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Presidents: Mr Wamalwa, Mr Wojcik

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

The PRESIDENT — I call to order this special sitting of the Conference to examine the Director-General's Report on the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories.

Before giving the floor to the first speaker on my list, I would like to make a few remarks. The sitting is held following the decision taken by the Selection Committee adoption, at the request of the Governing Body, on 3 June 2003. The decision appeared in the first report of the Selection Committee which was published in *Provisional Record* No. 3.

I am fully aware of how sensitive many of us are to an issue of such grave concern, the more so in view of the most recent tragic events in the region. May I reiterate, however, that as I stressed at the second sitting of this Conference, the debates of the International Labour Conference must not encroach on what is being discussed by the Security Council and the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York, which have responsibility for political decisions, and of the United Nations Charter.

I do believe that we can contribute greatly to alleviating the suffering of the population in the region, and that our discussion might facilitate the efforts of the international community to provide concrete assistance to the people concerned. As the Director-General says in his Report, social dialogue is a prerequisite of lasting peace, and its only through meaningful dialogue that the conflict may be defused and overall political, economic and social conditions in the region improved.

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 and avoid comments or attacks of a personal nature. Our aim must be to identify measures that may assist the workers concerned. Thank you for your understanding. The 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. This restriction was clearly announced in the *Daily Bulletin* and is particularly important due to the large number of speakers who wish to be accommodated.

I would therefore ask you to respect it especially closely.

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. The Officers of the Conference decided to make these arrangements in the interest of consistency, objectivity, and of respecting the legitimate interest of all concerned. They are entirely in accordance with the decisions taken at previous special sittings, and contribute again to the success of this important undertaking.

Regarding possible requests for right of reply during this sitting, I should like to inform you that a delegate may only avail himself of the right of reply on a specific point in a speech in which his Government has been implicated. 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 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 has been 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. I should like to add that it is not necessary to stop the debates by calling a point of order when actually requesting the right of reply. As I also mentioned in the second sitting, if a delegate feels that there is a need to respond to a particular comment, then he or she must inform the President of the Conference by coming to the podium, and advising the Clerk of his or her intention. The right of reply will be at the discretion of the President, who, assisted by the Clerk, will agree with the delegation concerned, on a time which the reply may be made.

If a delegate feels that a point of order should be called, with a view to respect of the Standing Orders, or on a question of general order, he should do so from the floor.

Original Arabic: Mr. KHATIB (*Minister of Labour, Palestine*) — I had the opportunity a few days ago to explain the relationship between poverty and unemployment, which were mentioned in the Report of the Director-General as being particularly evident in the case of Palestine, and mentioned the fact that the poverty rate in Palestine has reached 67 per cent, while the unemployment rate covers one-third to half the manpower, and per capita income has decreased by half.

And today, in the same context, I would like to place before you the reasons which explain the fact that this unprecedented unemployment, and this increasing poverty were not the result of wrong economic policies nor the result of failure to exploit resources, or obstinate failure to implement the recommendations of the World Bank, or the International Monetary Fund, but are the result of deliberate

policies, planned and carried out by the Israeli Government in its attempt to punish the Palestinian people and its leadership, for their insistence on obtaining their legitimate rights, confirmed by international legitimacy, including putting an end to occupation and establishment of a state and the right to return.

But before I go into details of these policies and their impact, I would like to emphasize the fact that this forum is not the appropriate place for propaganda, although this is important, but it is the forum through which we try to carry out a responsible and constructive discussion about problems mentioned by the Director-General concerning the status of workers in occupied territories, of which he underlined the seriousness and the need for a solution.

We expect this session to enable the International Labour Organization and the countries concerned, as well as other international organizations, to adopt the necessary policies and measures after drafting recommendations that address this problem. Therefore we, the delegation of Palestine, hope that we will be able to come to an agreement on what must be done to reduce poverty and unemployment, in a practical manner.

