and recruitment. Once again, the issue here was one of unjust and biased policies that were destroying the presence and future of millions of people. All that did not constitute an attempt to evade the responsibilities of Arabs and Muslims in the region. But it did point to the recognition that a great deal of responsibility fell to those forces involved in the region and whose policies, in one way or another, were the cause of many of its problems. Lasting peace required a fundamental change in the Israeli position to accept and commit itself to the two-State solution, based on pre-1967 borders and relevant provisions of international law.

MUNIR AKRAM (Pakistan) said the problem in the Middle East and Palestine was one that had been created by the use of force and foreign military occupation — all in contravention of international law. President Yasser Arafat symbolized the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people against foreign occupation. Pakistan shared the grief of the Palestinians and their conviction that the ideals Arafat struggled for would be achieved sooner rather than later. But his death had created a void that would be filled quickly and the Palestinians had responded swiftly and sagaciously by the decision to hold elections on 9 January 2005 -- a move that would put Palestinian political life back on track.

The organization of elections under foreign occupation, however, would be difficult, if not impossible, especially played out against the backdrop of assassination and imprisonment of key Palestinian political figures, illegal settlement activity, as well as the continued construction of the illegal separation wall, he said. It was the responsibility of the international community to uphold the Charter and international law. That community must monitor the response of the occupying forces to Palestinian efforts to revive peace and political processes. Restrictions imposed should be lifted to allow all Palestinians to participate in the January election.

Israel should immediately release all political prisoners, enabling them to participate in the political process, he said. It should also take concrete steps to improve the humanitarian situation and respect international law. Further, that country should suspend settlements, while the Palestinian territories in Gaza must be treated as a single entity. The Gaza disengagement plan must be the first step towards the release of Palestinian territory.

ABDULAZIZ NASSER AL-SHAMSI (United Arab Emirates) said the Middle East had suffered too many devastating wars and an endless cycle of violence since the end of the Second World War. Such would not have occurred but for the establishment of Israel in 1948. Since its establishment, that State had continued to occupy and confiscate the land and natural resources of

its Arab and Palestinian neighbours. It had used its military power to eject the Palestinians, replacing them with Jewish immigrants. Moreover, despite United Nations activities for decolonisation and assistance in the exercise of the right to self-determination, the conflict in the Middle East remained unresolved, due to Israel's continued disregard for international humanitarian law and international legitimacy.

The Palestinian question lay at the core of the situation in the Middle East, he affirmed. A just, lasting and comprehensive peace would only be achieved when the international community exhibited the necessary political will to bring pressure to bear upon the Israeli Government to withdraw from all the Palestinian and Arab territories it had occupied since 1967, and to end the daily oppressive acts it continued to commit against the Palestinians. Among its priorities, the international community must condemn Israel's illegitimate settlement schemes and demand their immediate removal. It must develop a mechanism by which to monitor that State's compliance with its international obligations, as stipulated in the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Israel must also respect the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, he stressed, and immediately cease its construction of the separation wall. The illegality of the administrative and judicial measures taken to change the Arab identity of Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the Syria Golan must be stressed and all Member States must refrain from relocating their missions to Jerusalem until that city's final status was determined. The international community must also call upon the Quartet to take measures to oblige Israel to resume negotiations, and to implement all its commitments under the Road Map within a specific time frame. The Road Map should also be extended to incorporate the Lebanese and Syrian tracks.

IBRAHIM ASSAF (Lebanon) said Israel's ongoing occupation of the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank, which had deprived the Palestinian people of their right to self-determination and hampered refugees' right to return to their homes, was at the core of the problems in the Middle East. And although Israel now occupied over 65 per cent of the Palestinian lands, it attempted to explain away its actions by describing the occupied territories as merely "disputed". Still, the fact remained that Israel was an occupying Power.

Israel had also been occupying the Golan Heights since 1967, displacing nearly 1 million inhabitants with settlement colonies for about 20,000 people. It had also refused to give back maps that would have identified the placement of thousands of landmines, thus rendering farmlands useless. Further, its fighter planes continued to fly over Syrian and Arab territories on a daily basis.

The only way to achieve any progress, was for the international community to ensure that Israel obeyed international law, lived up to its obligations and withdrew from all Arab lands. Such pressure had become particularly important since Israel continued to defy calls to resume peace negotiations, particularly under the Arab peace process.

PETER MAURER (Switzerland) said that the spiral of Middle East violence continued to claim innocent Palestinian and Israeli lives, and the humanitarian situation was still deteriorating in the occupied Palestinian territory. In the current context of change, he called on both the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government to take all necessary measures to ensure unrestricted participation in the crucial upcoming elections. Switzerland was willing to provide support to both presidential and communal elections. Those elections and the resulting government would create an opportunity to resume negotiations on the final status of a future Palestinian State.

