



Provisional Record

Eighty-ninth Session, Geneva, 2001

Eleventh (special) sitting

Thursday, 14 June 2001, 3.15 p.m.

Presidents: Ms. A. Sto. Tomas, Ms. Bannerman, Mr. Parrot

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR GENERAL ON THE SITUATION OF WORKERS OF THE OCCUPIED ARAB TERRITORIES: DISCUSSION

The PRESIDENT — I call to order the special sitting of the Conference to examine the Director-General's report on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories. Before giving the floor to the first speaker on my list, I would like to make a few remarks. This sitting is held following a decision adopted by the Conference on 5 June on the basis of the report of the Selection Committee which has considered proposals made by the Director-General at the request of the Governing Body.

This sitting will be held in accordance with the rules applicable to the discussion of the Director-General's report, including the restriction on speaking time to five minutes. Please take note of that.

I am quite aware of how sensitive many of you are to such a serious issue. I believe that we can contribute greatly to alleviating the suffering of the population in the region and we hope that the discussion will facilitate the efforts of the international community to provide concrete assistance to the persons concerned.

I am counting on each speaker to bring constructive elements to this debate. While we are required to exchange our views openly, all speakers should abide by parliamentary language. Our aim must be to identify measures which may assist the workers concerned. Thank you for your understanding.

I would also like to inform the Conference of certain arrangements concerning the sitting, which are part of the prerogative of the President and the Officers of the Conference. These arrangements have been decided upon by the Officers of the Conference in the interest of consistency, objectivity and respect of the legitimate interest of all parties concerned with whom we have been in touch. We are entirely in accordance with the decisions taken at previous special sittings and we should contribute again to the success of this important undertaking.

The first announcement is to do with possible requests for the right of reply during this sitting. This right of reply will be granted once only, in each case at the end of the sitting. This means that the general limit of two minutes decided on at the beginning of the Conference for exercising the right of reply will not be multipliable by the number of statements to which the speaker wants to reply, it being understood that the President may, if time permits, allow this limit to be somewhat exceeded if the reply relates to a large number of statements.

The second matter concerns non-governmental organizations which have registered for this debate but

which may only speak with the authorization of the Officers of the Conference. My colleagues and I have agreed that, in principle, these organizations will speak at the end of the sitting, in the order in which they registered and only if their speeches do not result in the special sitting lasting beyond 9 p.m.

Original Arabic: Mr. EL-NETSHEH (representative, Palestine) — In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate!

I speak today on behalf of the three social partners of Palestine.

I greet you in the name of all those who are struggling for peace and security in Palestine under the leadership of the President of the Palestinian Authority, Yasser Arafat, and the PLO executive committee.

I greet you in the name of the families of the martyrs, the small boy, Mohamed Dourra, who was killed, and all the men, women and children who have been massacred by missiles and bombs from the F165, helicopters and tanks.

I greet you in the name of a people dying of hunger, besieged and blockaded, suffering under the iron hand of oppression.

My questions to your people and your governments are these: How long must the Palestinian people endure this situation? What will the international community do? Where do we stand with respect to human rights and international law, and why has the international community remained so silent?

A terrible massacre is taking place of a people who wish only to regain their legitimate rights through peace and who call for the implementation of the peace agreements that were signed and ratified by all parties under the aegis of America, European and international sponsorship.

The embargo that has been imposed on us for nine months now has led to almost 50 per cent unemployment, the number of those on the poverty line has reached unprecedented levels — 60 per cent of our people are affected by poverty because workers are unable to negotiate the obstacles thrown up by the Israelis to prevent them from reaching their places of work. Hundreds are killed, thousands are wounded, tens of thousands are humiliated everyday. They are attacked by dogs released for this purpose, their work permits are torn up — permits issued for propaganda reasons and ripped to shreds by the Israeli army at the roadblocks.

I would not wish to become embroiled in the details of Israeli brutality against our children, schools, pupils, ambulances, first-aid workers and rescue services, not to mention offices that have been attacked, the

Ministry of Labour office, which was destroyed, the bombardments, missile attacks, the bans imposed on trade unionists to prevent them from carrying out their union activities, and the blocking of exports. We have presented a detailed report on the situation but I wanted to highlight a number of facts so that people are informed of what is really going on and what is happening to this peace-loving Palestinian People.

Palestinians have been patient but are determined to work towards peace in the face of this aggression. There is no looking back, whatever the cost, from the peace process.

The Palestinians believe in peace as the choice, the only answer to lasting peace in the region, but we will not make any concessions on our legitimate rights and we will continue to resist and to fight for our legitimate rights, irrespective of the cost to ourselves as martyrs, as prisoners, as wounded. Allah and all peace-loving peoples will help us in this.

These rights have been recognized and confirmed under international law — the right to self-determination, the right to the creation of the independent State of Palestine, the right for refugees to return to their birthplace, and the freeing of Palestinian prisoners.

The international community can still find the means to put an end to the aggression, and an end to the expansion of the settlements. This is a time-bomb against peace that threatens to explode at any moment.

We urgently appeal to you and your governments to shoulder your responsibilities vis-à-vis the Palestinian workers to put an end to Israeli aggression, so that Israel can no longer prevent workers from going to work and being able to provide for their children and families in a dignified fashion. If not, as I said before, the people of the region will rise up. We will see a revolution of the oppressed and starving Palestinian people that will affect the entire region.

I call upon the International Labour Organization and all donor countries to create a fund to finance projects which are already ongoing, micro projects, most of them, so that we will be able to at least ensure the basic survival of our people and indeed develop programmes in order to improve human resources and contribute also to training, and in particular special training for the disabled. We would like to see the creation of a standing committee that will follow up the cases of unacceptable treatment of Palestinian workers.

Finally, I would like to thank the Director-General for extraordinary efforts made so that I might be here today. I hope to be able to return home as safely.

Mr. PERETZ (*Workers' delegate, Israel*) — I had actually hoped to come here and talk about the strengthening of the peace process. But instead I find myself heartbroken, discussing the damage that has been caused by the series of crises that have happened in the last nine months.

I see so many innocent people pay the highest price of all as a result of the ever more horrific, senseless acts of unbelievable violence. Innocent Israeli citizens are forced to live in fear of terrorist attacks, buses and restaurants being blown up, innocent teenagers killed and mutilated whilst standing in a queue for a discotheque on a Friday night.

The Palestinians also pay the price in blood and death, and in addition find themselves with no sort of income and no way of supporting their families under

the closure. These inhuman acts of violence are carried out by ever-growing groups of fanatics.

Throughout the history of the entire world, in every conflict between nations there have been fanatics on both sides, and always the fanatics from one side encourage the others and serve each other in deepening the conflict. We in the Middle East suffer from the same problem. The question is who will be the victors? Is it to be the fanatics, or is it to be the moderates who determine the future of the region?

The Palestinians are not our enemies. Terrorism is. Fanaticism is. It has been said before that the worst peace is better than the best war. I believe this to be true. I know this to be true. Assuring human rights to Palestinians, creating a strong society and a strong economy among the Palestinian population is of course in the interests of the Palestinians, but it is also in the Israeli interest, and in the interests of the region as a whole.

However, above all, is not the most basic human right the right to life? This we must protect first. I understand that you expect me to fight against the closure that prevents Palestinian workers from entering Israel to make a living with dignity. But neither I, nor any of you sitting here today, can take the responsibility that, among those thousands of workers, is concealed a terrorist fanatic on a mission of mass murder and destruction.

I was born in Morocco. I came to Israel, I grew up in Israel, I served in the Israeli Army as an officer. I was severely wounded and spent two years in hospital. I left the hospital in a wheelchair and when I first stood on my feet again, I swore to myself that the next war I was going to fight was the war for peace.

From the start of my public life, I have always supported peace between Israel and its neighbours. As early as 1984, I believed, and openly stated, that the Palestinians have the right to a country of their own. Everyone knows I fully support the equal rights of the Palestinian workers.

Despite the fact that the situation today is very difficult I, as a Member of Parliament, and the Chairperson of the Histadrut, the Israeli trade union federation, gave a very clear instruction to all the heads of the departments to continue providing support and protection to the Palestinian workers. For example, teams of lawyers from the Histadrut are along the borders and receive complaints from Palestinian workers which are then placed before the Israeli courts. However, as long as the acts of terror continue, with every new horror, I can do less and less. I call on you, my colleague Shaher Sa'ed, General Secretary of the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions, to fight against terrorism. I call on you, the trade union leaders from Jordan and Egypt: instead of fighting the peace agreement, fight terrorism.

As representatives of workers' rights and human rights in the region, we should take a much more significant role in helping to change the atmosphere of hate in the Middle East. We are not and should not be swayed by political considerations, but by human ones. I have always believed that our mission should be to build the infrastructure for peace by creating mutually beneficial activities. It has always been the case that when there are agreements on paper, between politicians, it has been our job, the workers' representatives, to implement those agreements on the ground, between real people, with real everyday problems. Political agreement between governments

can stop tanks and missiles, but nothing can stop a hungry man.

In a situation like today, our function, our mission, takes on a much greater importance. Of course, I realize that this cannot happen, will not happen, unless we can find the right framework and create the atmosphere. Therefore, I turn to the ILO to sponsor such a framework under its auspices right. If, by these actions, we can succeed in getting a round the table, if we can show the world that it is possible and through this perhaps pressure the leaders of the region into following our footsteps, then we would have done our job, then we would have fulfilled our true function.

I have been dreaming and hoping for peace all my life. I believe the time has come to take more action towards turning this dream into a reality. I want peace. I support peace and I know that there is no alternative to peace.

When I hear the voices of hate in the debate, I ask myself, will these voices strengthen the efforts that are happening now to bring a ceasefire? Will these voices help the efforts of Mr. Kofi Annan and Mr. Tenet after the Mitchell report? Can these voices bring us back to the situation we were at nine months ago? And my answer to this is very clear — no, no. If we really want to help the peace process, let us find the words that can change this atmosphere. Let us find the words with which we can, with pride, educate our children to love one another for their future and the future of peace.

Original Arabic: Mr. GUIDER (*representative, Arab Labour Organization*) — In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate! We have just begun the twenty-first century and the new millennium, and atrocities and massacres are inflicted on the Palestinian people and its heritage, and the people of southern Lebanon and the Golan. From 1948 to date, Israel has never refrained from committing the worst crimes and atrocities against humanity. The occupation of land, flouting of international law, violation of human rights and international labour standards, closures and collective punishments are imposed upon an entire people, the Palestinian people.

From 28 September 2000 to today, eight-and-a-half months have elapsed and the Palestinian people continue to suffer horror, closures, and blockades at the hands of the Israeli occupying forces. The closure continues, and checkpoints and borders with Egypt and Jordan and the airport at Gaza, are still closed and nothing comes in, neither medical assistance nor emergency assistance.

For 270 days now, there has been a total military closure of the Palestinian territories by the Israeli forces; villages are isolated from each other. The West Bank is cut off from Gaza and the outside world. All this has led to an unprecedented rise in unemployment, which has soared from 11 to 50 per cent. The rate is 40 per cent in the West Bank 60 per cent in Gaza. This is the highest rate since 1994, according to information from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the near East (UNRWA).

The death toll has reached 450 martyrs, and there have been thousands of wounded and disabled; economic activity has come to a complete standstill, and educational establishments and enterprises have been destroyed; as a result most Palestinians now for the most part live below the poverty line (US \$2.1 per day

per inhabitant); this is now the case of 58 per cent of the Palestinian population. This figure is given in the report for 2001 of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA.

Faced with this tragedy, and the extremely tragic consequences being suffered by the Palestinian people because of this permanent aggression, the ILO and its tripartite constituents are called upon to adopt urgent measures to bring an end to the unjust aggression, to the closure and to the collective punishments inflicted by Israel on this people. Everyone must endeavour to provide every assistance and cooperate to rebuild what has been destroyed, so that this people can live again in freedom and dignity and have decent work on the basis of international labour standards and the principles of human rights.

The new world order is one of double standards, of discrimination. We hear slogans saying that there should be prosperity for all people throughout the world, and meanwhile Israel is arming itself amidst indifference to Palestinians' fate.

Campaigns are being waged alleging that Arabs are violent terrorists. Many intellectuals are inclined to theories of this kind, and some use them as imaginary enemy to distract their people from their own domestic problems, be they economic or social.

But in the march of history, truth always prevails, and there can be no doubt that truth and justice will triumph, and peace based on justice, freedom and dignity for all will prevail, as in the case of the ancient empires.

Here too injustice will disappear, just as other injustices have disappeared in the history of humankind.

Ms. STAVAS (*Government adviser and substitute delegate, Sweden*) — I am privileged to take the floor on behalf of the European Union. The Member States of the European Union would like to commend the ILO on the analysis of the employment situation in the occupied Palestinian territories as contained in the report under discussion.

The European Union remains deeply concerned about the difficult humanitarian and economic situation imposed on the Palestinian people in these areas and notes the linkage made in the report between economic decline and closures. All economic indicators have sharply decreased, reducing the Palestinian economy by half. Unemployment has risen on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. About half of Palestinian labourers are without work, a major reason being that many of them cannot travel to their jobs, nor have access to the labour market in Israel. One-third of the Palestinian population is currently living under conditions considered to be below the poverty line. This situation is not acceptable.

The European Union has on various occasions urged the Israeli Government to facilitate access for Palestinian workers and to lift all obstacles to the economic development of Palestinian territories. The European Union, again, stresses the importance that the international obligations in this field are respected.

The Israeli closure policy has had a lasting negative impact on workers in the occupied territories. Both parties have a duty to minimize tension between them. Improving the economic situation in the occupied territories is an important element of this effort. The European Union calls on the parties to take all necessary measures to stop the tragic escalation of the

conflict and to implement the recommendations put forward by the Sharm Al-Sheikh Fact-Finding Committee.

A just, comprehensive and lasting peace can only be achieved through negotiations based on international law including the United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 and 338. The ILO has certain responsibilities as regards the protection of the rights of workers in the occupied territories. The plight of these workers will only improve if there is economic development. The ILO is well positioned to contribute to improving employment opportunities and hence living conditions in the occupied territories. In this context the European Union would like to express its appreciation of the valuable contribution of the ILO's technical cooperation programmes.

In the belief that such assistance can play an important role in reversing the trend of economic decline, these programmes receive support from European Union Member States.

Mr. NENE (*Government adviser delegate, South Africa*) — On behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement I congratulate Madam Sto. Tomas on her election as President of this 89th Session of the International Labour Conference, and in the same vein I would like to congratulate the Director-General of the ILO, Mr. Somavia, for his splendid work and an excellent report.

The Non-Aligned Movement finds it inexcusable that more than 50 years after the United Nations affirmed the right of Palestinians to sovereign statehood and more than 30 years after the United Nations Security Council, in a binding decision, called on Israel to withdraw from all the Arab territories that it had occupied in the war of June 1967, the suffering and the humiliation of foreign military occupation continues.

Numerous attempts have been undertaken to bring the two parties together to find a long-lasting solution. All have not yielded positive results, owing to lack of total commitment, mainly due to the Israelis who do not want to implement the Security Council resolutions.

As Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement, I wish to reiterate our common conviction that just and lasting peace can only be achieved through peaceful negotiations. We believe that the first priority on the road towards that aim should be the cessation of violence. This can be achieved through concrete steps. Firstly, it is of the highest importance that the Israeli troops should be withdrawn at least to the positions that they occupied before 28 September, the day of Mr. Ariel Sharon's fateful and provocative visit to the Haram al-Sharif. Furthermore, the illegal measures of collective punishment against the Palestinian people, such as the total blockade of the Palestinian territories and the economic embargo placed on Palestine, should be ended forthwith.

We hope that the Sharon Government has learnt a lesson that violence begets more violence and that the retaliatory strikes using excessive military force against stone-throwing Palestinians will not bring everlasting peace desired by both sides.

We believe that this Conference should send a clear message condemning illegal measures of collective punishment and the blockade which violates the fundamental human rights of Palestinians, especially the workers' rights of those Palestinians working in Israel.

Recent attempts by the international community, especially the one which has received conditional support by both sides, need to be pursued vigorously.

The Non-Aligned Movement welcomes the involvement of the European Union and the Russians in an effort to find a lasting solution to the problems of the Middle East, but still believes that the United Nations, as the organization entrusted with the safeguarding and promotion of world peace, should play a central role in future negotiations, whatever the context or formula, for a resumed peace process. Other players who can make a meaningful contribution to building peace should be allowed to do so.

Original Arabic: Mr. ALFARARGI (representative, League of Arab States) — We have looked studied the Director-General's report on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories, based on the mission sent by the Director-General to this region to gather data and information with regard to the application of the resolution adopted by the ILC at its 66th Session in 1980.