There is no doubt that the real solution for all forms of suffering rests with a political solution based on international legitimacy which calls for an end to occupation. In this context we have welcomed the efforts exerted by the Quartet, and activation of the American efforts, as well as the road map. But it has become increasingly clear that the presence of an Israeli Government which is not seeking peace in the first place, but implements a political ideology which is in full contradiction with the international legitimacy on the basis of which these diplomatic efforts were based. This constitutes the main obstacle to these efforts. Israel is trying to justify its intransigence by violence, or what it calls terrorism, ignoring the fact that the current mutual violence comes within the context of the Israeli occupation, be it Israeli violence which aims at establishing the occupation and expanding the settlement, or the Palestinian violence which aims at ending this occupation. We have always called upon everybody to spare civilians in this violent conflict, and we continue to criticize every action which targets civilians, but we also hold the Israeli occupation and its practices, responsible for the suffering of civilians on both sides, because all this suffering stems from the occupation and its consequences.

Israel has so far confiscated half the occupied territories and by means of violence has established four hundred settlements. All these settlements are being constantly expanded, and thus it has turned the majority of the rural manpower into workers working in Israel. When Israel started its war against the Palestinian people in September 2000, it closed the door to those workers and made them unemployed, exposing their families to famine.

With the dawn of the new millennium, Israel has tried to bring back the policy of separating walls. Now that the Berlin Wall has been demolished, Israel has started to build its walls of racial segregation, which is an extension of the policy of constant confiscation of land and establishment of the occupation. The confiscation of thousands of donums of agricultural land has raised unemployment to 75 per cent in these areas.

In spite of all this, the Palestinian people have been able to hold firm and to absorb all this destruction and the systematic blockade. I would like to avail myself

of this opportunity to say that if Israel wants to forge ahead with this mentality of solving the problem by force, then this is only going to lead to further reaction and to further hostility and hatred. But, at the same time, if Israel is really seeking peace and security and a normal life, the Arabs have opened the door for that through the Arab initiative which enables Israel to carry out its objectives in return for putting an end to the occupation of Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territory, and to pave the way for establishing a State of Palestine with its capital in Jerusalem, and by solving the refugee problem on the basis of United Nations Assembly resolution 194. But Israel has fully rejected this initiative.

The Director-General of the ILO has shown interest in the conditions of workers in the occupied Arab territories by sending a high level fact-finding delegation which submitted its report this year. The report shows positive developments, in keeping with the growing risks and increasing suffering of those workers. Therefore, I would like to thank the Director-General and to thank the members of the mission for their efforts in producing their report, which reflects the minimum of what is actually being suffered by the Palestinian people and workers.

The report has succeeded in giving a picture of the basic and fundamental aspects of the Israeli occupation policies, the fact that these policies run contrary to international law, and that these occupation policies are responsible for the deterioration of the unemployment and poverty situation in Palestine.

In spite of that, the report could probably show more sensitivity in future vis-à-vis certain aspects of the terminology used. It is not possible to use the term security operations (on page 3) to describe the Israeli aggressions which are condemned by the report, and which are responsible for the suffering of the Palestinian people. The same goes for the use of the term, Operation Defensive Shield. This is in addition to some other observations, most of which are contained in a paper presented in the name of the Arab group to the Director-General.

In conclusion, this session is called upon to lay down mechanisms to convince or oblige Israel at least to stop and rescind the measures and policies which are mentioned in the report as violations of international law and as causes for this phenomenon of poverty and unemployment. It would be useful in this respect for the Director-General to consider the possibility of establishing a permanent committee stemming from the Conference to follow up the implementation of its previous recommendations and resolutions and its future decisions in this regard. Until this takes place we would like, in conclusion, to reiterate our call to all countries and organizations to contribute to the financing of the programmes of the Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection, which will constitute the main mechanism intended to alleviate the suffering of Palestinian workers.

Mr. PERETZ (*Workers' delegate, Israel*) — Two years ago I stood here before you when the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation was at its peak.