Toward that end, he said that confidence-building measures were needed by both sides: the Palestinian Authority should do everything in its power to combat terrorism, and the suffering of the Palestinian people resulting from the occupation should be alleviated. Strict respect for international humanitarian law by both parties was an absolute requirement. Israel had the right to protect its people but the excessive use of force and the building of new settlements were obstacles to peace. Concerning the wall and other matters, Switzerland, as the depository State of the Geneva Conventions, was mandated to conduct consultations on the advisory opinion of the ICJ and would in due course inform the Assembly of the results.

Switzerland, he said, supported the principle behind the Israeli withdrawal plan if it was

coordinated with the Palestinian Authority, Egypt and the Quartet; if it did not result in the transfer of residents to Israeli settlements in the West Bank; and if it was understood as a stage in the implementation of the Road Map toward satisfying the legitimate aspirations of both the Israeli and Palestinian people. In addition, it would be appropriate for Israel to facilitate reconstruction in Gaza. In conclusion, he urged the international community to encourage the parties to the conflict to grasp the current moment of opportunity and resume negotiations toward a peaceful two-State solution.

RASTAM MOHD ISA (Malaysia), welcoming the concerned parties' intentions to revive the Road Map, said such a revival still depended on Israel's willingness to cooperate in many areas, the first of which was to ensure, as the occupying Power, that the Palestinian presidential election could proceed in January in a calm, secure and peaceful environment. He urged the international community to support the new Palestinian leadership following the elections in their struggle towards the establishment of a viable, sovereign and independent State and in their efforts to come to the negotiating table. Regarding the occupied Syrian Golan, he said he supported Syria in asserting its legitimate demands and rights to restore its full sovereignty over the area. He also reaffirmed the legitimate right of Lebanon to liberate the remaining parts of its territories under Israeli occupation. The presence of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) continued to be pivotal in ensuring that peace and security would prevail in the area.

He remained concerned over the situation in Iraq, as discontent there could create further complications in many countries. The widespread insecurity and violence in Iraq formed the greatest impediment to a successful transition, he said. The Iraqi people must be convinced that foreign forces would leave within an early and clear timeline and that their freedom and independence would be assured. The United Nations should be given the central role in Iraq in creating the necessary environment for the January elections. Given the unsettled and dangerous situation in the Middle East, he urged the parties concerned to seek a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict based on the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, the principle of land for peace, the Arab peace initiative and implementation of all existing agreements towards comprehensive peace in the Middle East on all tracks.

SAEED H. S. AL-JOMAE (Saudi Arabia) said everyone knew that the situation in the Middle East had deteriorated due to the policies carried out by Israel against the unarmed Palestinian people, which had demonstrated Israel's practice of State terrorism. The question of Palestine continued to be the crux of the Arab-Israeli conflict, he affirmed, and included the situation of Palestinian refugees currently living in other Arab countries. The right to return, or to compensation if they chose not to do so, must be respected. Moreover, Israel continued to occupy other Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon. Israel must withdraw completely from all Syrian and Lebanese territories, in compliance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Israel refused to submit its nuclear facilities to international inspection, he noted, and to agree to the principle of a nuclear-weapon free zone in the Middle East. The international community must do its utmost to oblige Israel to accede to the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The only solution to the Middle East conflict lay in respect for international legitimacy, he concluded, including through complete withdrawal from all territories occupied by Israel since 1967 and respect for the rights of the Palestinian people.

ALTAY CENGİZER (Turkey) said that the Road Map was still the most important document that could break the current stalemate between Israel and the Palestinians. He stressed his country's misgivings about the construction of the separation wall. For normalization on the ground, the ICJ's advisory opinion should be taken into account. Furthermore, the wall could in no way be regarded as a means to prejudice the final negotiations on the borders of Palestine. Likewise, the unilateral initiative of the Israeli Government to disengage from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank had the potential to be counterproductive, unless it was planned and implemented carefully and in coordination with the Palestinians and in accordance with the Road Map. Only a full and complete withdrawal from the Gaza Strip that would also lead to the end of the occupation of the West Bank could pave the way for an independent and sovereign Palestinian State.