While we appreciate the efforts of the Director-General relating to the follow-up of the application of this resolution, we would like to draw your attention to a few points. Firstly, this report was prepared in the context of a steadily worsening policy of repression, displacement and collective sanctions against the Palestinian people, and against workers in particular. Workers have thus had their livelihoods taken away, and I think that the report should have reflected this very clearly. It should have indicated who was responsible for this, rather than simply identifying the link between the situation of the workers and the policy of occupation, without revealing the scale of the tragedy experienced by workers in the occupied Arab territories. The report should also have drawn attention to the terrible social, cultural and economic impact of occupation on the Palestinian people, as well as on the Syrian people in the area of occupied Golan. It should also have mentioned Israel's continuation of its policy of settlement and expansion into the occupied Arab territories, including Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, in violation of all the relevant ILO resolutions. The resolution of 1980 reiterated the illegality of Israel's policy of occupation, and urged the Israeli authorities to stop further construction immediately and to dismantle settlements already in existence.

The report should also have indicated that occupation and the continuation of the policy of expansion and colonization have created a situation of dependence on the occupying power, during both peace and wartime, and the very presence of Israeli forces in the occupied territories has been a source of humiliation for the inhabitants, and a restriction on their freedom of movement in both towns and villages. This is the real reason for the halt to development, the worsening of the situation of workers, and the increase in unemployment which now reached 80 per cent of the Palestinian labour force.

The report also dealt too superficially with the issue of discriminatory treatment against Palestinians, particularly the denial of their right to social security benefits, difficulties in reaching their workplace every day, and humiliation, contempt and rough treatment at military checkpoints and at the hands of Israeli settlers, with the covert blessing of the Israeli authorities. The report should really have focused on this a great deal more, particularly as it has been presented

during a session where the major item on the agenda is how to reduce the decent work deficit.

The Director-General stated in his Report *Reducing the decent work deficit: A global challenge* that the desire for people in the future is to find decent work in a sustainable working environment and that decent work amounts to a political programme. How can we deny the Palestinian people such an objective vision, and how can we explain that what is applicable to all the peoples of the world is not applicable to Palestinian workers?

In spite of the fact that the region of the Golan Heights is part of the mandate of the 1980 resolution, there was only a very brief mention of this region. We should not forget that the illegal activities carried out in the region are in breach of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law, and that the United Nations has stated very clearly that the occupation of these territories by force, or of any territories by force, is completely prohibited. We therefore need to make a better evaluation of the human rights situation in the region.

We welcome the Director-General's position with regard to the technical cooperation programme. The Palestinian people need, at the very least, compensation for the enormous harm that has been done, so that Palestinian workers can see a glimmer of light, despite the Israeli policy of occupation in the labour market.

We are convinced that more effective means of applying the resolution of 1980 need to be found, and that we should establish a special committee, responsible for studying the report, presenting proposals and making recommendations, in place of the special session.

Original Arabic: Mr. M'HENNI (*Minister of Social Affairs, Tunisia*) — In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate!

I am very happy to take the floor in this special sitting on behalf of the Arab Maghreb Union.

First, I would like to thank the International Labour Organization, and particularly the Director-General, for the excellent report which has been submitted to us. It is a shame that the report was submitted so late; it would have been more useful if we had been able to read it before we came to Geneva, pursuant to article 15 of the Constitution.

The report demonstrates the scope of the tragedy in the occupied Arab territories, South Lebanon and the Golan, and the violation of basic rights, the right to work and the right to life.

The report mentions various instances of discrimination against Arab workers, collective punishments, economic blockades, destruction of equipment and institutions, huge losses of earnings due to increasing unemployment, poverty, destruction of houses, massacres of women and children, and other inhuman practices, at a time when freedom and human rights are so extolled.

We believe that the Palestinians have shown great courage and fortitude, and we call upon the international community, and on the ILO, to work intensively to bring the suffering of the Palestinian people to an end. Human rights must be guaranteed to all people, with no discrimination and no hypocrisy.

Resolutions adopted by the ILO in 1999 served as the groundwork for the preparation of the Director-General's *Report on the situation of workers of the oc-*

cupied Arab territories, and the resolution adopted in 1980 specified a study of "the situation of Arab workers in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories". Furthermore, paragraphs 97-101 mention the impact of the crisis on the Israeli economy and the labour market and Israeli unemployment, which has nothing to do with the reports, the content of which is determined by the resolution to which I have just referred.

The conclusions also are not sufficiently far-reaching; they state merely that "Many of the points raised in the report are consequences of the political and military situation prevailing in the region," without explaining what the causes of this military situation are. The causes are the massive settlement and colonization, being carried out, a fact that the Organization has understood for a long time now. We have to remember that the resolution of 1980 referred to the repercussions of settlement and occupation on workers and appealed for the dismantling of settlements.

The countries of the Arab Maghreb Union and all the Arab countries have been working for a successful conclusion to the peace process. During the last summit of the Arab League we stated that peace for us was a strategic option, and that we would continue to work for a global and just peace, based on international resolutions.

Moreover, the proposals in this report are not consonant with the urgency of the situation. There is reference in paragraph 113 to "a serious deterioration in the living and working conditions of these workers". Subsequently the technical cooperation programme is mentioned and that the situation is the consequence of "the political and military situation prevailing in the region" and that "this dimension does not fall within the ILO's area of competence."

We agree with paragraph 115, "that a targeted technical cooperation programme by the ILO could certainly contribute to alleviating the situation of the Arab populations concerned". We believe that technical cooperation projects in Palestine should be strengthened on a tripartite basis so that Palestinian workers can enjoy social security coverage. We would like to see the Organization, which represents the universal conscience, play a more important role and call for decent work for all and the achievement of fundamental rights and freedoms for workers. Thus, it would work far more effectively to promote peace by working steadily in those areas in which it is competent to impose on the occupying forces the obligation to observe international labour standards and refrain from violating human rights. The ILO took up a determined stance against the apartheid regime in South Africa. It should do the same again for the workers of the occupied Arab territories.

We believe that the best way to study the Director-General's report on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories is not in special sittings but in a follow-up committee, and this for the following reasons. Article 18 of the Constitution of the ILO and article 8 of the Standing Orders of the ILC show that the best approach is to set up committees on issues like this. And this issue — the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories — is certainly no less important than other issues for which the Conference has established committees. A special sitting is inadequate to deal with such an issue and the report of the Director-General is a tool for reaching conclusions on

the basis of detailed discussions and the implementation of these. This renders the work of the Conference more effective. This, after all, is what happened when we fought against apartheid in the past.

We therefore strongly urge that a committee should be established and efforts made to achieve just and global peace as soon as possible, so that we no longer need a special sitting or a special committee.

Original Arabic: Mr. AL SHO'ALA (Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Bahrain) — I have the honour to speak on behalf of my colleagues from the Ministries of Labour and Social Affairs of the Gulf Cooperation Council States. We fully support our Palestinian brothers, who are the victims of Israeli military force, a blockade of the territories and the prevention of Palestinian workers from getting to their workplace, which has led to the loss of their jobs and income, and a deterioration of living conditions, not to mention complicating their daily lives and having a negative impact on their social status.

You are no doubt aware of the responsibility that we have as members of the ILO, irrespective of our culture or national origin, not only for humanitarian reasons or sentimental considerations, but also in view of the principles and objectives of this organization. The defence of workers' right to live in peace and dignity and to enjoy basic labour rights constitutes the very minimum of this organization's activities, irrespective of the gender, race or beliefs of those workers.

I would like to indicate here that the issue of Palestinian workers in the occupied territories is not simply a matter affecting Palestinians, Arabs, Moslems or Christians; it is also a challenge to all the members of this Organization, since it is the duty of the international community to take direct and decisive action to put an end to the oppression and suffering resulting from Israeli aggression against people who, despite the desperation of their situation, have never lost faith in their cause.

The international community, represented by the ILO, the United Nations and all peace loving nations, needs to take concrete action to stop the use of force and to help restore peace and stability, in order to implement the international resolutions and agreements signed with the Palestinians. The Gulf Cooperation Council States call on Israel to apply the agreements signed with the Palestinian authorities in order to help establish lasting peace and justice in the country. We call on the Organization to provide its support to Palestinian workers, and to make this one of its top priorities. We also hope that the technical assistance programmes can be stepped up, and that pressure can be applied to the Israeli authorities for them to respect international labour standards, in accordance with the principles of this Organization, and for them to provide workers with the opportunity to enjoy decent work.

Original Arabic: Mr. KANSO (Minister of Labour, Lebanon) — I consider it appropriate that the Selection Committee of this Conference has decided to devote a special sitting to the situation of workers of the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, because it is impossible to remain silent about the dramatic situation of the people living in these territories. It is a question of the sacred right to human life, which should be of concern to international organizations,

for what else should they be concerned about? Is there anything more sacred than freedom, the right to work and the right to social protection?

These fundamental rights are violated in any land which has been colonized, invaded or occupied. This is the situation in Palestine. The Israeli occupation of Palestinian land has entailed the confiscation of the rights of its inhabitants, in the first place, their right to independence and sovereignty. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinian workers are deprived of their rights. One can even say that thousands of them are martyrs, have been wounded and disabled; children are murdered, as well as women and the elderly. Economic and social institutions, as well as healthcare institutions, are being destroyed by the occupation. Villages, towns and even neighbourhoods within a village or town are being cut off from one another. The purpose of all of this is to destroy everything on which the life of the Palestinian people is based, just as is being done in South Lebanon, where workers and employers continue to pay dearly for the consequences of military occupation in social and economic terms. What is being done by the occupation in the Golan is similar to what was practised in South Lebanon and is now being practised in Palestine. All of the social partners in Israel, Governments, employers and workers, should bear responsibility for the violation of human rights, and for the confiscation of natural resources in Palestine, Lebanon and the Golan. Since none of them has attempted to intervene to put a stop to the crimes being committed against our people, the situation cannot improve. Neither is there any respect for international laws and agreements. And yet they talk about peace and say that they are in favour of peace. We are in favour of peace. We are the nation of peace.

Our land is the cradle of all religions. What peace are they talking about? Can there be any peace when there is oppression, when there is killing and destruction? The Israelis talk about terrorism, but who is perpetrating this terrorism?

All of the international charters confirm the right of persons whose land is occupied to defend themselves, therefore the Palestinian intifada, the Palestinian resistance, are not acts of terrorism. Resistance in Lebanon and in the Golan does not constitute an act of organized terrorism, since Israel has practised organized terrorism since it occupied our lands and violates the rights of our populations.

The question we must all answer is: where are the international laws in Palestine, South Lebanon and the Golan? What about these international agreements? If this Conference does not find an answer to this question, what other conference could respond to it?

Who can help solve the problem of forced labour? Forced labour has been and is being practised with complete impunity by the military occupation. In South Lebanon, Lebanese youths were compelled to join Lahad's army and the Israeli occupation is exploiting the conditions in which the workers live. Children are being killed by Israeli army bullets.

There is no freedom of expression, of assembly, to work and retain one's job, neither is there freedom of self determination. All of these rights are being violated by the occupation forces, which are dominating the lands of Palestine, the Shebaa farms area and the Golan. One could talk endlessly about the violations of Palestinian rights, but we should not forget that the

Iraqi workers and people are suffering as a result of the unjust embargo imposed on their country for no reason, other than their resistance to attempts to humiliate them.

The Palestinian intifada is a cry for justice in the face of an occupation which is destroying the very basis of life in Palestine and of the lives of its workers, farmers and employers. This intifada calls on our consciences and our international forums to support it and uphold the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.

If we desire peace, we must make our voices heard and say no to the policy of killing, destruction and starvation practised by Israel against the Palestinians.

We should say no to the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

We should say no to the settlements.

We should say no to the fragmentation of the Palestinian territories.

We should say yes to a Palestinian State throughout the Palestinian territory.

We should say yes to the return of Palestinian refugees to their homes.

We should say yes to moral and financial support to the Palestinian workers. We hope that the Director-General will set up a permanent committee responsible for gathering information on the violations perpetrated by the Israelis against the Palestinian workers and employers in the occupied Palestinian territories.

As for South Lebanon and the Golan, the military occupation must end. We commend the Lebanese resistance, which defeated the Israeli occupation, and we salute Syria and the Syrian populations of the Golan. We are convinced that at the end of the night, no matter how long, the day will finally dawn.

Original Chinese: Mr. CHEN (Government adviser delegate, China) — The Chinese Government representative feels that the convening of a special session during the 89th Conference of the ILO to discuss the Director-General's report and the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories is extremely topical. I think we need to make the most of this occasion, in order to have a real in-depth exchange of views and really deploy efforts together, in order to ensure an equitable and rapid solution to the problem of the occupied Arab territories.

The Palestinian issue is at the heart of the Middle Eastern problem, because of the blockade and embargo against Palestine that have been in place for many years. Palestine really does not have the resources that it needs to make the most of its human resources. We have noted that the educational level is very low, vocational training is facing many problems it has not been possible to raise the quality of Palestinian labour in any effective way. Thus, unemployment level in the region remains extremely high, which impacts very severely on the lives of the Palestinians. This is all unacceptable.

The international community has made unstinting efforts to find a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. So has the ILO, which has organized several special sessions in order to discuss the rights and interests of Palestinian workers. However, it is very worrying to note that, since the beginning of this outbreak of violence between Palestinians and Israelis last September, the armed conflict has only accelerated, producing more and more victims. In this

situation, Palestinian civilians have suffered heavy losses, in terms of lives as well as property. Many Palestinian workers have lost their jobs and the standard of living of Palestinians is deteriorating.

The Chinese Government feels duty-bound to express its deep concern and alarm. We are of the opinion that the international community has a responsibility and an obligation to pursue its efforts in order to bring together Palestinians and Israelis with a view to ending the violence as soon as possible and protecting the legitimate rights and national interests of the Palestinian people. In addition, it should provide them with the necessary support and economic assistance in order effectively to improve the living conditions of Palestinian workers.

We hope that the ILO will continue to play an active role in order to protect the rights and interests of the region's workers.

As a permanent member of the Security Council of the United Nations, China will continue to provide steadfast support to the Palestinian people in their just struggle to see their legitimate national rights re-established. We will work in conjunction with the international community in order to contribute to a fair and reasonable settlement of the Middle Eastern problem.

Mrs. COLETTI (*Workers' delegate, Italy*) — It is not the task of this assembly to analyse the dramatic, complicated political situation. We all know this and we all have our own ideas and opinions. But I assume that the one common aim of this assembly is a sincere desire for peace. We know that lasting peace can only be based on justice and this requires effective recognition of the human, political and economic rights of the Palestinians.

But what is the responsibility of the ILO? Our specific responsibility as constituents is to guarantee conditions of justice, that is to say the respect for the rights of Palestinian workers of the occupied territories. We all know, as worker representatives, that hunger, starvation and lack of prospects are discouraging in the struggle for peace, which is our aim.

Besides being the best way out of poverty, work is also the best way to peace. And of course this is the contribution that, as an organization, we can and must make — ensuring respect for labour rights. Director-General's report highlights the dramatic effects of the existing situation on employment and the economy.

This, of course, is not new. We have been hearing about these problems for years but they have become far more serious with the present critical situation. Violations of the basic rights of Palestinian workers are intolerable to the international community.

This is where the ILO action is key, and where its cooperation needs to be strengthened. The ILO taskforce mission recently attached to the Emergency Employment Generation Programme for the West Bank and Gaza was able to gather evidence of alarming rates of unemployment, underemployment, loss of income, and rapidly accelerating poverty.

We heard from previous speakers that at least 60 per cent of Palestinian families live in poverty in the occupied territories. Closures, road blockades and blocked access to villages dramatically affect the circulation of goods, services and labour inside the territories. This is perhaps a very diplomatic way of describing the situation but we know what is really happening.

All this has paralysed the Palestinian economy and has resulted in the suspension or slowdown of development projects. Income generation opportunities for Palestinian workers and their families are dramatically affected and the two are perhaps mutually exclusive. Workers without food for their families are not inclined to peace, and as this is our goal, we have to do all we can to improve the situation.

I am therefore in favour of new ILO initiatives, especially a new package of ILO emergency employment generation proposals that need to be implemented and adequately funded.

But longer-term prospects are, perhaps, my main concern and should be our common concern, because I believe that peace, based on justice, is always in the interest of all workers. Working towards a peace based on respect for fundamental rights is, I believe, in the interest of both Palestinian and Israeli workers, and I strongly appeal to Israeli workers to make their voices heard in condemnation of all kinds of violations of Palestinian workers' rights.

I welcome the speech by the Israeli workers' representative and I hope that it will lead to something more constructive.

I appeal to all the constituents of this Organization to condemn outright any violations but also to give their full support to ILO initiatives. This is a contribution we can make and Italian workers and their organizations are committed to showing solidarity with their Palestinian brothers and sisters whose fundamental rights have been violated and who need our help today.

We will continue providing this support also in co-operation with the ILO.

Original Arabic: Ms. AL-QUDSI (Minister of Social Affairs and Labour, Syrian Arab Republic) — First of all, I would like to extend my warmest possible greetings to this forum that has been created in order to express our aspirations for peace and prosperity for our generation and those of the future.