I stood here expressing pain for the high costs in bloodshed paid by the two peoples. I stood here and cried the cry of families who have lost their dear ones because I knew just how much these victims could have been together with us in life, continuing to build, continuing to love, continuing to dream.

I knew that, ultimately, there is no alternative other than to return to the negotiating table.

For two years and eight months I have been longing for an end to the war and the grim atmosphere in our region, and have hoped for a return to the path of negotiation and reconciliation.

Last week at the Aqaba Summit, the Israeli and Palestinian Prime Ministers stood along side the King of Jordan and the President of the United States and committed themselves to accepting the road map, a timetable at the end of which a Palestinian State will be established, existing peacefully and securely next to the State of Israel.

Nobody should fool themselves — it is clear to us all that the battle for peace is often more difficult than the war itself. This is because the price of peace will be very steep, since many groups will do everything to foil this process.

To my great sorrow, yesterday, fanatics and murderers got on a bus filled with innocent civilians: workers, housewives, children and old people who were on their way back home, but who did not get home. These murderers who got on the bus are doing everything they can to murder the hope for peace.

I share the cry of the families and wish recovery for all the wounded.

I want to tell you that I live with my family in Sderot, the city of peace, which is on the border of Gaza.

My city is attacked every day by missiles that fall inside the city, in people's back yards. Naturally, these salvos against innocent people require a response by the Israeli army.

I, who served as the Mayor of Sderot and influenced its inhabitants towards peace and coexistence, must return home and ask my people not to lose hope, since those who lose hope for peace enable the murderers to win.

Those who want to defeat the murderers, the fanatics and the terrorists must continue searching with all their strength for any means to continue negotiations.

Today, the road map is the document that we must implement for the benefit of all our peoples.

I understand that you expect me to fight against the closures that prevent Palestinian workers from entering Israel, to make a living with dignity. But neither I, nor any of you sitting here today, can take the risk that among those thousands of workers is concealed a terrorist fanatic on a mission of mass murder and destruction.

After the horrible pictures of the dead, we know today that it is the terrorists who are to blame for the Palestinians continuing without work and without hope.

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.

Therefore I call on you, my colleague, Shaher Saed, Head of the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions, and all the heads of trade unions in the Arab States, to denounce terror and violence.

In spite of everything, I call on the members of the ILO Conference and the members of the ICFTU to unite and jointly demand that the leaders of the Middle East and the leaders of the entire world continue to support the road map to and give a real chance for peace.

We, who deal daily with human rights, have no right to lose hope, as those who lose hope resemble a dead human being.

We will be committed and will continue to believe in peace for the children of the Middle East and for the children of the entire world.

Original Arabic: Mr. GUIDER (*representative, Arab Labour Organization*) — In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate! May the peace of God be with you.

Today, we are meeting as is customary in this special sitting in order to discuss the Report of the Director-General on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories. Despite the importance of this special sitting, I would like to point out that such special sittings have never produced any specific measures that would help the individuals in these territories who are suffering from racism and discrimination. One might therefore wonder whether these sittings are of any use. But since I am addressing you today, I feel duty-bound to make certain comments on the Report of the high-level mission fielded by the Director-General of the ILO to examine the situation of the workers of the occupied Arab territories, including the Golan and the Shebaa Farms.

Since the Israeli Government, as usual, has delayed the issuing of visas, the mission completed its work just before the holding of this Conference. This means that in turn there is a delay in the distribution of this Report for it to be considered. Accordingly, we propose that the Governing Body of the International Labour Office take a decision establishing March as the date for this mission. The ILO could then, by the end of March, produce a report based on the information supplied, and the mission should be cancelled if Israeli occupying authorities fail to grant the necessary facilities by the set date.

Furthermore, I am very surprised — as are all those who have read this Report — at some of the terms used, which deliberately hide concealed meanings, for instance, the “Palestinian population in the territories under Israeli control” and the “Arab population of the Golan” or the “Druze community”. These are immoral attempts to distort reality, for the Palestinians are at home in their own territory, as are the Syrians in their own territory in the Golan.