Another challenge before the international community was the coordination of the numerous

steps that lay ahead, he said. Therefore, it was crucial to sustain support for reforms in the Palestinian Authority, which would eventually form the administrative and institutional structure of the future Palestinian State. At the end of 2003, Turkey had launched an action plan to increase and diversify its assistance to the Palestinian people. This year, it had started implementing that plan in the areas of health, technical and vocational education, food, and financial, as well as humanitarian aid under the supervision of a Government-appointed coordinator. In addition, the resumption of talks between Israel and Palestine and the impact of other tracks to achieve the desired peace in the region should not be overlooked. The Syrian and Lebanese tracks also awaited the attention of the international community.

ANDREY DENISOV (Russian Federation) said the past months had been difficult regarding efforts to secure lasting peace in the Middle East. Indeed, those efforts were no longer guided by the principles of negotiation, compromise and concession and had been replaced by unilateral actions and terrorist strikes, which had resulted in the deaths of countless civilians. As for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, undoubtedly at the heart of the tensions in the wider Middle East, the diplomatic Quartet would do all it could to ensure the successful holding of elections in the wake of the recent death of Palestinian President Yasser Arafat.

At the same time, Israel must refrain from any actions that would heighten tensions or undermine the election process in any way. Israel must also press ahead with its initiative to withdraw from Gaza. The Russian Federation hoped that, following the elections, the two sides would return to the negotiating table. And while the outstanding issues between the two were undoubtedly complex, they must be resolved cooperatively. The Quartet had been unable to have a real impact on the situation in the occupied territories, but it had served to ensure that the peace process did not languish altogether. He said that the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese relations did not offer much hope for progress either. The international community must do its part to ensure that those tracks did not become stalemated.

RODNEY LOPEZ CLEMENTE (Cuba) said that the Assembly was once again addressing the situation in the Middle East amid a stalemate in peace negotiations. The vicious cycle of violence and retaliation persisted and political tensions continued to be aggravated. The number of dead and wounded continued to mount and countless families were living in precarious conditions, under constant threat of death and destruction. With all that in mind, he said that one thing was certain: more violence, destruction and use of military force would never lead to the peaceful settlement of conflicts like those in the Middle East.

In addition, Israel's continued occupation of Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories continued in flagrant violation of a great number of relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. Moreover, it was a real shame that the Security Council continued to be held hostage to the whims of a power that used or threatened to use the veto. To achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, a definite and peaceful settlement of the Palestinian question was necessary, without disregarding the need to address the Syrian and Lebanese tracks.

He stressed that the United Nations should continue to play an important role in the region. The Organization must move towards the implementation of more incisive measures, including perhaps the deployment of an international force, under a United Nations mandate, to protect the Palestinian civilian population and contribute to constructive negotiations in an atmosphere of peace and trust.

JOHN TIERNEY (Australia) said establishment of a Palestinian State living in peace, security and prosperity alongside Israel would be a fitting tribute to Yasser Arafat. The international community must work together to that end with renewed energy and commitment. Failure to do so would further degrade the lives and hopes of people in the region and would fuel extremism and terrorism. It was incumbent on the international community to help the parties in conflict to seize the opportunity resulting from the change of Palestinian leadership to move forward. Despite the Road Map's delayed implementation, it offered the best hope for peace in the Middle East.

Australia would continue to urge the parties in conflict to fulfil their obligations under the Road Map and build mutual trust and confidence needed for progress. It would also continue to call



for patient, sustained negotiations to resolve intractable issues, and would stand ready to contribute to moving the process forward. Moreover, Australia and its Coalition partners were firmly committed to stabilizing and rehabilitating Iraq. He congratulated the Iraqi Interim Government on its steadfast progress toward democratic rule. He encouraged the international community to support Iraqi efforts to achieve freedom and prosperity. He also urged all nations to support the 30 January 2005 elections, which would give Iraqis the opportunity to elect, freely and fairly, a Government of their choice.

DINA MARTINA (Ukraine), expressing solidarity with the Palestinian people on the passing of Yasser Arafat, said that the holding of free and fair elections in the occupied Palestinian territories was an issue of utmost priority. She called on Israel to facilitate those elections, and on the international community to provide assistance. Condemning terrorism, she also said that self-defence could not justify disproportionate use of force and other Israeli practices. It was only through peaceful dialogue and political process that a comprehensive settlement could be achieved.

She reaffirmed her country's commitment to such a process and its support for the Quartet's Road Map, and recalled its offer to provide "good offices" for holding peace negotiations. She also supported the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, in the context of the relevant conditions laid out by the European Union and the Quartet, and said that the international community should provide support to the parties on their way to peace. She added that a comprehensive settlement should include agreements on the Israeli-Lebanese and Israeli-Syrian tracks. Meanwhile, she called on all parties to exercise maximum restraint and respect for international law and relevant Security Council resolutions.

