

1 December 2003

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Julian Robert Hunte,
President of the 58th Session of the General Assembly,
on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People**

Mr. Chairman; Mr. Secretary-General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

As President of the Fifty-eighth Session of the United Nations General Assembly, I am honoured to participate in this solemn meeting. Mr Chairman, I commend the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for convening this meeting, and for its contribution to international efforts to bring peace, security and stability to the Middle East. In implementing the mandates entrusted to it by the General Assembly, the Committee continues to play a central role in focussing the attention of the Assembly, the Security Council, the United Nations system, and the international community as a whole, on specific concerns and developments on the Question of Palestine.

The Question of Palestine has, in fact, been a priority issue for the United Nations since its earliest years. After much deliberation, the second session of a nascent General Assembly on 26 November 1947, adopted resolution 181 (II) on the Palestinian issue. Reflected in that resolution, was the decision of the Assembly to partition the Mandate of Palestine into two states, one Jewish, one Arab, with Jerusalem to be the subject of a special international regime. In the year marking the thirtieth anniversary of that landmark decision, the General Assembly determined, in its resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977, which it would annually observe 29 November as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

The commemoration of this Day of Solidarity, then, is an affirmation of the United Nations unflagging commitment to the resolution of the Question of Palestine, and of its support for the Palestinian people in their aspiration to exercise their right to self-determination. It provides further opportunity for the international community as a whole to reflect on the Question of Palestine, and to continue to vigorously pursue initiatives that not only make promises, but that also delivers on those promises, to bring peace, security and stability to Palestine and to the Middle East.

The current situation, however, is fraught with danger and far from encouraging. The General Assembly has twice in the last two months responded to the request of a majority of its member states by reconvening its tenth emergency special session on the 'Illegal Israeli Actions in Occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territories', to allow all to express their concerns on this critical issue. The Assembly, in its resolution ES-10/12 of 18 September 2003, demanded that Israel, the occupying power, desist from any act of deportation

and cease any threat to the safety of the elected President of the Palestinian Authority, Yasser Arafat.

The General Assembly has also recognized the danger posed by Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and has stated its opposition to their continued establishment and expansion as a grave violation of international law and a serious obstacle to peace. Resolution ES-10/13 adopted by the resumed tenth emergency special session on 27 October 2003 drew world attention to the danger posed by a separation barrier that Israel is constructing in the West Bank, including around East Jerusalem. The resolution reaffirmed the principle of the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force, and demanded that Israel stop and reverse the construction of the wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including in and around East Jerusalem, which is a departure from the Armistice Line of 1949 and a contradiction of international law.

The Secretary General was requested to periodically report on compliance with the resolution, and I, as President of the General Assembly, was authorized to resume the tenth emergency session upon request from Member States. The Secretary-General has now reported, and has advised of the non-compliance with resolution ES-10/13. His report is for the further consideration of Member States.

History is a persistent reminder that problems between peoples and states cannot be solved by violence and conflict. We must look beyond the bleak picture, beyond the crisis and towards action on which the United Nations, and indeed the Global community has pronounced itself. A majority of the Member States of this United Nations, in the fifty-six years since the partition resolution, have exercised their right to self-determination, and have joined the community of nations as sovereign and independent states, underscoring the right of people to choose to govern themselves, and not to be governed by others.

There is broad international consensus that the two state solution is the only one that will bring this longstanding Middle East conflict to an end. It is a consensus firmly established by the United Nations Security Council, in its resolutions 1397 (2002), and upheld in the Quartet's Performance-based Road Map to a Permanent Two-State Solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, unanimously endorsed by the Council just two weeks ago, in its resolution 1515 (2003). The Council's decisive action must surely provide the impetus to act on the General Assembly's fifty-six year old decision in respect of Palestine. Both parties have also been called upon to fulfil their obligations under relevant provisions of the road map.

This is an opportune time for me to recognise the efforts of the United Nations - guided by the Secretary General, supported by his Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process - and members of the Quartet for their important and constructive contribution to international efforts aimed at resolving the conflict and the Question of Palestine. We must support these efforts, in the interest of making progress today, and of meeting the considerable challenges that remain before a just and lasting peace is established in the region, and importantly, before the vision of

the two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders, becomes a reality.

I am also encouraged to learn of the participation of civil society in the search for creative approaches and in offering new ideas to re-start the peace negotiations. These initiatives are welcome, should be supported, and as fitting, should be channelled into broad international initiatives to bring statehood to Palestine and peace to the Middle East.

The Question of Palestine has a customary place on the agenda of the General Assembly, a place that reflects the continuing responsibility of the Assembly for this critical issue, and for its effective resolution in accordance with the seminal resolutions of the United Nations.

The General Assembly takes up consideration of the Agenda Item on the "Question of Palestine" on the afternoon of 1 December 2003. Given all that is transpiring in the Middle East and the decisions taken in the Assembly and the Security Council as well as action taken internationally in recent months, I look forward to a focussed and serious debate that will give clear indication of the position of Member States on the issues.

As President of the General Assembly, I take the important opportunity offered by this solemn meeting to recognise and uphold the Assembly's responsibilities in respect of the Question of Palestine.

I thank you, Mr Chairman.