I would like to emphasize once again our faith in the objectives and values of the International Labour Organization which has taken on the mission of protecting human rights, particularly the rights of workers, namely the rights to life, freedom, justice, equality and dignity. We are holding this special sitting today in order to discuss the Director-General's report on the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories in Palestine, the Golan Heights and other occupied Arab territories.

We would like to thank the Director-General for the efforts which he puts into this task each year in the occupied territories and preparing the reports to organize this work. We hope that the Director-General will accept our proposal for the creation of a standing committee with a mandate to study the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories for as long as the Israeli occupation continues, on the model of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

We repeat continuously that Israel is ignoring the resolutions and decisions of the Security Council and the General Assembly. The most basic rights of Syrian citizens in the Golan Heights are being violated. Discrimination and oppression are their daily lot, not to mention other inhumane practices. Israel has stepped up its aggression against the Palestinian people, against the southern Lebanese and against the inhabitants of the Golan Heights. As usual, Israel

responded to the El Aqsa uprising with a series of aggressive actions against Palestinian workers. Hundreds of martyrs have been cut down, including women and children. This is not even to mention the hundreds who have been crippled and the economic and social problems which have been created by these actions that deny the Palestinian people the right to a life and dignity. The Israeli aggression is a flagrant violation of all international instruments, in particular the Geneva Convention and international resolutions and conventions, and represents a threat to peace throughout the region.

Our dearest wish today is for an end to the aggression from F16 planes, tanks, helicopters and battleships and to the use of missiles, and all weapons of mass destruction. It has to stop.

We call on the ILO to cooperate with other international organizations to ensure immediate intervention in order to put a stop to the violent aggression which the Palestinian people are being subjected to.

The Syrian Arab Republic will continue to strive for a fair and global peace based on the principles of the peace process. His Excellency, the President of the Republic, Bashar Al-Assad, has declared our determination to build peace and security in the region and throughout the world. The Syrian Arab Republic has affirmed many times that, for us, peace is a strategic objective and that we want a fair, global peace based on international resolutions and the principle of land for peace. This would require Israel to withdraw to the borders of 1967, leaving the farms of Shebaa in south Lebanon. The Palestinian people must regain all their national rights, notably the right to return to their homeland, to self-determination and to create an independent State with Al-Quds (Jerusalem) as its capital.

The Arab nation has a long history of respect for others and tolerance, but there is an enormous difference between tolerance and concessions affecting our basic rights. For us, sovereignty is a question of national dignity, and we cannot renounce our rights or our dignity.

Original Arabic: Mr. DAHLAN (Employers' delegate, Saudi Arabia) — In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful! In the name of peace, human rights, and the fundamental principles of the ILO! I should like to thank the members of the ILO's Governing Body who decided that this sitting should be held, particularly in this darkest hour for our region, when our most basic rights are being violated.

We are optimistic, and we aspire to peace. We have supported all the efforts of the peace process. But what is meant by the word "peace"? For some people, peace means denying the most fundamental rights of the workers of Palestine. What can the word peace mean when there is bombing, violence, injustice and oppression? We in the international community struggled against apartheid until South Africa was free.

Today, let us struggle to restore peace in this long-suffering region, this land of the prophets, this land of three great religions, this birthplace of civilization, this land which would have so much wealth, if it had peace. We call upon workers, employers and governments to apply the principles and objectives of this Organization, in which we are proud to be members.

I turn to my colleague who spoke on behalf of the Israeli workers. I appeal for an end to violence. I

appeal to you, my colleague from Israel, that you should continue to work for the rights of the workers in the occupied Arab territories.

We must be sincere, as we have been in the Governing Body. We cannot accept oppression.

I address my friend, Yoseph, the Israeli employers' delegate. You have worked for the development of the Israeli economy and for the implementation of the principles of the ILO. I appeal to you. Together we must work for a just and lasting peace to bring about economic prosperity.

To my friend, the representative of the employers of the United States, I say that surely the time has come to end the violations of the rights of Palestinian workers and employers.

Let us not be blind to what is happening in certain countries and regions. All peace-loving persons have to show solidarity with the Palestinian people so that the Palestinians can recover their fundamental rights, as stipulated by international resolutions.

The persistence of this painful and dangerous situation in Palestine calls for the creation of a special committee to study the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories. It also calls for more financing for technical cooperation projects for Palestinian workers and employers.

We would also like to ask the ILO to work to ensure the application of international labour standards in the occupied Arab territories.

Those who think the Palestinians are responsible for terrorism do not understand the pain which leads to such acts. A kitten will only scratch if someone steps on its tail. We support peace. We will advocate peace everywhere — in all international conferences and forums. We will work to overcome all obstacles to achieve peace in the land of peace, Palestine, and in the occupied Arab territories.

Mr. AHMAD (*Workers' delegate, Pakistan*) — On behalf of the Workers' delegation of Pakistan and myself, I take this opportunity to convey deep appreciation to the members of the Governing Body for placing this item on the agenda and to the Director-General of the ILO for presenting the comprehensive report on the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories.

The report highlights the serious economic and social suffering of the Palestinian workers, the growing unemployment, falling income levels and increasing poverty. As the report points out in paragraph 10: "the events since the end of September 2000 have had a tragic impact on the situation of the workers covered by this report. Closures of the territories and encirclements within them, considerable loss of income and the drastic increase in unemployment and poverty have unleashed a major crisis, from the humanitarian standpoint, for the Palestinian population. This crisis is becoming worse".

It further reflects the hardship being faced by the Palestinian workers in paragraph 68: "Large numbers of persons have lost their jobs in the domestic and Israeli labour markets... there points enough! The share of households living below the poverty line was estimated in March 2001 at 55.7 per cent in the West Bank, and as high as 81.4 per cent in the Gaza Strip; it has most probably further increased since then".

It is further stated in the report that the transfer of tax and other funds due to the Palestinian authorities has been frozen and blocked, as has the transport of

raw materials, goods and finished products for import-export. These measures have also aggravated unemployment, since the Palestinian workers employed in the occupied Arab territories are unable to go to work regularly.

Recent deadly violence perpetrated against the people of Palestine has made it virtually impossible for Palestinian workers to be employed in Israel. The serious economic and social plight of Palestinian people and workers in their own land is a serious threat not only to the region's peace but also to security. The Palestinians have become foreigners in their own land and there is great anguish and grief over the day-to-day killing of innocent Palestinian people, both young and old, men, women and children.

We appreciate the technical assistance programmes of the ILO to the Palestinian workers and urge the Director-General to expand vocational training for both men and women and job creation into a multi-component programme at the community level. There is also a need for vocational rehabilitation for the disabled and youth with special needs, and for special efforts to eliminate child labour. Solutions must be found to reinforce local capacities. We appeal to the world community and the member States of the ILO, in particular those States who brought the PLO and Israeli authorities to a peace accord in the past, to work towards peace and respect for the fundamental rights of Palestinian people under the dedicated leadership of the PLO, in order that they may enjoy their inalienable right to return to their fatherland, own property, and, above all, enjoy the fundamental right of self-determination with full independence.

We, in Pakistan, believe that the member States of the ILO will hear our call, since they have pledged to uphold the principles enshrined in the Philadelphia Declaration, which proclaims that: "all human beings, irrespective of race, creed and sex, have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity".

The just struggle of the Palestinian people is bound to succeed and we assure them, on behalf of the Pakistani workers, of our complete solidarity and support.

Mr. HEFDAHTAN (*Government delegate, Islamic Republic of Iran*) — First, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude for the opportunity granted my delegation to speak a few words on Palestine.

More than half a century since the Palestinians were deprived of their homeland, the problem remains the most complex issue and deep-rooted crisis facing the international community. Yet there is still no glimmer of hope in sight.

However, the national determination of the Palestinians to continue uprising, will play a decisive role in liberating the Palestinian territory from the Zionist occupation. The Palestinian uprising indicates that the Palestinians are disappointed with the so-called Middle East peace process and have reached the conclusion that it has brought nothing but plunder of the rights of Palestinians and made the enemy more aggressive.

We agree that peace should be established, for we sincerely wish the region long-lasting peace and prosperity, but we regard the Israeli regime as one with no just intention or good will.

The Islamic Republic of Iran strongly condemns the Zionist regime's organized crimes in Palestine and

emphasizes its commitment to supporting the Palestinians in order to terminate the occupation of the Holy Land, repatriate the Palestinian refugees to their homeland and establish an independent Government of Palestine with the Holy Al-Quds as its capital.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, with its peace-loving belief, cannot disagree with peace. However, we are not optimistic and believe that the negotiations will not bring a positive result due to Israel's biased objectives. We are worried about being confronted with an even more dangerous situation than the one we are now facing.

The Islamic Republic of Iran believes that, considering the current developments in Palestine, any solution to the Palestinians' plight should guarantee the rights of that people. Otherwise, the crisis in the Middle East will continue. In our view, peace will be established when the present situation in the region is changed and the Palestinians' rightful demands are granted.

Allow me to add that, from the economic perspective, there has been no sign of improvement; on the contrary, the economy is stagnant and unemployment and inflation rates have increased excessively. Social conditions have deteriorated and are now quite grave. Moreover, the unequal distribution of wages between Palestine and Jewish workers and the employment of Palestinian workers in low-paying jobs are undeniable examples of discrimination against and exploitation of Palestinians by the Jewish.

Resolving the Palestinian problem is the moral responsibility of all international organizations and countries throughout the world. The trust placed in the international community should only increase its awareness of its responsibility.

We hope in the near future to witness the establishment of real peace in the region and global aid, assistance and cooperation in the political, economic and technical fields in order to improve living conditions in the region.

As we stand at the beginning of the third millennium, we hope and pray that it will bring an end to wars and instead bring peace to the world.

Original French: Mr. NORDMANN (Secretary of State, Directorate of Labour, Federal Department of Economy, Switzerland) — The Director-General's report on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories deals with this "extremely serious problem".

Switzerland endorses that analysis and the views expressed in particular by the European Union States in their joint declaration. As stated in the report, the Palestinian economy is still extremely vulnerable because of its structural weaknesses and its high level of dependence on the Israeli economy.

In addition, and here I quote: "The events since the end of September 2000 have had a tragic impact on the situation of workers. Closures of the territories and encirclements within them, considerable increase in unemployment and poverty have unleashed a major crisis from the humanitarian standpoint, for the Palestinian population."

In this present emergency situation, Switzerland supports, for instance, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency with its employment creation programmes, and envisages continuing in the same direction, with the hope that there will be close cooperation between the various actors involved.

At the same time Switzerland has relentlessly called upon Israel to abstain from acts of confiscation or destruction and also serious and discriminatory measures, such as encirclements which have a damaging effect on the economic and social situation of the occupied Arab territories. We have also called upon Israel to unconditionally respect international humanitarian law. These are basic framework conditions which directly concern Palestinian workers.

In addition to the respect of humanitarian laws, there is a need to strengthen the specific protection of Palestinian workers against abuse and to strengthen their social security cover. The respect and strengthening of law, which Palestinian workers can and should insist upon are essential in terms of human development and human safety. These are also elements which are required for fair and lasting peace.

Switzerland would like to convey to the ILO its appreciation and gratitude for its specific action in favour of the Palestinian workers. This action also involves maintaining a dialogue between both peoples in those areas governed by the ILO mandate, in the interests of the workers in the region who all suffer in one way or the other from the crisis. This action therefore, responds to urgent needs and is a paramount objective in the areas of development, respect of human rights and peace in the Middle East.

Original Arabic: Mr. JRAD (Workers' delegate, Tunisia) — In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate! I would like first of all to extend my greatest thanks to Juan Somavia, the Director-General of the ILO for this important report on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories, which contains a substantial amount of information, data and figures which show the extent of the suffering of the Palestinians and the inhabitants of the Golan.

The report shows the extremely dangerous nature of the situation, particularly its consequences on the most vulnerable sectors of the population. However, a simple description and diagnosis, despite their importance, are not enough to solve the problem, which is the occupation of land by Israel, expropriation, the establishment of settlements for settlers coming from all regions of the world, to the detriment of the true owners of the land: the Palestinians.

The report recounts a certain number of facts, evidence, figures and statistics which clearly show the serious deterioration in the living conditions of Palestinians (with 40 per cent unemployment in some regions), and extremely high poverty (55.7 per cent of the inhabitants of the West Bank and 81.4 per cent of the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip live below the poverty line). Owing to the policy of closures and encirclements the Palestinian economy is completely paralysed.

The Palestinian workers have lost their freedom of movement, even within Gaza and the West Bank. The occupation forces have appropriated new lands for military reasons, or for establishing new settlements. This was cultivated land and crops were destroyed, fruit-bearing trees ripped out of the ground, thus increasing malnutrition, unemployment among agricultural workers and misery.

All of these repressive measures, in less than six months, have resulted in a 50 per cent reduction in Palestinian GDP. We appreciate the extent of the ILO's action to help Palestinians and the inhabitants of other occupied Arab territories, but the extent of

their suffering means that occupation and colonization must be stopped immediately. The Israeli forces should withdraw from all of the occupied Arab territories. Israel must respect the Palestinians' right to self-determination, following the example of all peoples of the world.

We would like to see the creation of a standing committee responsible for monitoring the situation of workers in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories.

We want to see the respect of international legitimacy and the application of Security Council resolutions, and an end to the policy of double standards in the region. In this, the twenty-first century, Israel is the only power which uses force to occupy the land of others, violating the fundamental rights to peace and justice; it is the only power which uses tanks, planes and helicopters to kill children, women and workers, and to starve powerless unarmed civilians.

A lasting and just peace can only be based on principles of justice which we all respect. For this reason, there can be no peace in this region unless the Palestinian people exercise their legitimate rights, and above all, their right to create an independent State, with Jerusalem as the capital, and unless Israel withdraws from the Shebaa farms area or south Lebanon and liberates the Syrian Golan.

A lasting and just peace also depends on putting a stop to all aggressions in the region. We need to put an end to the suffering which the embargo is inflicting on the people of Iraq and the people of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. We need to strive to ensure peace and stability in the region through cooperation for development and prosperity amongst all our people.

Original Arabic: Mr. ELAMAWY (Minister of Manpower and Emigration, Egypt) — In the name of God, the decision to devote a special sitting for the consideration of the report of the Director-General related to conditions of workers in the occupied Arab territories, a continuation of the special sittings which have already been devoted to this purpose, is without any doubt an expression of the extent of concern felt by the International Labour Organization faced with the deteriorating situation of Palestinian workers and employers. It is also an expression of its will to do everything in its power to improve their conditions and to lift the injustices from which they suffer, in accordance with the resolution of the Conference adopted in 1980.

The decision to hold this sitting is a reaction to the intransigent policies adopted by the Israeli Government in the occupied Palestinian territories, and reflects a clear desire to place the responsibility for the obstruction of the peace process on Tel Aviv. The policies of the Government of Israel have pushed the Middle East into an impasse which not only threatens the peace and stability of the region, but also international peace and security.

The deterioration of the situation and the flagrant violation of the human rights of the Palestinian people since 28 September of last year have exceeded all limits. There is not a single human right, workers' right or employers' right which has not been violated by Israel.

Israel prevented Mr. Rafiq Sh. El-Netsheh, the Palestinian Authority's Labour Minister, from travelling to preside over the delegation of his country at this Conference, delaying his arrival at the Conference by

one week. This is one of the arbitrary Israeli actions which should be condemned, particularly because before that, the Palestinian Health Minister was prevented from going to chair the delegation of his country at the World Health Assembly.

There is no need to describe all these violations. They are taking place daily and are broadcast over the media. There has never been such a wealth of international documents and reports, and even Israeli ones, which document the Israeli violations. These violations for the first time appeared in a report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and by the International Commission of Inquiry which was established by the special session of the Commission on Human Rights in October 2000. They have also been reported by the commission which was formed after the Sharm-el-Sheikh Summit last year, known as the Mitchell Commission, which recommended the complete suspension of any expansion of Israeli settlements. That is without even mentioning the documents and reports of international organizations such as UNICEF, FAO, UNRWA, and reports by non-governmental organizations such as Amnesty International, the Israeli human rights organization B'Tselem, the International Red Cross and its delegation's director in Tel Aviv, who describes the Israeli practice as war crimes. I am going to focus on what was mentioned in the report of the Director-General, which we are now discussing.

There are many points which are worthy of our attention.

Firstly, the purpose of the Conference's decision to send missions to the region was to study the situation of the workers in the occupied Arab territories. But the report that we have before us merely presents statistics and the points of view of the different parties. It offers no insight into the mission's conclusions following visits to the field, capable of permitting the Conference to draw up specific conclusions, as it had done in similar situations in the past. Despite this observation, which we hope will be taken into consideration during the visit by the mission next year, we appreciate the effort made by the mission of the International Labour Office during its visit and in the preparation of this report, which also deals with the situation of workers in the occupied Golan, and we also appreciate its concern for technical cooperation with the Palestinian Authority.