The Report neglects to mention the legal status of East Jerusalem, which was specifically highlighted in previous reports. The Report does not mention the attempt by Israel to impose its laws and rules on the Golan and in the occupied territories, the establishment of settlements and the confiscation of land, which runs counter to international law. Neither does it mention the fact that Israel bears responsibility for the deterioration of the social situation because of its military aggression and collective punishment.

I would also like to give you some figures that are quite revealing of the situation in the Arab occupied territories. Loss of human life from September 2000 to May 2003 numbers more than 3,000 martyrs, 30 per cent of whom are children and 20 per cent elderly people and women. In attacks on doctors and nurses, more than 250 nurses and doctors have been killed, as well as ambulance drivers. The injured amount to 44,000, 20 per cent of whom are totally disabled. A total of 500,000 dunums of land have been destroyed, 700,000 trees uprooted, 40,000 houses destroyed, and 700,000 people are now unemployed — a rate of 65 per cent.

The intransigence of Israel, which continues its policy of collective punishment, closures, road blocks,

and restrictions on movement is the main reason for the deterioration of the situation of Arab and Palestinian citizens, which has led to an overall deterioration in the lives of people and their families.

The Arab-Israeli conflict is an historical one: if one looks back into history one finds the balance of power on a global scale.

We cannot but see that there is no genuine will to find a solution, the aim being to perpetuate the crisis and manage it. Crisis management is difficult, but not dangerous as long as essential requirements are met: namely to ensure the security of Israel. That is a fact; but there is a historical reality that has held true throughout human history: oppressors — whether individuals or nations — always reach the end of their life, however long it may be.

Mr. T. KRIEKOUKIS (*Government delegate, Greece, speaking on behalf of the European Union*) — I am honoured to speak on behalf of the European Union. The acceding countries (Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia) and the associated countries (Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey) have aligned themselves to this statement. Iceland, Norway and Switzerland have also expressed their wish to align themselves to the statement.

The European Union welcomes the Report of the Director-General, *The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories*, and it wishes to reiterate its support for the ILO's efforts for the implementation of the enhanced programme of technical cooperation. It is still a matter of great concern for the European Union that during the period covered by this Report, there has been a marked deterioration in the situation of workers in the occupied territories. The closures have had a negative effect regarding employment and income security and the poverty rate is increasing.

The European Union wishes to affirm its readiness to assist in the process of job creation and economic reconstruction in the region. Thus, it places strong emphasis on the promotion of the enhanced programme of technical cooperation, especially for the establishment and running of the Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection, as set out by the Palestinian National Report, the creation of a much needed system of social protection, as well as the promotion of a platform for constructive dialogue for labour issues between Palestinians and Israelis.

We believe that the ILO's role in this matter is of crucial importance. The European Union wishes to emphasize its commitment towards peace-building in the Middle East. The European Union reiterates the importance of the Quartet's road map for the re-establishment of a positive political perspective in the region and calls on both parties to seize the opportunity offered to put the Middle East process back on track. Both parties must do their utmost to ensure the swift implementation of the road map.

Visible and clear actions by both parties are imperative in order to restore hope and promote stability in the Middle East. It is crucial that parallel progress be made in the political, economic and security fields. Time is of the essence. Concrete action and results are needed — now.

Mr. SHAHARUDIN (*Government delegate, Malaysia, speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Move-*

ment) — Malaysia has the honour and pleasure to speak on behalf of the member States of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) at this special sitting on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories.

The Non-Aligned Movement is concerned that, according to the Report of the Director-General, *The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories*, tabled in this session, the situation of the workers and their families has worsened. According to the Report, human security, rights at work, incomes, access to employment and social protection are under constant threat.

The Non-Aligned Movement is dismayed at the deepening economic and social crisis in the occupied Arab territories and the severe restrictions on the movement of persons and goods within those territories, which have resulted in a drastic decline in consumption, income and employment levels. It is even more disturbing to learn that 60 per cent of the population in the occupied Arab territories live on an income of less than US\$2.15 per day.