CESAR MAYORAL (Argentina), expressing sorrow over the demise of Yasser Arafat, said that, in the current moment of "a certain optimism", the Road Map was still the best way to implement relevant Security Council resolutions on the Middle East, and bring about two viable States living in peace with their neighbours. In the current moment, progress towards that goal depended on free and fair Palestinian elections unfettered by restrictions, and a successful Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, coordinated with the Palestinian Authority and consistent with the Road Map.

He called on the parties to exercise the utmost restraint at this juncture and condemned all acts of violence and terrorism, on both sides, which affected the civilian population. He reiterated that both parties should fully respect international humanitarian law, and that Israel should fulfil its obligations as occupying Power. Concrete advancement must be made on all tracks in the Arab-Israeli conflict as well, and the final status of Jerusalem should take into account the legitimate concerns of both the Israeli and Palestinian sides. In closing, he reiterated his support for the role of the United Nations in providing humanitarian assistance and advancing the peace process in the Middle East.

NABEELA AL-MULLA (Kuwait) said one of the most serious problems in the Middle East region was the persistence of the Israeli Government in implementing illegal policies and practices. It had rejected peaceful initiatives and chosen to follow a path based on the use of force to ensure its security, all the while occupying Palestinian and Arab territories. Her country had followed the catastrophic situation of the Palestinian people and the residents of the occupied Arab territories, and noted that they had been exacerbated, in particular, by the policy of repression and restrictions on the movement of Palestinian people. Israel continued to commit its criminal acts in public -- before the eyes of the world -- and with impunity. That State seemed truly not to care about international reaction to its practices.

For its part, she stressed, the international community remained preoccupied by the pretexts of security invoked by Israel to distract from the crux of the problem -- the continued occupation. In accordance with the Road Map, Israel must be brought to guarantee the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people with a specified time frame. Kuwait reiterated its commitment to the Palestinians' struggle to regain their legitimate rights, including through the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with Al-Quds as its capital. Israel must implement relevant, internationally legitimate resolutions, as well as other obligations taken under various peace initiatives, including the Road Map.

Also reiterating the importance of observing the sanctity of holy places, especially the Al-Aqsa Mosque, she rejected all measures aimed at the "Judaization" of the city of Jerusalem. Also reiterating the importance of complying with international opinion regarding construction of the separation wall, she called upon Israel immediately to cease its construction and to dismantle those parts that had been built. Finally, she reaffirmed that a just, lasting and comprehensive peace would not be achieved in the Middle East so long as the occupation of Arab territories continued.

FRANÇOIS OUBIDA (Burkina Faso), paying tribute to the memory of Yasser Arafat, said that the situation in the Middle East was more precarious than ever. The Road Map seemed to be fading into oblivion. The situation in the occupied territories had deteriorated and Israeli practices had maintained their severity, which was strengthening the hatred of those who had lost their territories. The building of the wall struck to the heart of the matter, creating a fait accompli and creating no alternative to violent reprisal. The entire region could drown in conflict if progress was not made.

The Road Map presented the only route to a peaceful resolution of the conflict, and he called on the parties to follow it to a two-State solution. To honour the memory of President Arafat, dialogue toward that end must resume and the international community must provide support to the intermediaries and to the upcoming Palestinian elections.

#### Right of Reply

The representative of Iran said that the Assembly had heard a number of irrelevant comments today, as well as fabricated and baseless allegations made by the Israeli representative against Iran. Israel's aggressive policy and inhumane practices towards "the Palestinian and other nations in the region" had rendered that sensitive part of the world as volatile as ever. Israel's attempt to pretend to be the advocate of peace was a pure myth. Indeed, that country's State terrorism and aggression were deliberate attempts to preclude and torpedo any possibility of bringing peace to a region that had been sadly engulfed in a whirlpool of tensions and conflicts for so many decades. Israel could not and should not blame others for the creation of that dangerous situation. It was an open secret that Iran had always been sympathetic to and supportive of the Palestinian people, and that support had always been of a moral and political nature.

The Israeli representative also attempted to distort the facts relating to Iran's peaceful nuclear programme, he continued. The irony was that the Israeli regime had never been a party to the internationally negotiated instruments on weapons of mass destruction, nor had it paid attention to constant calls in other relevant forums. It was worth mentioning that the only existing obstacle to the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East was the non-adherence of Israel to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, as well as its continued clandestine operation of non-safeguarded nuclear facilities.

In contrast, his own country, Iran -- as a party to the Chemical and Biological Weapons Conventions and the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) -- was committed to all the provisions of those instruments and to making declarations and accepting international monitoring by competent international bodies, and had always demonstrated that it would not seek any weapons of mass destruction.

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