Secondly, the Israeli occupation and Israeli racist practices are the main source of the many problems faced by workers in the occupied Arab territories. The repression which is part of the occupation takes the worst forms, including murder, detention, torture and the systematic destruction of Palestinian infrastructure, industrial and agricultural production. This creates a climate in which there is no respect for the human being isolated from the requirements of economic and social development. It also constitutes a flagrant violation of the principles and rules of this Organization. In addition, the horizontal and vertical expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied Arab territories — what is called the "natural expansion" of these settlements — is yet another illegal and destructive manifestation of the Israeli occupation.

Thirdly, as the report has made clear, because of this poor social and economic situation imposed by Israeli military force, and faced with these repeated violations which constitute a challenge to the international community, the situation of Palestinian

workers and employers has seriously deteriorated. The United Nations Office of the Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories has estimated that the direct loss for the Palestinian economy is about 50 per cent of the Palestinian GNP, that one of every four Palestinian workers is unemployed and that 55.7 per cent of Palestinian families in the West Bank are living below the poverty line. This percentage goes up to 81.4 per cent in Gaza.

In the light of all this information on illegal Israeli acts such as embargoes and blockades, we should consider concrete steps that the ILO might take to follow up on the decisions of the Conference.

First of all, the International Labour Office should issue a statement on this special sitting on the situation in the territories and disseminate it as widely as possible, if possible over the Internet.

Secondly, the report which we are considering today should be published and translated into as many languages as possible and should be put on the Organization's website.

Thirdly, this special sitting should not be limited to the reading out of statements. It should formulate practical recommendations which must be applied if we would like to maintain the credibility of the sitting.

Fourthly, we should seriously consider constituting a special committee for the application of the resolution adopted by the International Labour Conference in 1980, so as to stand up to the continued Israeli violations in the occupied Arab territories.

This Organization bears a clear responsibility for the conditions of workers in Palestine, and this responsibility should not be abandoned by the Organization. In this respect, I would like to take this opportunity to express our profound appreciation for the constructive role played by the Director-General, Mr. Juan Somavia, with a view to mobilizing international resources for international technical cooperation projects in the Palestinian territories. I would like also to recall the invitation addressed by the Director-General to the Palestinian Minister of Labour and to representatives of the workers and employers to visit the Organization's headquarters in Geneva and to take part in consultations on the best ways to provide technical cooperation. The Director-General also sent a multidisciplinary mission to visit Gaza and the West Bank in March 2001. Such activities should continue, and we call on donor countries to offer every support possible to the Palestinian people and to the Syrian people in the occupied Golan. We hope that all these positive steps will lead to concrete results.

Lastly, we stress that the Israeli withdrawal from all the occupied Arab territories and the end of the occupation is the only way to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the area and to provide for security.

Mr. TABANI (*Employers' delegate, Pakistan*) — It is with a degree of regret that I take the floor. Regret because we had discontinued the special session for Palestinian workers as conditions had improved and it was felt that the peace efforts had borne fruit. Today's special session is a retrograde step and the Director-General's report on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories clearly shows the extent to which conditions have deteriorated once again.

The report is factual because both the missions sent by the Director-General were given every facility by Israel and the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to visit the affected areas. The report is

based on the actual conditions of work and employment of the occupied Arab territories in areas of employment promotion, access to the labour market, working conditions, social security, poverty alleviation and individual relations. Surprisingly, the Palestinians living in Israeli-controlled areas are governed by a body of different laws.

Paragraph 10 says it all by describing the tragic impact on the situation of the workers due to closure of the territories and encirclements within them — 72 closures in the last quarter of 2000 — resulting in a considerable loss of income and drastic increases in unemployment and poverty, which have unleashed a major crisis from the humanitarian standpoint for the Palestinian workers.

Furthermore, crops, irrigation systems and enterprise premises have also been destroyed, affecting the lives of farmers, the self-employed and employers in addition to the workers of the occupied territories.

Over the last four days we have been discussing the Director-General's Report on *Reducing the decent work deficit: A global challenge*. The state of the Palestinian workers is far more than a deficit. It is critical, and, as the report points out, it is getting worse. The international community needs to wake up and resolve these issues in order to restore the dignity of the workers in the Israeli occupied territories.

Mr. LEVY (*Government delegate, Israel*) — Let me say at the outset that my Government opposed and still opposes a special sitting.

This kind of sitting blatantly discriminates against a member State of the United Nations, contributes to the politicization of this specialized agency and will add neither to the thematic work of this Conference nor to the well-being of the workers in the area.

Israelis and Palestinians are neighbours. They are also partners, even though at this time the partnership is strained. This is why we have said time and again in the last few years that Israel is interested in the well-being of the Palestinians. We see the improvement of their social situation as an Israeli interest.

In order to further these common interests, over the past few years we have initiated policies which have brought about an improvement in the situation. Let me stress that these measures were taken in spite of the security risks involved and in spite of the fact that according to the agreements signed between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, the Palestinian Authority is responsible for the overall economic sphere, including the labour sphere. In this context I refer to the Israeli-Palestinian interim agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, signed in Washington on 28 September 1995, article 11 of which speaks about employment, stating that "power and responsibilities of the civil administration in the sphere of employment in the West Bank and Gaza will be transferred to the Palestinian side". This element was also mentioned in the protocol on economic relations signed in Paris between the Government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization on 29 April 1994.

These measures have produced the following results. Prior to the beginning of the riots, there were 120,000 Palestinians employed in Israel. When the speakers who took the floor before me spoke about the right to work and the prevention of work through closures, they omitted one key phrase. They were talking about their expectations of the rights of

Palestinians to work *in Israel*, But they chose not to mention it, probably with a reason.

As it is stated in the report of the Director-General, "remittances of Palestinian workers employed in Israel contributed 32 per cent to Palestinian GNP before September 2000". Palestinian workers enjoyed, in addition to salaries, the same social rights as Israeli employees: pension rights, paid vacations, sick leave, accident insurance, etc, all on an equal footing.

The previous Israeli speaker, the Secretary-General of the Histadrut, has been fighting for that side by side with those in the Israeli Government who are indeed concerned for the well-being of their Palestinian neighbours.

Prior to the beginning of the riots, employment in the territories had improved to a great extent, and the rate of unemployment had been lowered by almost 50 per cent according to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. It had reached levels very similar to the levels of unemployment in Israel.

The atmosphere of peace attracted many investors from various parts of the world. Alongside the industrial parks of Erez and Atarot, a new industrial park in Gaza became operational and others were in the planning stages in Tulkarem and in Jenin. The level of trade between the two sides grew extensively. As a result of all these positive developments, the Palestinian GNP grew by 8 per cent in 1998 and 7 per cent in 1999.

It is important to note that because of the improved security situation, there were hardly any days of closure in 1998 and 1999, and again in 2000, until the riots. When there are no riots, there are no closures.

Why did the riots begin in the first place? It is not because of a pretext, as one speaker mentioned here, such as a visit to the Temple Mount. It was apparently a strategic decision taken by the Palestinian leadership headed by Mr. Arafat, following the near breakthrough in negotiations last July at Camp David.

At the time the Israeli Government made a far-reaching proposal. The Palestinians did not respond. The former United States President, Mr. Clinton, made a bridging proposal which we were ready to accept. It was rejected, in fact, by the Palestinians. Apparently a decision was taken to resort to other means rather than negotiations, trying to force Israel's hand and generate pressure on her to make further concessions.

The Palestinian strategy is to internationalize the conflict and reach an imposed solution rather than negotiate an acceptable compromise in face-to-face talks. This will not work. Genuine peace can only come about as a result of compromises by *both sides*. All the other distinguished speakers who called from this rostrum on only one party to make concessions have it wrong. Peace will only emerge through concessions from both sides. Indeed, yesterday and today, we managed to reach an agreement which involves compromises and concessions, first and foremost in security areas, by both sides.

Not long ago we were very close to resolving some of the issues still dividing us, the issues of self-determination for the Palestinians, settlements and refugees — all of these could have been concluded by now in an agreement, but the Palestinians decided in July last year at Camp David that they were not ready to strike a compromise on these core issues. Such an agreement could have enabled us to achieve our common dream of lasting peace.

Regrettably, one of the first segments of Palestinian society that was hurt because of the violence initiated by the Palestinian Authority was the workers. The deteriorating security situation in the area, fuelled by PLO incitement, forced the Government of Israel, which like any other Government is first and foremost responsible for the security of its own citizens to take measures in order to minimize the risk of potential terrorist acts by Palestinian radicals. This situation brought about a significant decrease in the number of Palestinians employed in Israel.

Moreover, the Palestinian Authority has deliberately acted against those workers who tried to continue their work in Israel. Amongst these actions were shots fired daily at industrial parks in which most workers were Palestinians, the burning of factories, the shooting at Palestinian workers on their way to the Erez checkpoint and delays in the distribution of work permits.

Even before the riots started, the Palestinian Authority had made every effort to avoid joint projects with Israel which were intended to improve the welfare of the Palestinian workers. To cite just one example, a joint seminar, planned and prepared by none other than the ILO in the field of safety and hygiene, was cancelled unilaterally by the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Labour a few days before it was scheduled to take place. Despite the level of violence and the loss of trust between the parties, the Government of Israel has tried throughout this period to enable as many workers as possible to return to work. This situation has also not affected the ability of the Palestinian workers to benefit from their social rights. To emphasize this point, I would like to state that US\$40 million has been transferred recently directly to the personal accounts of each Palestinian worker employed since the riots started so as to ensure that the workers themselves and no one else would receive the sums which were owed to them.

The Palestinian Authority's response to this act of optimism was continued incitement. Let me give you a case in point to illustrate the problematic nature of allowing Palestinian workers to come into Israeli villages and cities freely, as they did prior to the rioting. We have a contingency plan which, even in the case of a crisis, allows tens of thousands of Palestinian workers who have what is called "fail-safe permits" to come into Israel. However, after a Palestinian driver bringing workers to Israel rammed into a group of Israeli youngsters, killing eight — most of whom were women — and wounding scores of others, Israel had to take the necessary precautions for the protection of its own citizens.

Would not any responsible Government represented in this hall have acted in a similar vein to protect its own citizens? Once more, those who are to blame for the loss of work opportunities and economic opportunities are those who perpetrate such acts of terrorism, who train the terrorists and brainwash them, not the Israelis who have been victims of such attacks.

A month ago we decided to try again. Taking the risk, we decided to allow thousands of workers to come into Israel. The answer was the terrible massacre of 21 teenagers in a discotheque in Tel Aviv. One hundred and twenty others were wounded in that attack.

A lot has been said in this room about Palestinian suffering. Let me say a word about suffering. It is not limited just to those of Arab or Palestinian nationality.

Some might be surprised that the Israelis are now suffering. We are burying our dead — 115 of them killed in the recent riots — throughout Israel. Israelis are victims of terrorism, of car bombs, of sniper attacks, of ambushes along the roadways. We are treating thousands of our wounded in hospitals, victims of continuous attacks, but even those who have suffered no physical injury are suffering from psychological wounds. People are afraid to ride the buses because suicide bombers, having been brainwashed by fundamentalist zealots, board these buses and blow themselves up with innocent civilians.

Israel has also suffered economic losses. Let me just quote to you briefly from the report of the Director-General, presented this very week, the report which is the basis of this sitting: “the present events have also seriously affected the Israeli economy, which had just recovered from a three-year recession ... the last quarter of 2000 saw a major GDP slowdown to 3 per cent growth ... direct economic losses are mainly concentrated in four areas: tourism, exports to the occupied Palestinian territories, construction and agriculture, although all the other industries have also to a certain extent been negatively affected by the crisis.”

Let me return to my opening remarks. Special sittings and political debates are pointless. However, one would expect that distinguished cabinet ministers speaking in this hall would cite the truth in their remarks. Not only did the Palestinian delegate arrive here on time, with some degree of intervention from our delegation here, I might add, but so did other members of the Palestinian delegation. One would have similar expectations of the distinguished Egyptian Minister who spoke a few minutes ago.

The way for the parties to emerge from this crisis has been pointed by the Mitchell Commission, the only body agreed upon by both parties, Palestinian and Israeli. The Commission has concluded its work and has presented recommendations which fall into four stages: the first stage is a ceasefire, which Israel already declared unilaterally on 20 May and has been respecting in spite of major terrorist attacks, such as the one in the discotheque in Tel Aviv in which 21 youngsters were killed. Both sides have now declared that they accept the provisions of what is known as the “Tenet document”. Still, in these very days, the terror still continues. But we hope that the ceasefire will be adhered to by the Palestinian side. We are still committed to the ceasefire.

The second element is the cooling-off period. The third is confidence-building measures, and the fourth, later, is the resumption of political negotiations on the outstanding permanent status issues. There are detailed timetables of days and weeks for all these elements of the proposals, and we — both parties — began implementing them just yesterday.

The only way to emerge from this crisis is indeed to stop the hostilities and then restart negotiations. That is the course on which Israel has embarked. We invite our Palestinian neighbours to become once again our partners in peace, our partners in employment. If we succeed in doing so we will have no need for special sittings or debates. Once more we will return to work together for the furtherance of the values cherished by us all.

Mr. JOHANSEN (*Government adviser and substitute delegate, Norway*) — Norway would like to commend the ILO on the analysis of the employment

situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, as contained in the report under discussion.

The developments in the Middle East since the end of September 2000 have had a serious impact on the employment situation in Israel and Palestine. This is in particular true for the workers in Palestine, where a drastic increase in unemployment and poverty has unleashed a major humanitarian crisis.

Israel carries a special responsibility in this regard. The internal and external closures have had a devastating effect on the Palestinian economy, and hence the employment situation for the Palestinians. Israel's reluctance to transfer to the Palestinian Authority taxes collected on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, as stated in the Paris Agreements, threatens the employment situation also for tens of thousands of Palestinian public servants.

The only long-term solution to the present devastating employment situation in Palestine is to negotiate a final status agreement that brings an end to the occupation.

The time has now come to let political vision and leadership decide the future of the Middle East, rather than a vicious circle of attacks and counter-attacks. Everyone needs to understand that there can be no military solution to this conflict. The situation will continue to worsen unless the Government of Israel, and the Palestinian Authority, take swift and decisive action to end the violence, rebuild confidence and resume negotiations.

The recommendations from the Mitchell Committee, in which the Foreign Minister of Norway participated, suggest a way out of the present situation. The recommendations of the report have received broad international support, and the responses from the parties have also been positive. These recommendations should form the basis of a process that will enable the parties to break the present impasse and open the road to a resumption of negotiations.

Norway urges the parties to make use of this window of opportunity to break out of the downward spiral of violent acts and military retaliation.

Norway urges the parties to exercise maximum restraint and to refrain from any action that can endanger the two unilaterally declared ceasefires.

There is no time for preconditions to implementing the recommendations of the Mitchell Report. The recommendations must be implemented now, as a package.

However, steps to halt the violence and rebuild some trust cannot be long sustained without new talks. The aim must be a resumption of negotiations based on the parties' signed commitments, and through the implementation of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, and the Oslo Agreements.

We must find a path to negotiations now. There is no substitute. We must all make a true effort to encourage the parties to resume political dialogue and to reach a permanent settlement. Only then will the rights and interests of workers in Palestine and Israel be safeguarded as they deserve to be.

Original Spanish: Mrs. HERNÁNDEZ OLIVA (*Government adviser and substitute delegate, Cuba*) — After a period in which the Palestinian workers apparently recovered their rights, the international community has witnessed recent acts of violence committed by members of the Israeli army and Israeli settlers, against the Palestinians. The result has been

the destruction of enterprises, farms, irrigation systems and trees. The Israeli authorities have confiscated land for military purposes and in order to establish settlements in Palestinian villages. The ILO has undertaken a range of actions in order to strengthen the labour relations system in the Palestinian territories. The Palestinian Authority has also shown itself to be receptive by promulgating a new Labour Code on 1 May, and by submitting the Social Security Code to the Palestinian Legislative Council.

But regrettably all of these efforts have been hampered by the situation of dependence of the Palestinians in their own land on the Israeli infrastructure, because the electricity and water supply, sanitation and roads can be controlled, restricted or cut off by Israel, making a stranglehold on the Palestinian economy possible.

Furthermore, the increase in Israeli settlements in Palestinian territories is designed further to limit the possibilities for Palestinians to develop their own infrastructure on their own land. The Palestinian reaction is justifiable in the light of these events, events which prevent them from attending to the development of their lands and of their institution of consultation which can channel actions in the fight against poverty, the reduction of unemployment, the creation of job opportunities for men and women of the active Palestinian population, the training of human resources and the improvement of living conditions.

My delegation supports and thanks the ILO for the technical assistance projects which are being prepared for the Palestinian workers, but the situation of the violation of rights of Palestinian workers in the lands occupied by Israel should be seen in a broader context than simply the closures and encirclement measures and the violence committed by Israel in the latest period of resurgence of human rights violations. If the situation cannot be resolved once and for all with respect to the political and military activities pursued by Israel in the illegally occupied territories and if they do not withdraw from those territories, then the Palestinian and Arab workers who are victims of these policies will not be able to move forward and achieve lasting peace.

Original Arabic: Mr. SAVAEDI (Workers' adviser and substitute delegate, Islamic Republic of Iran) — In the name of God, the Merciful and Compassionate! Allow me first to all to thank the Director-General for his report on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories.