To further add to their miseries, workers and their families live in constant fear of the possible physical, economic and social consequences of the Israeli occupation. Violence occurs daily and at any time, causing severe psychological stress. If this continues to be the scenario, we can sadly conclude that the future of Palestinian people remains bleak.

The plight of the Palestinian people has always been an issue of concern to the Non-Aligned Movement. At the thirteenth NAM summit in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in February 2003, the NAM Heads of State and Government strongly condemned the systematic human rights violations and the reported war crimes that have been committed by the Israeli occupying forces against the Palestinian people. They condemned, in particular, the wanton destruction of homes, infrastructure and agricultural lands; and the imposition of collective punishments on the entire Palestinian population, including severe restrictions on the movement of persons and goods, which has resulted in socio-economic debilitation of the Palestinian people amounting to a dire humanitarian crisis.

The Heads of State and Government also emphasized that the main danger to the realization of the national rights of the Palestinian people and the achievement of a peaceful solution comes from colonization by settlers. This has been going on in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, since 1967, through land confiscation, settlement building and transfer of Israeli nationals to the occupied territory. The Heads of State and Government, stressed that this policy, with all the measures that it entailed, must be immediately stopped and reversed.

The Non-Aligned Movement welcomes the efforts of the ILO, through its technical cooperation programme and capacity-building projects, to assist the Palestinian people. However, the plight of the Palestinian people could only be improved through a political solution involving the establishment of an independent and sovereign State of Palestine. In Kuala Lumpur, the NAM Heads of State and Government reiterated their commitment to the achievement of peaceful solutions to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. They reaffirmed their support for the rights of the Palestinian people to national independence and the exercise of sovereignty in their State, Palestine, with Jerusalem as its capital. They welcomed, in this regard,

the universally supported vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders. The Heads of State and Government also expressed their support for the efforts of the Quartet in resolving the Palestinian issue and encouraged it to proceed speedily with the implementation of its road map.

While a particular solution to the present issue is being worked out, the Palestinian workers and their families deserve to be assured of their basic economic rights as much as workers elsewhere in the world. In this regard, the Non-Aligned Movement would like to encourage the ILO to continue its social dialogue to prepare the ground for the many reforms that are required to bring about economic recovery, protect Palestinian workers' rights at work and provide them with productive and remunerative employment and protection.

Mr. SOODHUN (*Minister of Labour and Industrial Relations, Mauritius*) — I am making this statement on behalf of all the national tripartite delegations of the African Union.

At the outset, I wish to associate myself with the statement made by Malaysia on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. I also wish to thank the Director-General for his Report and the Appendix thereto, concerning *the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories*. His assessment of the situation is factual and objective and, therefore, should be treated with the credibility it deserves.

The issue before us today is a matter of concern for the international community as a whole and not merely to the Middle East Region.

At its meeting of April 2003, the Labour and Social Affairs Commission of the African Union considered this issue, on the basis of a report submitted by a national delegation, and adopted a decision on Palestine. The decision calls, inter alia, for the immediate cessation of acts committed against the Palestinian people and workers, such as the economic blockade, curfews, and demolition of houses and infrastructure. The decision also requests fulfilment of the obligation towards the Palestinian workers, namely the removal of restrictions on entry and exit from Palestinian territories, as well as freedom of movement of workers, raw materials and goods in the occupied territories.

It also requests the Arab Labour Organization to pursue its efforts to protect the rights of Palestinian workers and employers throughout the occupied Arab territories, in accordance with the Commission's previous decision on the matter. Finally, the decision calls for collaboration with the ILO and other regional and international trading institutions.

The Labour and Social Affairs Commission of the African Union hereby reiterates, in no uncertain terms, its stand on this issue. While there seem to be some developments for a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, we wish, in the light of the Director-General's Report, to reiterate the calls made in various meetings for a constructive dialogue among all the parties concerned to ease the presently untenable situation of Palestinian workers and their families and, furthermore, to improve the overall political and socio-economic conditions in the Middle East.