On behalf of the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, it is a great honour for me to address this assembly. As we move into this third millennium, it seems that the world is inheriting the detestable spirit seen in the two world wars, as well as in the dozens of other conflicts we witnessed during the twentieth century, the horrors of some of which are unforgettable, and that a certain number of these crises and conflicts have continued into the new century. But I think the most serious and unjust of all these conflicts is the occupation of the Palestinian territories and the oppression of the Palestinian people by the Zionists who choose to disregard at all international charters and all international standards and conventions.

At the dawn of the third millennium, the Islamic Republic of Iran has undertaken actions with the United Nations to institute a dialogue between the

civilizations to take the place of domination by the inhumane culture of war. It is the duty of all the free men of the world to support the Palestinian people suffering under the occupation, rotting in prisons and subject to torture and expulsion. A huge portion of them are far from their despoiled land. This tragedy has already resulted in thousands of martyrs and has forced hundreds of thousands of refugees to flee. The aggressive Zionist power has used weapons of destruction against children whose only retaliation is stones. Testimony of the extent of the occupier's barbarity is the number of babies, children, and women who have been killed and the situation in the refugee camps. This calls for the conscience of humanity to address this essential question: What have we done to defend the legitimate rights of the unjustly treated Palestinian people? What have we done for the workers who are deprived of their jobs, for those subject to discrimination and violence, for those chased from their workplaces and all those who, every day in the occupied Arab territories, are subject to all kinds of inhumane practices.

We live in a unipolar world, a world where there is just one major power. Even this constitutes a threat for workers in the occupied Arab territories because globalization goes hand in hand with the impoverishment of workers worldwide. Faced with the conflicts springing up all over the world, workers weakened by conflict are no longer in a position to pursue development plans and are unable to build a free and prosperous future. This is the case of the sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic of Iran, the suffering inflicted on the children of Iraq, of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, the Sudan and Cuba, and the unjust measures applied in the areas occupied by the Zionist power in our region.

We will say it loud and clear: the challenges we face are enormous. We are confronted with challenges which put our existence and future in peril. We must resist; we must fight together to achieve our common objectives and prepare ourselves for this struggle for survival. We must strengthen the spirit of responsibility and solidarity of all workers if we are to ensure victory for our peoples and the establishment of a new, more just and more harmonious world order, and to achieve peace based on justice, rights and freedoms in all regions of the world.

Original Portuguese: Mr. LANÇA (Workers' delegate, Portugal) — CGTP has consistently shown solidarity with the Palestinian cause, and has followed with great concern the events that have caused such a high number of deaths and wounded, particularly among defenceless Palestinians, events which have also led to the loss of thousands of jobs among that same population. Moreover, Palestinians are totally reliant on Israel for their income, and have helped to create the wealth and level of development currently enjoyed by the country.

It is extremely important that the aggression ceases and that people go back to the negotiating table. This is the only way we will see any prospect of a lasting peace emerging, and it will guarantee all peoples in the region the right to territorial integrity and indeed, sovereignty.

Only United Nations Security Council resolutions calling on Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories are fully respected will any just peace be a possibility in the region. Tolerance, although it is indis-

pensable in such a complex conflict, must not be allowed to conceal either the causes of the conflict or those who are responsible.

The aggression carried out by Tel Aviv has called into question the entire peace process which began with the Oslo agreements and, indeed, all the efforts made since then to find a fair and peaceful solution to the conflict.

We feel that the ILO can take on a paramount role in resolving the serious problems currently behind this conflict. Although this has been demonstrated by the current debate and the contribution of the Director-General on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories given the tragic consequences of occupation, we believe that more can be done, particularly by the creation of a standing committee, like that created for the terrible case of apartheid. We feel that such an initiative could contribute positively to resolving the conflict. It would mean that at least Palestinian workers would see their right to work protected and this, of course, for them and their families is tantamount to the right to survival.

On behalf of Portuguese workers, we therefore express our solidarity with the Palestinian workers and people so that they might be able to build a free and independent homeland. This, of course is a right which is broadly recognized by the United Nations and the international community.

Mr. SITUMORANG (*Government delegate, Indonesia*) — At the outset my delegation wishes to add its voice to those of previous speakers in expressing our appreciation to the Director-General and to commend him on the comprehensive report he has compiled on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab Territories, which is at the centre of our deliberations today. This is an issue which deserves our fullest attention, especially in light of the tragic turn of events in recent weeks, which cannot but compromise any chance of progress in improving the condition of the local population in general and of workers in particular.

It is obvious that the breakdown of the Middle East peace process a few months ago and the spiralling violence which followed have had disastrous effects on the respect for the fundamental freedoms of the inhabitants of the occupied territories and for their right to lead normal lives. More particularly, in the specific context with which we are concerned today, the total or partial closures of checkpoints and borders, which have intensified steadily in recent weeks, have had crippling consequences on the region's workers and have deprived them of their right to exercise their occupations or professions in safety. The Director-General's report on the situation in the occupied Arab territories reflects this fact and highlights the breakdown of normal economic activity throughout these territories.

The escalation of violence and the rising death toll, the curfews and closing of borders, as well as the restrictions of every kind for security or other reasons, including the most recent sanctions affecting fuel, international money transfers and mail services, are slowly strangling the Palestinian community. Discrimination inspired by hatred or fear has dramatically affected the employment and working conditions of the inhabitants of the region, most of whom are barred from going to work in Israel, thereby effectively losing their livelihood. Moreover, the deep-

rooted mutual distrust between the two communities constitutes an additional obstacle which is prejudicing the hiring of Palestinian workers by Israeli employers, whose firms consequently suffer from staff shortages.

It is imperative that the ILO add its voice to those of the various mediators within the international community who are prevailing on both sides to observe a ceasefire, if only to enable the civilian populations and the workers in particular to resume a normal life. Indeed, my delegation strongly echoes the view of the report whereby a more technical approach aimed at addressing the immediate and crucial issues of employment and labour can surely lend a weighty argument to the other pleas for peace.

My delegation wishes to emphasize the importance of implementing the ILO Plan of Action and of maintaining close links through technical cooperation projects to promote job creation and safety at work. Notably, the social dialogue programme must be actively pursued in order to lead to concrete decisions on the issue of secure employment in the region. Moreover, the clearly stated preference for vocational training expressed by the Palestinian labour officials should be taken into account, and moves to implement the relevant programmes set in motion. Through its Regional Office in Beirut, the ILO must strive to overcome the problems associated with capacity-building activities in the fields of labour and social policies, and endeavour to expand the employment opportunities of the Palestinian labour force. In this regard, the international community should continue to do its utmost to ensure that the ILO receives the necessary backing to implement its Plan of Action.

To conclude, my delegation believes that the various emergency programme proposals mentioned in the report deserve to be closely examined for their pertinence in bringing relief to the suffering workers in the occupied Arab territories. In addition, we trust that this forum will put its utmost resolve towards acting on behalf of the Palestinian workers through the necessary steps advocated by the Director-General in his report, with a view to making a significant improvement to their living and working conditions. Meanwhile, my delegation expresses the hope that the two sides will break out of the cycle of violence and reprisals in which they have been locked for too long and resume peace talks. Only then can conditions conducive to a more favourable social and economic climate be restored. To this end, we would like to assure the ILO of our wholehearted support in assisting it in accomplishing this arduous task.

Original Spanish: Mr. BEDOYA (Workers' adviser delegate, Colombia) — I represent General Confederation of Democratic Workers of Colombia, which is affiliated to the World Confederation of Labour and the Latin American Central of Workers (CLAT).

I would like to express the concern of Colombian workers for the fragile circumstances of the Palestinian people.

It is a situation we understand very well, because we also live in a state of war, but the difference is that Colombians have land on which to work, and do not suffer the consequences of border conflicts like the Palestinian people.

That is why, today, in the context of the Director-General's report, I would like to encourage the international community to take decisions to put an end to

the terrible situation in Palestine, and to ensure respect for the sacred principle of the right to self-determination of peoples.

It is a well-known fact that the Palestinian economy was built on peaceful foundations, but this economy is now threatened by external forces. The Director-General states in his report that "the economic and social development of the occupied Palestinian territories has been negatively affected by the political situation in the region and the years of conflict and occupation". No nation can survive without a solid economy, and its economy cannot be solid if there are external factors which prevent this.

As I was writing this speech I thought of the tragedy suffered by people who live in war-torn countries, the innocent people who die in the fields, in the streets, everywhere. Wherever innocent blood is spilt, it is our duty to call for justice, and for all the men and women of the world to unite in their call for an end to violence.

The fruit of the land is bloodstained. In the future, let it be nurtured by the hope of a prosperous future. It is this hope which drives our commitment to strive for peace, land, and food for the Palestinian people.

Self-determination is an essential condition for the construction of world peace. Any country which violates the autonomy of another commits a crime, because they endanger not only the country which is the victim of their arrogance, but all the nations of the world.

My organization, true to its principles, previously, defended Israel's right to have its own land, and in the same way with due force, we call for the return of the occupied Arab territories to the Palestinian people.

Humanity abhors the horrors of war. It is therefore our duty to fight tirelessly for world peace. Those who believe in God share the belief that he who is with us always gives us the following promise: soon there will be peace in the world.

Original Arabic: Mr. MAZHAR (*Employers' adviser and substitute delegate, Egypt*) — I would have liked to inform you this afternoon about economic and social progress achieved by the peoples of the Middle East. I would have liked to have talked about peace, about increases in individual income and improvements in education, the health services and the social services.

But, after having listened to the representative of Israel, I found myself plunging into despair, because he denied every reality of the situation in the Middle East as enshrined in the Mitchell report. He has challenged everything that is confirmed by a number of international sources and everything that we have heard from speakers in the room, notably the last speaker, the representative of Colombia, and from the European Union and all those following events in the region.

Nevertheless, let me try and address this dramatic situation, which is a threat to peace and progress in the region: as an employer, that is my main concern. When we talk about the situation of workers in the occupied Palestinian territories, even if we avoid political polemic, we are bound to recall certain truths. One of those is the blockade, imposed on the occupied Palestinian territories, which is a flagrant violation of the most basic rights of workers — including the right to work which is enshrined in the Constitution of this Organization and the Declaration of

Philadelphia and which is at the heart of human progress and development.

The prevailing situation in the occupied Palestinian territories denies Arab workers any possibility to invest and thus to create jobs. It increases unemployment and is damaging to employers, who, because of the blockade, have to cut back production or even to stop it altogether.

Such pressures on the Arab workers, are, from the legal point of view, penalties applied to an entire people. They deny that people its rights and its most basic needs, which is a violation not only of the Declaration of Human Rights, but also of the ILO Constitution and the Declaration of Philadelphia.

While, as I said before, we do not wish to descend to the level of political polemic, but it is important to remember that this treatment meted out to the Palestinian workers is a violation of the most elementary human rights, particularly the right to freedom of movement, the right to equal pay for equal work, the right to choose one's work and the right not to be subjected to forced labour. These rights are guaranteed by all of the movements I have mentioned, notably the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

Today we can only ask for the minimum, and that is the right to decent work, which corresponds to the appeal by the Director-General of this Organization. We hope that the Organization will make every effort to achieve that end.

Mr. MAZUR (*Workers' adviser delegate, United States*) — I should like to thank the President for giving me the opportunity to speak to what hopefully will be the last special sitting on the issue before us now.

As has been the case every time from 1980 to 1985, in 1998 and in 1999 and again this year, the International Labour Conference has held a special sitting on the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories. The American labour movement, the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) has expressed its deep concern over the sad misuse of the ILO.

It has been the AFL-CIO's consistent view that these special sittings do not contribute any constructive role to help guide the ILO. Simply stated, this is the wrong place to discuss the political and security aspects of a very tense situation.

The ILO Conferences are not the same as the United Nations General Assembly or the Security Council. The ILO is a unique and specialized international organization, including its tripartite structure, within the United Nations system and the ILO has a globally respected mandate, responsibility and competence.

These special sittings only serve to politicise and weaken the effectiveness of the ILO and ultimately its credibility. Unfortunately, there are some who, while not openly admitting it, would indeed like to see the ILO's credibility weakened and its organization undermined and, more disturbingly, there are those who would just as well like to see any progress towards genuine peace, security, democracy and economic and social justice undermined in this part of the world.

Certainly there is very clearly a constructive and important role for the ILO to contribute that is within its mandate and competence. The vision of decent work, including the strategic objectives and cross-

cutting issues all have elements that through technical cooperation can help build essentially needed confidence, dialogue and negotiation within its sphere of competence.

The Appendix to the Director-General's Report, which is the basis of the discussion in this special sitting, includes a useful summary of the technical assistance programmes under way within the framework of the 1994 Memorandum of Understanding. The report specifically mentions the project to assist members of the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) in the formation, development and implementation of vocational training policies with the help of the ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV).

Also noted is the establishment of a vocational rehabilitation centre for people with disabilities and youth with special needs as well as the technical support to the employment programme through the multidisciplinary team and the regional office.

The work of the ILO, including its Decent Work Agenda, strategic objectives, in particular, winning respect for and implementing the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work are now more important than ever around the world, especially in the surrounding wider region we are addressing this afternoon.

It is a fact that there is still a gaping absence of fundamental human labour rights in the wider region that has been documented in the Annual Survey of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), annual survey of the violations of trade union rights and other sources for years. Trade unions are simply banned in some states and in others no collective bargaining is allowed. Outright government control is the situation in other states and only a very few states permit trade unions to act, and then usually often under severe limitations.

The fact is that these special sittings do not address the underlying problem of the massive and appalling social and economic inequalities that are so widespread throughout the greater surrounding region.

These injustices are clearly linked to the harsh suppression of democracy and prohibition against workers being able to freely form their own trade unions. In reality, that is the great challenge facing the ILO in the wider region today and for the foreseeable future.

Ms. BUVERUD PEDERSEN (*Workers' delegate, Norway*) — On behalf of the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) I would like to thank the Director-General for this most needed follow-up report on the extremely difficult situation of the Palestinian and Arab workers in the occupied territories.

I must, however, express my disappointment that the report has reached us so late. The report does illustrate and confirm the need for the ILO to keep up the pressure for changes through a special session on this issue until a final and real peace agreement has been achieved.

The published material is important in that it provides objective and impartial information on the main problems arising from the occupation. It points specifically to the worsening of the working, economic and social conditions of the Palestinian workers since September 2000, when the Israeli Government stepped up its closure policy, increased establishment

of illegal settlements and denied Palestinian workers access to their workplaces in Israel.

It thus became almost impossible to collect wages, receive unemployment benefits or benefit from severance pay. As a result, poverty reached unbelievable heights, child labour increased in families deprived of income, and unemployment rates became higher than ever before. This led to frustration, despair and the use of violence and undesirable behaviour on the part of the Palestinians. However, the counteractions taken by the Israelis have, in my opinion, been far too strong, and are unacceptable.

The oppression of the Palestinian workers has devastated the Palestinian economy. The policy of closure and collective punishment, the destruction of homes and fields and the colonization of the Palestinian territories have led to a significant decline in the economic and social conditions, which threatens Palestinians and their livelihood.

In this extreme situation it is very difficult for the Palestinian trade unions to perform their legitimate work as workers' representatives. Because of this, it is our hope that Histadrut will be more active and visible in their protests against the many unacceptable measures taken by the Israeli Government, and in their support for the Palestinian workers.

The situation of the Palestinians was high on the agenda at the Congress of the LO our trade union confederation, which was held from 5 to 10 May this year. A resolution giving full support to the Palestinian workers was adopted. Israel was called upon to stop its aggression against the Palestinian workers. We requested our Government to do its utmost to make Israel resume the negotiations with the Palestinians with the goal of implementation of the United Nations resolutions, thereby securing the right of Palestinians to their own independent State.

That is what the Israelis already have, and what both the Palestinians and the Israelis should have in the future.

Madam President, in conclusion, in my opinion the report of the Mitchell Commission has given some hope that the road of peace will replace violence and the threat of war. Israel must respect international law, withdraw its forces from all the occupied territories and stop the establishment and expansion of settlements. That is the only just and comprehensive step towards peace which can ensure stability and co-existence in the Middle East.

There is no doubt in my mind that the Israeli people, in spite of electing Ariel Sharon as their leader, must be tired of war and violence. They must desire a life in peace with their neighbours. Judging from their history, this should be self-evident.

We call upon the ILO and all the international trade union movements, as well as the employers' organizations, to do their utmost from where they are to achieve this goal of peace.

Original Arabic: Mr. ISSA (Workers' delegate, Syrian Arab Republic) — I shall not confine myself to my text. I should like to begin by saying that one of the delegates said that he was born in the Maghreb, in Morocco. You know that others were born in Ethiopia, the Russian Federation, Europe, the United States. Why are they here? Why have they come here from the four corners of the globe to meet in this room? And why have others come into our territory to wipe out our people, to kill our children, destroy

our homes and carry out massacres worse than those of the Nazis? Is this not organized terrorism?

I should like to welcome the President and express my gratitude for her presence during this meeting. We hope that this sitting will be a symbol of her solidarity with the Palestinian people and its quest for the liberation of its land and for its right to self-determination and the creation of an independent State with Al-Quds as its capital.

We are convinced that solidarity against the apartheid regime of South Africa made it possible for the people of that country to pursue their struggle. We know that apartheid received the support of world Zionism, the terrible crimes of which were worse than those of Nazism. So what we have to do is to rehabilitate the United Nations resolution that considers Zionism as a form of racism. This is our demand.

Israeli forces continually repress the Arabs in Palestine. In the Syrian Golan, in the Shebaa farms area, they continue to destroy the infrastructure, they build their settlements, they constantly provoke the Palestinian people. We can only call this a war of extermination, an, organized massacre, in which the number of wounded and disabled Palestinian Arab martyrs, including children, continues to rise.

So the international community must bring an end to this conflict, in keeping with the values and principles that formed the foundations of the international organizations, and particularly in keeping with the Human Rights Charter and the Fourth Geneva Convention which Israel consistently disregards by continuing its occupation of the Palestinian territories in Palestine and the Syrian Golan.

The people in the Golan are repressed. They live under an occupation. Their situation consists of a life of poverty because their land, has been taken, settlements have been built on it, and their water has been stolen.

From this rostrum I should like to stress the decisions of the 1974 and 1980 sessions of the International Labour Conference condemning the Israeli actions of racial discrimination, oppression and terrorism in the occupied Arab territories and their intent to pursue the practice of settlements. All this is counter to international law. The Israeli threat that weighs heavily over the Syrian Arab Republic, Lebanon, and the Policy of organized terrorism against the Palestinian people, has plunged the region into an explosive situation. We cannot predict the outcome. It may be catastrophic, not only for the region but also for the entire world. We all know the danger of Israel's nuclear arsenal to peace and stability in the region.

Israel has continually refused any attempt at international monitoring of this arsenal, thereby violating the laws governing any country possessing such an arsenal. The Palestinian cause is an international and humanitarian cause, one which is of concern to advocates of freedom all over the world.

Mr. Bashar Al-Assad the President of the Syrian Arab Republic, has described the intifada as a vital struggle because without the intifada it would have been difficult to attain what we have attained to date, so this fight must be continued courageously.

The victory of the Lebanese people and, the resistance that liberated the South encourages us to continue our work to liberate the Golan and the occupied Arab territories. We are confident of that the victory of the intifada which is rooted in the values of law and justice.

We are therefore confident of our victory despite the unlimited support of the United States for the Israeli aggressor.

Long live the blessed intifada. May its noble Martyrs rest in peace.

Original French: Mr. VERONESE (Workers' delegate, France) — Once again, after several years of hope, the Middle East is on the verge of exploding.

The Israeli Government is embarking on a veritable war against the Palestinian people. We cannot, however, turn our backs on any prospects for peace. Since the Oslo agreement, the historic possibility of establishing a lasting peace has been put off indefinitely because of the refusal by successive Israeli governments to comply with international law and to accept reciprocity and equality as a basis for negotiation.

The continued subjugation of the territories occupied by Israel and the intensified settlement of those territories have thrust the Palestinian territories into a situation of violence, humiliation, blockade and segregation.

Ariel Sharon's Government of national unity has launched into a deliberate policy of escalation. Gaza and the West Bank have been cut off; there is the blockade; towns, villages and Palestinian refugee camps have been shelled; new settlements have been built; have been confiscated, there have been premeditated murders of Palestinian political leaders. The efforts undertaken by the ILO, the office and trade unions have been shattered under the effects of unacceptable collective punishment.

Workers have no way of reaching their work. Hospitals, schools and universities are inaccessible because everything has been sealed off. The workers are denied their social rights.

Since September 2000, several hundred men, women and children, mostly Palestinians, have been killed. More than 20,000 people have been wounded, including 3,000 who are handicapped for life. The Israeli population has also been the victim of unacceptable attacks. We condemn any act of violence against the civilian population from any source whatsoever. That notwithstanding, we can only identify the Israeli Government as responsible for these serious violations. It has gone one step further by launching an attack upon Lebanon. In Israel there are forces for peace, and we pay tribute to their work, in difficult circumstances, to try to find a peaceful solution.

There can be no solution to this conflict unless it is through the negotiation of a just and lasting peace founded upon law and the application of the resolutions of the United Nations. Peace and security for all peoples in the region will involve the total evacuation of the territories occupied by Israel since 1967, the application of the United Nations resolutions concerning the right of return of refugees and the right of the Palestinian people to have their own sovereign State in the West Bank and Gaza, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The time is right for significant pressure to be brought to bear, not only by the United Nations but also by the European Union and the French Government. This could in particular lead to a ban of entry into the European Union of products manufactured in the settlements. The Commission has recognized since 1997 that these settlements are illegal. This could also lead to the suspension of the agreement of

association between Israel and the European Union, as long as human rights are flouted.

We must demand that all those who maintain extremism on all sides must stop breeding hatred and spreading death. If we wish to reduce the level of violence, then all construction or expansion of the settlements must stop and an international protection force must be deployed to protect the Palestinian population. No ILO technical cooperation efforts can be fully effective unless there is peace and unless there is economic and social development of the Palestinian territories and of the other countries of the region.

(Ms. Bannerman takes the Chair.)

Mr. FOLEY (*Government adviser and substitute delegate, United States*) — The United States takes the position today, as it has in previous years, that it is inappropriate to hold this special sitting. Not only does this practice single out one member country for treatment different from all others, but it also misuses the ILO as a forum for political discussions and sometimes incendiary rhetoric instead of focusing attention on practical measures that can make a real difference in the daily lives of Palestinians.

The United States strongly agrees that the ILO should focus on programmes of technical assistance that will improve the situation of workers in the West Bank and Gaza. We commend the Director-General for taking steps to strengthen the ILO's activities in this area by sending two high-level missions to the region and by setting up a Task Force on emergency employment creation. The ILO is putting the emphasis on saving existing jobs, creating new ones, and setting up vocational training and rehabilitation programmes. In our view this is the correct approach. Several donors are already contributing to these programmes or are pledged to do so, and all who believe the ILO can play a role in bringing peace to the region owe them a debt of gratitude.

The Director-General's report points out, however, that some donors are wondering whether technical cooperation activities are feasible under existing circumstances. We believe they are indeed feasible and we offer as evidence the US Agency for International Development's Community Services Program for the West Bank and Gaza. This five-year programme, started in 1999, will grow to about US \$90 million by the time it is completed in 2004. It focuses on creating jobs and improving infrastructure and services in communities hard hit by the current crisis, and it is continuing despite daunting operational difficulties related to that crisis. Agricultural roads are being built linking villages that have been largely cut off from the outside world following the closures. Schools are being refurbished, providing jobs to artisans and construction workers shut out of the Israeli labour market. Local communities have been eager to contribute materials, labour and even cash towards these projects, demonstrating that technical assistance can continue even in the midst of an uprising.

The Director-General's report documents a dramatic decline in the standard of living of Palestinian workers as a result of the tragic violence in the region. It is all the more tragic because it comes at a time when the economic situation in the West Bank and Gaza had been improving. In the first three-quarters of last year, per capita GDP and GNP were growing impressively. Employment rates were going up, un-

employment rates were going down. The violence has taken an enormous toll, wiping out these gains and leading to widespread job insecurity and deepening poverty. And as the Director-General's report makes clear, the Israeli economy has suffered as well. A report just released by the Federation of Israeli Chambers of Commerce estimates that the crisis has cost the Israeli economy US \$2 billion this year.

The Director-General's report reminds us that this tragic situation is the result of political and military developments outside the ILO's area of competence. Just one year ago, the peace process was alive, violence was held at bay, a political settlement was at hand and the Palestinian economy and workers were in much better shape than they are today. Under the current most difficult circumstances, we do nonetheless believe that the ILO can make its own contribution to alleviating the plight of Palestinian workers through targeted technical assistance at the local level that will give the unemployed the training they need for future jobs and through emergency employment generation. These are efforts to which the ILO's Government, Employer and Worker constituents can each find ways to contribute.

However, in a larger sense, the key to improving the situation of workers in the West Bank and Gaza lies in achieving a meaningful end to the violence and a consolidation of the ceasefire that my Government has helped to negotiate in the last few days. Therein lies a fragile and yet powerful hope for a resumption of dialogue, a path to peace and a lasting improvement in the lives and livelihood of the people of this troubled land.

Original Chinese: Mr. BAI (Workers' adviser and substitute delegate, China) — This session is the first session of the International Labour Conference of the new century.

In the past century the problem of Palestine, one of the thorniest problems in international relations, did not have a full, just and lasting solution to it and is once again on the agenda of the Conference. This is a matter of regret for the whole of mankind. We wish from the bottom of our hearts that this session of the Conference might be the last to tackle the problem of Palestine and that after this session, the problem will be solved as soon as possible with the efforts of the parties concerned so that the peoples of the Middle East can finally live happily in the new century.

The Palestinian problem is at the heart of the problem of the Middle East.

The creation of a Palestinian State is the legitimate right of the Palestinian people. Because of the absence of a just and reasonable solution to this problem for many years, not only peace and development in the Middle East, but also peace and stability throughout the world have been compromised. We would like to express our deep concern that Israeli/Palestinian conflicts continue to deteriorate and that the Israeli Government continues to build settlements on the West Bank, which has provoked regional tension.

We express our sympathy towards the Palestinians for the great losses in property and human lives caused by the conflicts, and our firm opposition and condemnation of the force used by Israel against Palestinian civilians. We believe that the relevant resolutions of the United Nations and the principle of land for peace should be the basis for talks in the Middle East and that the parties concerned should undertake,

in a spirit of mutual understanding and concessions, to apply the agreements that have already been reached, so as to restart the negotiations for the peace process in the Middle East.

We are pleased to note that the just cause of the Palestinian people for legitimate rights is gaining ever broader support internationally. We strongly ask the Israeli authorities to apply the relevant United Nations resolutions to honour the commitments of the preceding government to withdraw as soon as possible its troops from the West Bank and to stop building new colonies, new settlements, in the occupied Arab territories according to the principle of land for peace, in order to solve the problems of the Palestinians as soon as possible.

Chinese workers and trade unions have always upheld the just struggle by the Palestinian and Arab workers and peoples to re-establish their legitimate rights and will continue, as in the past, to support the peace process in the Middle East.

We greatly appreciate the notable role played by the ILO in the occupied Arab territories to promote democracy, fundamental rights of workers and employment, and also to combat poverty and protect the legitimate rights and interests of workers.

We hope that the ILO will continue to accompany the peace process and consolidate technical cooperation projects so as to improve the working and living conditions of workers and promote the well-being of the Palestinian and Arab peoples. The workers and people of China will continue to work for the achievement of peace and stability in the Middle East.

Mr. LAURIJSSEN (*representative, International Confederation of Free Trade Unions*) — The problem of the appalling situation and conditions of Palestinian workers deserves the attention and support of the ILO and of this Conference. I would therefore have liked to discuss today the points and proposals for constructive action contained in the excellent special report presented by the Director-General to this session.

However, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), and I am sure all of the delegates here, once again have come to the special sitting of the International Labour Conference with a feeling of deep frustration and disappointment. Indeed, since we met here in June last year the world has witnessed the total collapse of the Middle East peace process and a dramatic deterioration of the situation of the Palestinian population.

Worst of all has been the devastating wave of violence and bloodshed which has terrorized the population on both sides of the conflict and claimed hundreds of innocent human lives. If not brought under immediate control, the security problems in Israel and the occupied territories will turn into a full-scale war which would involve surrounding countries and perhaps the entire region.

The first priority must therefore be to stop the violence and return to the negotiating table. The cold-blooded killing of children and innocent people is an unforgivable criminal act, whether it happens in the streets of Gaza, or in Tel Aviv.

The ICFTU joins with the entire international community which has called for the consolidation of the tacit cease-fire which has brought back fragile hopes for a peaceful settlement because, in spite of the outrage and bitterness caused by recent setbacks, politi-

cal leaders will have to recognize that the only way out of this explosive situation is by restoring non-confrontational dialogue and negotiations. History has shown in many countries, and deep in our hearts we all know, that this is the only way to find a sustainable solution to our problems. Every opportunity, every tool must be used to put peace and political responsibility back on the rails. This Conference must express its strong views in this respect on behalf of the ILO.

In the next steps in the continuing process, both sides will have to renew their resolve and spirit of compromise in order to turn the tide and end this tragic crisis. However, the problem remains. There will be no peace if both Israelis and the Palestinian people are not given full guarantees that they will be able to enjoy freedom, dignity and human rights in their own independent and sovereign States. The ICFTU has a long-standing policy of defending the right to self-determination of all peoples in all parts of the world. This right must be given to the Palestinian people as well.

The ICFTU delegation, which visited the occupied territories last month, witnessed the devastating impact of widespread military occupation, including those parts of the land which had been returned to the Palestinians by Israel in recent years. The ICFTU strongly believes that colonization and foreign occupation are policies that belong to a past era and as such can no longer be tolerated anywhere in the world, including Palestine.

Our delegation also found the Palestinians badly affected by the problems of massive unemployment and rising poverty. The closure of the borders as well as the virtual standstill of the Palestinian economy, due to the severe restrictions of movements of goods and people, have left hundreds of thousands of Palestinian workers and their families without any income. Apart from the human rights abuse and added security threat that this represents, these measures are having a disastrous effect on both the Palestinian and the Israeli economies. The ICFTU has therefore appealed to the Israeli Government to terminate the stranglehold on the Palestinian economy and, while aware of the security issues involved to restore the rights and conditions of Palestinian migrants who were employed in Israel until September last year.

In conclusion, I would like to touch upon a few other important aspects of the Palestinian labour situation. First of all, I welcome the adoption of the first Palestinian Labour Code which was promulgated on May Day this year. The code was drawn up with the help and guidance of the ILO and this is a very significant step, not only for Palestinian workers but also as an example for the entire region. We trust that the remaining regulations for the practical implementation of the law will be drawn up on the same basis.

The ICFTU also hopes that the law, and the spirit of tripartite dialogue and cooperation which has led to its adoption, will help to put in place a system of sound and constructive industrial relations in the Gaza and the West Bank. In this connection, the ICFTU delegation was pleased with the positive discussions it had with the Palestinian authorities, during the visit, concerning the role of independent trade unions in the building of a democratic nation and in the defence of legitimate workers' rights in general. Particularly in the context of globalization, privatization and the growing power of multinational companies, strong trade unions must be regarded as an

important partner in promoting policies for balanced development. As Palestine consolidates its own economic and political future, it will have to come to grips with this problem too, and peace does not only mean peace with your neighbours. It also means internal peace deriving from social justice within the country and within the economic system.

We have been very encouraged in this regard to see from the Director-General's report as well as through our own cooperation with them that the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU) has made significant progress, not only in its trade union work but also in a wider range of social responsibilities which it has taken on within Palestinian society. There is no better way to highlight the important and legitimate place of the Palestine trade union movement in the struggle of the Palestinian people for freedom, democracy and respect for their basic rights.

Mr. RAGEB (*Employers' adviser delegate, Jordan*) — In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate! May peace be upon you all. On my own behalf, and on behalf of the employers in Jordan, I would like to congratulate the President on her election to preside over this session of the Conference.

I would like to thank the Director-General, for the excellent report he has prepared.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the ILO for setting aside this special sitting to discuss the report of the Director-General on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories, workers who are suffering under Israeli occupation. Everyday factories are closing, houses are being destroyed and the Palestinian economy is under siege.

I have read all the international labour Conventions on the rights of workers to equality and social security in addition to the items on our agenda for this session of the Conference wherein all the countries of the world are represented.

It seems to me that we are consolidating what has already been said in these Conventions: social security and strengthening cooperatives and so on and so forth. These issues have been discussed for a number of days now and we are cooperating to find the best ways in which to achieve equality and non-discrimination and ensure decent work and a better life for the workers of the world.

Unfortunately, what we are seeing in the occupied Arab territories differs greatly and does not reflect at all that which is laid down in the Conventions. There is racial discrimination and a lack of social security or decent work due to the actions of Israel and the occupying forces.

What workers' rights are we discussing? The Palestinians are deprived of these rights. What we are talking about here in this session of the Conference is what we find in the occupied Arab territories. We know that there are Conventions that have been adopted by many countries but the Palestinians cannot really benefit from those Conventions. As far as I am concerned, we are talking about the workers of the world and the universal application of the Conventions. The policies of aggression and discrimination applied by the Israeli occupying forces in Palestine, the Golan and in the Shebaa farms in the South Lebanon, and the fact that these international labour Conventions are not applied to workers of the occupied Arab territories, prompts us, to call on the international community and on the ILO to freeze

the membership of Israel in the ILO until it implements the resolutions and recommendations. All workers of the world, and those working in the occupied Arab territories in particular, look to the ILO to help them improve their standard of living and find decent work. We all know that ILO member States, even if they have not ratified these Conventions, are obliged by the fact that they are Members of the ILO to respect and to implement what has been stated in these Conventions.

On behalf of the Jordanian employers and workers, I call on the ILO to provide enough financial resources to rebuild the Palestinian institutions and train the Palestinian workers so that they can find decent work, thereby providing for their families. This, of course, will be keeping with the Conventions and the Constitution of the ILO. Help and assistance should be given to Palestinian workers, those who work in the occupied territories, those who work in Israel, and those who live in the Golan.

Original Spanish: Mr. GONZÁLEZ GONZÁLEZ (Workers' delegate, Cuba) — The report on the occupied Arab territories presented by the Director-General provides important and alarming information about the situation of the workers and their families who are subjugated people in their own land.

The international community has a great responsibility in seeking a solution to this serious conflict among whose victims are also Israeli workers and their families.

The time has come to stop these abuses. The only viable, honourable and responsible solution is the total and unconditional withdrawal by Israel from all the occupied territories. If we go seeking any other solution we will merely be perpetuating Israeli presence in these territories.

It is necessary to mobilize all possible forces together with the workers and peoples of Palestine and the other occupied Arab territories.

If we do not act in time we run the risk that tomorrow could be too late.

Original Spanish: Mr. FUNES DE RIOJA (Employers' adviser and substitute delegate, Argentina) — My statement on behalf of the Employers' group seeks to reflect the solidarity of our entire group with the workers whose serious situation is illustrated in the Director-General's report.

I would go so far as to say that we are deeply moved and welcome the efforts to achieve stable peace in the region because there can be no economic and social progress and development without a lasting peace.

There is no possibility of employment without the prerequisite of peace because employers and workers need a climate that guarantees the possibility of being able to create companies and jobs. Today, in the region, this climate is seriously compromised.

The Director-General's report quite rightly states that the events that have taken place since the end of September 2000 have had tragic repercussions on the situation with a considerable loss of income and a drastic increase in unemployment. It also states that these are not only short-term losses, but that they will be felt into the future, and the current economic crisis compounded by social and economic problems has vastly increased the unemployment rate and the levels of poverty, both in quantitative and qualitative terms. Hence, we are aware of the need to develop

and modernize the economy and this must go hand in hand with the strategy for employment and development of human resources.

We agree that only a dynamic and prosperous economy with a well-trained labour force, as the report says, will attract investment and make it possible to improve the standard of living of the people of Palestine.

The effects of the situation, as recognized in the report and by other speakers who have already taken the floor, have also had their impact on the Israeli economy, which had barely recovered from a long period of recession.

I insist on the need for peace; a peace that must be accompanied by a strong programme of technical co-operation by the International Labour Organization. Initiatives and priorities are already defined. There is no doubt whatsoever of the urgency of this commitment and our Organization must give top priority to this matter, including support for enterprises, because only encouragement for the development of business will open the doors to job creation.

Within the framework of the programme of activities to be carried out we should like to emphasize programmes to assist small and medium-sized enterprises, because without companies there can be no employment.

I shall conclude by expressing my most fervent desire that peace and the right to life will finally be guaranteed in the region. Without these basic human rights there will be no future for either the workers or the enterprises. I hope to see my desire one day become a fact of life.

Original French: Mr. DJENOUHAT (*Workers' adviser delegate, Algeria*) — May I, on behalf of the Algerian General Trade Union (UGTA), make the following statement.

The occupied and autonomous territories face a campaign of aggression and intimidation by the occupying Israeli forces against the Palestinian people in general and workers in particular. They are fighting for their legitimate rights to defend their country, their dignity and their holy places, and against the occupation policy establishing settlements and expanding at the expense of the Palestinian population, which is becoming impoverished because of the exclusion policy carried out by the Israeli Government.

This policy, based on an economic blockade of the occupied territories, means that Palestinian workers and trade unionists are prevented from exercising their rights to work and to freedom of association, as their lives are constantly in danger.

Excessive collective punishment is applied through the use of weapons banned by international agreements. In addition, the Palestinian people and workers are not allowed to benefit from humanitarian aid, international protection for the Palestinian people is refused, and there has been massive destruction of social and economic infrastructures which have a direct link with the living and working conditions of the Palestinians. The UGTA firmly denounces this policy of massacres based on constant aggression and the expropriation of land.

It calls for international opinion firmly to condemn this policy carried out against the Palestinian people and to oblige the Israeli administration to put a stop to inhumane acts, to respect the Geneva Convention relating to peoples under occupation, to apply inter-

national law, including the resolutions of the United Nations, to withdraw its forces from the occupied territories and to recognize the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and its right to a free and independent State with Jerusalem as its capital, to free all Palestinian prisoners, to dismantle all Israeli settlements and allow all Palestinians in exile to return. The UGTA calls on the Office to set up a commission of inquiry and a permanent follow-up commission to monitor the serious situation of the Palestinian people, workers and trade unionists.

The holding of the special sitting at the International Labour Conference on the examination of the situation in the territories occupied by Israel should be maintained and support should be given to the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions to assist in its natural mission to defend moral and material interest of workers.

The UGTA would like to take this opportunity to make a pressing appeal for urgent assistance for the Palestinian people and workers facing an inhumane situation, and also for the Arab workers in the other occupied territories.

Original Arabic: Mr. ZLITNI (*Workers' adviser and substitute delegate, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya*) — In our country, we have read the report of the Director-General on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories. We are deeply grateful to the Director-General for his efforts in drawing up this report. However, this report makes no mention of the aggression of the Israeli forces conducted before the very eyes of the whole world.

The Israeli forces have used all possible weapons, including Apaches and F16s, in response to the throwing of stones by the Palestine people. They have used weapons which have killed old people, women, children and men. There have been thousands of people martyred, wounded or crippled. We need only see the Palestinian people bearing coffins on their shoulders daily; these are the images we see on our television screens. The Israelis, not content with killing the Palestine people, have also destroyed their homes.

I would like to point out, that the report fails to mention the causes of the violence of 28 September 2000, which followed the provocative visit of the criminal Sharon, and does not take into account the feelings of Muslims and Christians throughout the world and in the region itself.

While the report does discuss the situation of Palestinian workers in the occupied Arab territories and particularly in Palestine, several paragraphs fail to give details of the various problems caused by Israeli aggression, with a view perhaps to avoiding offending the aggressor. This is like trying to place the executioner his victim on the same level. The report has not studied in detail work of Israeli aggression which is spreading like a cancer through the occupied Arab territories, causing all sorts of irreparable damage. It has not studied in detail the destruction of the city of Jerusalem which is undergoing forced demographic and geographical transformation.

The report falls into the predictable trap of not considering the Golan Heights to be an occupied Arab territory. It has not taken into account the resolutions of the United Nations concerning the occupied Arab territories. We find this surprising. We are particularly surprised when, at the end of the report, the Director-General asks how to find a solution to this vicious

circle. The reply to this question is quite simple. There can be no lasting peace in the region if the Israeli authorities do not recognize the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and do not recognize the existence of a Palestine nation with Jerusalem as its capital. We condemn all human rights violations committed by the Israeli occupying forces and call for the establishment of a special commission as a result of this Conference, to monitor the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories.

As a matter of ethics, this International Labour Conference, with its responsibility to uphold human rights, must reject the existence of the Zionist State and oppose any State that supports it in its aggression.

Original Spanish: Mr. GORRITI (Workers' delegate, Peru) — The General Confederation of Workers of Peru is extremely interested in this special sitting. It is a sitting that has concentrated upon a matter that worries all the workers the world, since the Arab workers are suffering the consequences of a conflict which is costing many lives, including those of children.

Workers like peace and struggle for it, and therefore we cannot remain passive in the face of this serious threat to peace in this region.

We think that the main cause of the conflict is the occupation of the Arab territories by the Israeli armed forces, and therefore that it is right and proper to accede to the demand that South Lebanon, the Golan Heights, and the lands of Palestine be evacuated of Israeli forces immediately.

All the workers of Peru and Latin America are aware of the reports which have been sent by the Human Rights Commission to the United Nations and of the general information on the intensification of military aggression perpetrated by Israel. They have even attacked the civilian population with fighter aircraft, causing hundreds of deaths and destroying work areas and the surrounding countryside.

The situation is extremely serious because of military attacks and blockades; workers cannot even travel to their places of work. This situation is mentioned in the report provided by the Director-General to this session of the Conference.

We support the efforts of the ILO to defend the rights of the workers in this region.

The General Confederation of Workers of Peru express their solidarity with their brother workers and the people of Palestine, and support the just cause of the Arab peoples to achieve an equitable peace in the Middle East.

We ask that the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council be complied with fully. The Peruvian workers send a message to their brothers in Palestine: that they are not alone. They can always count upon the support and solidarity of the Peruvian workers and those throughout Latin America and the Caribbean region.

Original Arabic: Mr. OSMAN (Workers' adviser delegate, Egypt) — In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate!

May I begin by saying, on behalf of the workers of Egypt, how grateful we are for the efforts of the International Labour Organization to ensure the monitoring of the situation of the workers in the occupied Arab territories, particularly through the annual mission sent by the Director-General to the region and also through the report that he has prepared.

In point of fact, for some time now this Organization has been fully aware of the reality of the sufferings of the Palestinian people. In 1974 a Conference was held and a resolution adopted which had very important repercussions, namely it condemned the Israeli authorities for the practices that they were perpetrating against the Palestinian workers in Palestine and the occupied Arab territories.

Despite all resolutions and, all decisions subsequently adopted, condemning all the Israeli practices in the Palestinian and occupied Arab territories, despite all resolutions adopted by the International Labour Conference for so many years, the situation in Palestine and in other occupied Arab territories, namely the Golan and Lebanon, is deteriorating.

For some nine months now the region is the setting for an unjustified war, waged by Israel, which is using its whole arsenal; aircraft, tanks, weapons of destruction, submarines and ships. All these weapons are being used against a people which only believes in its own land and the value of sacrifice, a people which is ready, physically and morally, to sacrifice itself and which is in despair.

They have lost all hope of grasping the glimmer of peace that appeared in Madrid, but today the people are in total despair because the Israeli authorities are vacillating. For some years now the people of Palestine have been subject to ever greater sufferings. The Israeli forces wish to destroy the Palestinian people which is seeing its land seized, its water confiscated, its lands settled by immigrants from the four corners of the earth.

My colleague, Mr. Issa, who spoke earlier, said exactly the same thing.

Violence breeds violence. The people of Palestine are the victims. They are exercising their legitimate right to resist, like any other occupied people. We cannot speak here of decent work. We cannot speak of the fundamental rights of workers for as long as the situation in the occupied Arab territories continues. On behalf of the workers of Egypt, I declare that it is high time to tell to the International Labour Organization to take a stand against Israel, as it spoke out against apartheid in South Africa.

We call on the Organization to oppose Israel and propose that a study be conducted into the Director-General's report on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories, by a special committee set up within the Conference, the outcome of which would be published and ultimately adopted.

We urge the international community to give support to the Palestinians, who are seeking international protection so that they might be able to enjoy their rights and see an end to settlements on their land, and in order to provide the Palestinian people with all the assistance, it needs in order to put an end to this situation.

(Mr. Parrot takes the Chair.)

Mr. BRODRICK (*Government adviser and substitute delegate, Australia*) — We have read the Director-General's report on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories, and we thank the ILO officials involved for their work.

The report highlights the adverse and regrettable impact of recent developments on workers and employment in the occupied territories and Israel, fol-

lowing a period during which economic indicators appeared so positive.

The Australian Government supports the ILO's technical cooperation activities in the region, and we welcome the Director-General's efforts to improve employment creation, training, rehabilitation and to pursue other objectives within the ILO's mandate.

Nevertheless, while we support, the discussion of technical issues to do with the report and other issues that fall within the ILO's mandate in an appropriate forum, we are concerned that debating political issues in the International Labour Organization, a technical body of the United Nations is not particularly useful. We feel it will not contribute to a rapid return to negotiations or to a resumption of the peace process.

Australia has been deeply concerned with the escalation of violence in the West Bank, Gaza and parts of Israel since September last year. We deplore the loss of life and injury that has occurred. We have consistently called for a resumption of the dialogue between the parties, and we support the efforts of the various governments that have offered their services in mediation. We welcome the latest ceasefire but note that matters remain at a delicate stage and the parties themselves should be given the fullest opportunity and encouragement to advance negotiations further.

For these reasons we have not felt able to support the holding of this special sitting, and in attending have decided to place these concerns on the record.

Ms. ZETTERVALL-THAPPER (*Workers' adviser and substitute delegate, Sweden*) — The report of the Director-General on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories contains alarming facts. It is clear that since the events started in September 2000, they have had a tragic impact on the situation of the workers concerned. The Israeli closure of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem and the encirclements within these areas have meant a considerable loss of income and a drastic increase in unemployment. The result is poverty, and a major crisis in the humanitarian situation of the Palestinian people. And this situation is getting worse as we speak. We have seen and continue to see deadly violence perpetrated against Palestinians, and we see the massive destruction of enterprises, farms, irrigation systems and trees. These collective punishments must stop. The responsibility for these wrongdoings lies with the Israeli army and Israeli settlers. An increasing amount of land has been confiscated for military purposes, thus enabling already existing Israeli settlements between Palestinian villages to be extended. The ongoing crisis has made it virtually impossible to employ Palestinian workers in Israel. Many employers are afraid of repercussions if they do so. This of course has had very negative effects on the unemployment rate, which has risen considerably. A rapidly growing part of the Palestinian population is living below the poverty line today. It has not been possible to elaborate and implement a real unemployment policy during these severe crises. The number of working children is growing at an alarming speed. The safety of several thousand Palestinian workers as regards their personal safety is not guaranteed.

The Swedish workers wish to express their deep concern over this situation. The occupation must end, and the Israeli Government must live up to its international commitments. We share the view of the Director-General's report, which says that a way out

of this vicious circle must be found. Today we can see an ever worsening deterioration in the living and working conditions of the Palestinian workers. This cannot simply be allowed to go on. Therefore we strongly support the proposal in the report to set up a targeted ILO technical cooperation programme, including vocational training.

Mr. MAHENDRA (*Workers' adviser delegate, India*) — My heart goes to the men, women and children of the Arab territories occupied by Israel. Year after year world public opinion raises its voice about the aggressive attitude of Israel, which does not have any consideration for the democratic right of self-determination and has no respect for human rights and workers' rights. Israel has illegally occupied the Arab territories of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and the Golan Heights. It has constructed settlements on Palestinian territory which come under Israeli law, not Palestinian law.

The Israeli Government defies world opinion and the resolutions of international bodies like the ILO by subjecting women and children in the occupied territories to inhumane treatment. It does not believe in equal treatment for all but adopts a policy of discrimination in favour of Jewish citizens not only in Israel but also in the occupied areas of Arab lands and in Palestine.

Palestinian workers are subjected to inhumane treatment and the ILO conventions and recommendations are violated with impunity.

There were efforts by world forces to see that the cease-fire is agreed to by both parties and treaties were signed to this effect. But in each case Israeli forces violated the cease-fire before the ink with which it was written had dried.

The ILO published reports on conditions of workers in the occupied territories and adopted resolutions in the plenary, and today another resolution will be adopted.

Israeli forces violated the cease-fire agreement attacking some areas, killing and injuring women and children. Tension prevails in those areas and the situation can escalate into a war situation at any moment. At present the United States representative and especially the CIA is again making efforts for a cease-fire so that outstanding issues can be resolved peacefully. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, is on his way to the Middle East to make efforts on the behalf of peace.

I urge the Israeli Government to give up its dependence on the use of force as it is better equipped. I appeal to Israel to accept the independence of Palestine, recognize the right to self-determination and withdraw its forces from the occupied Arab territories of the Gaza Strip, West Bank and Golan Heights. This alone will create a movement towards peace and development in the Middle East.

The ILO has adopted resolutions on the observance of the workers' rights in the occupied Arab territories and the illegal implementation of Israeli law in the aggressively constructed settlement in the occupied territories.

I urge the ILO to appoint a standing committee to monitor the observance of human rights and labour rights and to ensure that women and children are not harassed and tortured. It is time that we woke up and pressured international trade unions to ensure that the long-standing oppression of the Palestinian

people from the late 1930s comes to an end. A solution should also be found for Jerusalem which has both a religious and a historical background. In the end, I appeal to all peace-loving people and international bodies to see that the ordeal of the Palestinian people and the people of the occupied Arab territories comes quickly to an end.

Original Arabic: Mr. DJEMAM (representative, International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions) — We have taken note of the report of the Director-General on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories. We are grateful for the efforts made by the Director-General with a view to applying the various resolutions that have already been adopted. We feel, however, that this report is nothing compared to the daily suffering of workers in Palestine, Lebanon and the Golan.

In Palestine, Israeli occupation forces have besieged towns and villages, transforming these territories into gigantic prisons, destroying houses, destroying Arab land and the entire infrastructure.

Despite everything, the international community rarely raises its voice, and we rarely hear an act of contrition. We only hear talk of mobs, and acts of violence from different quarters. We recall that these stones are only thrown by those whose rights have already been infringed. Where is justice then?

The Palestinian intifada was a response to Israeli occupation, repression and Israeli terrorism which is worsening daily, especially under the leadership of Mr. Ariel Sharon, who wants to push the region to breaking point and is a threat to peace throughout the entire world.

The International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions appeals to the international community to support the Palestinian people and oblige Israel to respect international resolutions. We also make an appeal to this Conference to establish a standing committee shall be to observe the situation in Palestine, because we need people to directly witness and monitor Israeli activities.

This situation, as I have just described it, threatens the life of the population, in particular, the most disadvantaged. Agricultural land has been destroyed and its workers are unemployed. We condemn the policies and acts of the Israelis. We condemn and regret the silence on the part of the international community, and we declare the rights of the Palestinian people to freedom, independence and the construction of a homeland with Jerusalem as its capital.

We recognize the refugees right of return and we demand the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Golan Heights and the Lebanese territories. Peace can only be global and lasting if there is an end to repression and persecution.

The Israeli authorities not only represent employers, but also workers, and the proof of this is that the Histadrut has representatives in the present Government.

Mrs. LUCERO (representative, World Confederation of Labour) — The World Confederation of Labour (WCL) welcomes this opportunity to give this brief address on the situation of the workers in the occupied Arab territories.

Ever since it was established in 1920, the WCL has incessantly affirmed the universal right to social, economic, political and cultural self-determination

and the right of peoples to determine their own destiny, choose their system of government, manage their own development and live in freedom. These are basic requirements for the exercise of democracy. It is on the basis of this principle that the WCL has always recognized the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.

When the WCL addressed last year's International Labour Conference, we highlighted the favourable prospects of the then peace proposals to reinforce security in the Middle East and to provide workers in the region, particularly Palestinians, with the best possible conditions. Unfortunately, these hopes have ended in the breakdown of the peace process and, in recent months, in a new outburst of violence and discriminatory measures against the Palestinian workers employed in the occupied Arab territories and Israel. Workers' rights are being violated at various levels; in particular, activities are paralysed because of the demolition of farms, plantations and companies by Israeli colonists and the military; imports from these territories are blocked; it is increasingly difficult for Israeli employers to employ Palestinian workers; the number of work permits for Palestinians in Israel is being reduced; Palestinians seeking to work in Israel are being subjected to arrest or sanctions; acts of aggression are being committed at the checkpoints; child labour is increasing as parental income falls and, in the worst cases, workers are being murdered. It is also regrettable to note that women are among the first to be excluded from the labour market and are increasingly having to work in precarious and low-paid jobs.

As a result, the Palestinian economy, which is highly vulnerable on account of its dependence on trade relations with Israel and its labour market, has suffered a very sharp downturn

As pointed out in the report of the Director-General, the total rate of unemployment amounts to 39.7 per cent in the occupied territories as a whole, 34.7 per cent in the West Bank, and 50.8 per cent in the Gaza Strip. This state of affairs also has a negative effect on the economic growth and employment situation in Israel.

Even if we share some of the reservations made by the trade unions, we welcome the fact that in May 2001 the Palestinian Authority adopted a new Labour Code. Nevertheless, we wish to stress that the closure and encircling of the occupied territories have led to an increase in violation of the Palestinian workers' rights, raising social tensions and feeding the vicious circle of violence.

The World Confederation of Labour insists again on the absolute need for the State of Israel fully to respect the United Nations resolutions, and on immediate resumption of the peace talks. We are profoundly convinced that only negotiation can yield substantial, rapid progress towards the creation and recognition of the Palestinian State. It is also the only way to lay the foundation of a fair and lasting peace in the Middle East.

We endorse the recommendations of the working party of the Director-General set up in December 2000 and the priorities defined as the policy lines for technical cooperation by the ILO. It is our fervent wish that all the peoples in the region might soon be able to live and work in peace, which is the only way to guarantee development, democracy and freedom.

Mr. ZHARIKOV (*representative, World Federation of Trade Unions*) — The principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the founding principles of the ILO, international labour standards and the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work are flagrantly violated by the Government of Israel, as it continues its illegal occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories in the Syrian Golan Heights and parts of Lebanon, and is waging a genocidal war against the women, men and children living in the occupied territories. The situation of the workers in the occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories has been further worsened as the workers have recently been denied access to work, their workplaces bombed out of existence, and the working people are deprived of their means of livelihood.

These illegal actions and atrocities committed by Israeli occupation authorities are confirmed by various missions sent by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights and by the independent observers. They are confirmed in the report of the Director-General presented to this timely session. How do we stay detached when in recent days this aggression by the Israeli authorities has been further intensified? Israeli military planes have bombed Palestinian cities, with jet fighters provided by the United States, and the unarmed Palestinian people have been attacked by various mass destruction weapons. The air raids have destroyed factories and other workplaces. Thousands of people have been killed or injured. Pursuing a scorched-earth policy, the Israelis are destroying standing crops and uprooting trees. Roads are cut and workers have been prevented from going to work. The territories handed over to the Palestinian Authority have now been virtually reoccupied and blockaded, thus undermining the peace process. Instead of its own State, as defined by United Nations resolutions, Palestinian people find themselves in a ghetto or concentration camp. The economic base and social infrastructure which sustained the people's day-to-day lives have been systematically destroyed. This deprives the people of their means of livelihood and denies them even food and other essential articles needed for human survival.

Such gross violations of human rights compound the 34 year-old unlawful occupation of Arab territories by Israel. For 34 years, the United Nations Security Council has witnessed the non-implementation of its resolutions by the Israeli Government. These include Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 and the call for a just solution to the problem of Palestinian refugees in accordance with Security Council resolution 194.

The World Federation of Trade Unions upholds and supports the just cause of the Arab and Palestinian people to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East region and supports the right of the Palestinian people to refuse to continue living under Israeli occupation, and their right to establish their own independent national State with Jerusalem as its capital. The WFTU reiterates its call for an end to Israeli occupation and demands the immediate and complete withdrawal of all Israeli troops from all occupied Arab territories in Palestine, the Syrian Golan, and the remaining occupied part of Shebaa in Lebanon. The WFTU draws attention to the fact that the Israeli Government is refusing to stop the enlargement and building of Jewish settlements while it demands an end to the intifada of the Palestinian

people, who demand the dismantling of all such settlements, an immediate end to the Israeli occupation and guarantees for a comprehensive and just peace in the Middle East.

The WFTU calls on the International Labour Conference and the ILO to condemn the repression unleashed against the Palestinian people by Israel and to demand the cancellation of all actions on the part of the Israeli Government which prevent the working people going to work and an end to all forms of economic blockade, which obstructs trade, the movement of goods and people, and other economic activities. The Israeli authorities should be asked to pay compensation to all the Palestinian people who are affected by the military attacks and economic blockades. It is also essential that the United Nations and member States take the necessary steps to provide urgently needed international protection for the people of Palestine.

The WFTU urges the ILO, the United Nations and other international organizations, as well as the United Nations member States, to provide economic, technical and other assistance to the Palestinian people and the Palestinian Authority to deal with the extremely serious negative consequences of the aggressive war and the economic blockades imposed by the Israeli authorities.

For over 50 years Palestinian people have been denied basic rights, including the right to a homeland. Palestinian children born during this period of time now have their own children and grandchildren. Were their children also denied this right, they could not accept it, as we cannot accept it, either. The ILO is doing positive work in this respect, but this work is sporadic in nature. This time we strongly insist that we must set up a permanent committee on the subject, and we should follow this issue until it comes to an agreeable end.

Original French: Mr. DIOP (representative, Organization of African Trade Union Unity) — It is a genuine pleasure and an honour for me to participate, on behalf of the Organization of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU), in the special sitting of the 89th Session of the International Labour Conference devoted to the alarming situation of workers in the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories.

On behalf of millions of African workers within the OATUU, I should like to thank the Governing Body of the ILO most warmly for organizing this sitting, which ought to be organized on a regular basis for as long as the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and workers are not fully restored.

It is well known to everyone that, in addition to facing massive unemployment and terrible conditions of life and work, the Palestinian workers are being subjected on a daily basis to inhumane practices such as harassment, humiliation, murder, imprisonment, dismissal from employment, etc., etc.

As in the past, African workers and their national trade union organizations today express their active and unwavering solidarity with the Palestinian people and workers in their heroic and legitimate struggle to regain their liberty and their dignity, their right to live in an internationally recognized national territory with Jerusalem as its capital.

My organization, the OATUU, is deeply concerned by the genocide that is at present taking place in Palestine. We vehemently condemn the cowardly

murders of peaceful defenceless people, the seizure of farmlands for establishing settlements. We continue to ask: why are Palestinian workers stopped at road blocks on their way to work? Why do Israeli soldiers prevent them from going to work by closing borders daily?

This unbearable situation is the cause of the increase in levels of unemployment. It naturally entails substantial losses for the burgeoning Palestinian economy.

Resolutions adopted at different sessions of the General Council and Congress of the OATUU noted that the military occupation and the settlements are the real source of the problems of the Middle East. The longed-for peace will only be genuine and lasting if it is just and comprehensive and if it embraces the entire region.

The only condition able to bring peace to the Middle East is the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, from the Syrian Arab Republic and from all of Palestine. In this respect, my organization is of the view that the international community and all justice- and peace-loving men and women throughout the world should demand that the Sharon administration end its confiscation of Palestinian land in Jerusalem and end its settlement building. Is it not high time for Israel to respect the pertinent resolutions 242, 338, 465 and 478 of the United Nations Security Council, together with resolution 101 of the United Nations General Assembly?

The OATUU urges the ILO to pay more attention to the situation of workers in the occupied territories. The ILO should do its utmost to strengthen the abilities of these workers and improve their living conditions by means of basic and higher training programmes and job creation. Thus, the ILO would play an active role in the strengthening of the peace process and in development in the Middle East.

Lastly, my organization asks the International Labour Conference to set up an ad hoc committee similar to the Committee against Apartheid, to give close scrutiny to all cases of violations of human rights, including trade union rights, in the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories.

Original Russian: Mr. KANAIEV (representative, General Confederation of Trade Unions) — For many years now the situation of Palestinian workers in the occupied Arab territories has been on the agenda of the International Labour Conference, and for all these years the situation in the region has been characterized by more or less acute political and military crises. Today we are again witnesses of a crisis which is threatening to turn into a large-scale war.

The Director-General's report raises some serious concerns. The facts it contains are of great concern to us all. They clearly go beyond social and economic problems, and the solution to these problems is further complicated by the general political situation in the region.

How can we even speak of solutions when the workers are under constant threat by Israeli forces? The closure of the territory and internal isolation have caused a significant fall in income, and a rise in unemployment and appalling poverty, leading to a serious humanitarian crisis among the Palestinian people. This crisis continues to worsen.

We fully agree with the statement in the report that the events that have taken place since September

2000 have tragic consequences for the situation of Palestinian workers. We consider that until, a just political settlement is found based on United Nations resolutions 242 and 338, there can be no hope of improvement in the social and economic situation of the Arab workers.

The trade unions of the whole world, whom we have heard speaking today, have always supported and expressed solidarity with the Palestinian workers struggle for self-determination. They are adamant that a peaceful and just solution must be found to what I would call a universal problem.

Chris Patten of the European Union has spoken of the need for economic sanctions against Israel. We are against the use of armed force and weapons of mass destruction against a peaceful population.

How can we accept that the Golan Heights have been annexed and illegally declared part of Israeli territory in violation of United Nations resolutions? We do not understand this Israeli policy. The Director-General's report points to the Israeli policy of so-called islands of sovereignty.

The explosive situation in the region, can only be definitively resolved through goodwill and determination on the part of the entire international community, including the ILO.

We should not forget the words of the Declaration of Philadelphia: universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based on social justice.

The ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and all of the ILO conventions ratified by Israel are being violated at present in the occupied Arab territories. The ILO should take action based on those instruments and, together with the other United Nations agencies, it should make every effort to guarantee peace and development for the workers of this region who have suffered so much.

The PRESIDENT (Mr. PARROT) — I have received two requests for a right of reply but, first I wish to refer to the practice with regard to the exercise of the right to reply. The reply should refer only to the point under debate, it should be brief, not exceed two minutes and should not give rise to any further remarks. Lastly, it should be couched in correct and parliamentary language.

Furthermore, I wish to point out that in order to avoid endless debate it has been the practice of the Presidents to refuse to allow replies to a reply.

The first request is from Mr. El-Netsheh, Minister of Labour, Palestine. As you know, according to article 14.12 of the Standing Orders, the representatives of liberation movements can address a conference with the permission of the President. I will make use of this prerogative to give the floor to Mr. El-Netsheh to reply to the intervention of Ambassador Levy from Israel. You have the floor, Minister.

Original Arabic: Mr. EL-NETSHEH (representative, Palestine) — We have a proverb which says that the sunshine cannot be masked by a mere sheet of cloth or a simple blanket.

We have to make it clear that peace is not possible so long as the occupation continues. Mr. Levy should propose to Mr. Sharon the solution of total withdrawal from the occupied territories. The violence of which he has spoken existed long before the Palestinian Authority came into being and this violence will continue for as long as the occupation continues.

We have signed one convention after another, and yet they have all been violated. The Israelis claim that they are victims, and it is true that we are not the only ones to bury our dead, but if we want to have an end to victims, then we have to end the occupation. It is the only way to end this violence.

The Minister of Labour has removed our security and protection. Do we have the right to move from one town to another to work? We have not taken these decisions; it is the Government of Israel which has ended all our activities. They paid 40 million to the workers and what has been the result for the hundreds of people who were detained and imprisoned. Where are their rights?

We insist once more that it is essential to make a distinction between violence and the struggle against occupation and we are happy to cooperate with you in any possible manner in order to show our good faith and our good will.

You have heard all the delegations; you have heard the voice of the world giving its support to the Palestinians, for they are the victims; they are the persecuted. We appeal to you to cooperate and to take tangible measures in order to create lasting peace in this region. We stress once again that there can never be peace as long as the occupation continues.

The PRESIDENT (Mr. PARROT) — The second request is from Ambassador Levy of Israel, who intends to reply to the interventions of Mr. El-Netsheh, Minister of Labour, Palestine and to the intervention of Ms. Al-Qudsi, Minister of Labour, Syrian Arab Republic and of Mr. Issa, Workers' delegate of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. LEVY (*Government delegate, Israel*) — First, I would like to appeal to all the Arab speakers who asked for this special session to ask yourselves, on your way back home, whether your speeches helped the peace process in any way, and whether you helped the situation of the Palestinian workers on whose behalf you were ostensibly speaking?

I think that what happened here today demonstrates that there is no justification for the special sitting. I would also like to ask, did any of the Arab delegates today really try to engage in meaningful dialogue, as some speakers pretended to be the case?

In response to Mr. El-Netsheh, the distinguished Palestinian Minister of Labour, I would like to make three brief comments. I was saddened by your speech, which was given as a call to combat, full of hatred and accusations, which even found their way into your right of reply. Did you hear the words uttered by you:

“violence will continue”. Yes there was violence before Oslo, but the Oslo process was about to put an end to it.

There was a lot of discussion here about technical cooperation. It was you, Mr. El-Netsheh who instructed the cancellation of the joint seminar for Palestinian Israelis under the auspices of the PLO. Do you think that this decision was right?

As Minister of Labour, perhaps you would like to appeal to Palestinian workers not to heed the calls of radicals and extremists who support terror. Perhaps the call in the spirit of the International Labour Conference would create a better spirit than the tone you set at the beginning, as well as in your right of reply.

And to the Syrian speakers — yes, you changed your text. I am sorry you did so, as far as the content, but I can understand you, because back home you cannot speak as freely as you can speak in this hall.

You lack that freedom of speech and freedom of association, and even the recent attempt to create a cultural centre in Damascus failed when it was forced to close down.

You spoke about massacre. Were you intending to speak about the massacre of your own citizens by your Government in the town of Hama, or perhaps the massacre of the Lebanese and Palestinians when you invaded Lebanon in 1976? You too used words of violence, struggle and victory. They have no place in the ILO. And if people on the ground heed these words, is it surprising that there is a reaction and suffering as a result?

The only way to emerge from this crisis is indeed to abandon this language of hate, to stop the hostilities and then restart negotiations. This is the cross upon which Israel has embarked especially after both sides just yesterday accepted the Tenet plan and began implementing it this very day when voices of hatred continued to resonate in this hall.

We invite our Palestinian neighbours to become once more our partners in peace.

The PRESIDENT (Mr. PARROT) — We are now coming to the end of the sitting. According to the Standing Orders of the Conference, there can be no formal decision or formal conclusion adopted at the end of this special sitting.

There is no doubt that the Director-General will learn a lot from what has been said, especially from some of the proposals made by the speakers. He will probably deal with this issue in his reply to the discussion of all the reports submitted to the Conference. Therefore I declare the special sitting closed.

(The Conference adjourned at 8.15 p.m.)

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