Original Arabic: Mr. NEFFATI (*Minister of Social Affairs and Solidarity, Tunisia, speaking on behalf of the Arab Maghreb Union*) — At the outset we would

like to express our thanks to the International Labour Office and the Director-General, Mr. Juan Somavia, for the efforts exerted in order to prepare the Report presented to us on the situation of Arab workers in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories. But we would have liked that this Report to have reached us much earlier, to have given time to the delegations participating in this Conference to read it before coming to Geneva.

Examination of this Report shows the magnitude of suffering and hardship experienced by the Arab people under occupation in Palestine, in the Syrian Golan and the Lebanon. Such suffering has taken many forms in practices contravening international law, international labour standards and the most basic of human rights such as the right to movement, the right to work and the right to life.

The Report has presented a sample of those practices, such as closures, collective punishment, imposition of severe restrictions on the movement of goods and people, the construction of a security wall, building of settlements and destruction of homes and economic establishments, killing of civilians and other forms of inhuman suffering, and this at a time characterized by the defence of human rights and freedoms.

These practices have led to the deterioration of the economic and social situation in the occupied Arab territories. The Report notes many features of the situation, such as a drop in per capita income increased unemployment and a high incidence of poverty.

From this forum we express our support for the Palestinian workers and people and for workers in the other occupied Arab territories, and we call urgently on the Organization and other actors in the international community to act swiftly and firmly to put an end to this suffering. We call for respect for human rights for all without discrimination, selectivity and double standards, and for the application of international labour standards to all, so that they do not lose their viability and credibility.

In the Report, there are certain paragraphs and designations which are not compatible with international law and even with the resolution adopted by the International Labour Conference in 1980, which is the legal basis for the annual report by the Director-General on this topic. The title of this Report is: "*The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories*", but the wording of the 1980 resolution was "the situation of Arab workers in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories". Furthermore a large part of the Report (paragraphs 58-61) is devoted to the "impact of the crisis, on the Israeli economy", while that question is not part of the annual reports as stated in the 1980 resolution. Furthermore, many parts of the report (such as paragraphs 107 and 108) stress that the economic recession and the deteriorated security situation also concerns most and not only the occupied Arab territories. But those paragraphs do not suggest that the cause of this crisis is the occupation by Israel.

The countries of the Maghreb and other Arab countries have endeavoured to ensure the success of the peace process and reiterated at the last Arab Summit at Sharm el-Sheikh, that peace is a strategic choice and they are still working in order to establish a just and comprehensive peace on the basis declared at the Madrid Conference, namely the application of resolutions by international organizations and of the Security Council, in accordance with the principle of land

for peace, in such a way as to ensure the withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Arab territories. There can be no hope for peace except by ending occupation and the restoration of rights

We share with the Director-General his hope that the road map would give an impetus to political negotiations and create an opportunity to bring about peace in the region.

On the other hand, we support efforts by the International Labour Organization to offer technical assistance to the social partners in Palestine, and we call for this assistance to be intensified and to be delivered swiftly.

At the same time, we look forward for a larger role for the ILO, this Organization which represents the world's conscience and which calls for providing decent work for all and for respect for basic principles and rights in the area of labour.

We consider that this Organization is capable of acting more effectively to serve peace in the area through sustained and determined efforts aimed at getting Israel to respect international labour standards and cease serious violations of human rights. The Organization demonstrated its capacity to undertake this role when it stood firmly against the apartheid regime in South Africa.

We believe that the best way to study the annual report by the Director-General on the situation of Arab workers in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories is not by holding special sittings, but by forming a committee within the International Labour Conference which meets annually for as long as the Israeli occupation remains. While calling for the formation of such a committee we hope that all the good efforts aimed at the achievement of just and comprehensive peace in the area will succeed and that therefore there will be no need for special sittings or a special committee.

Original French: Mr. JOUBIER (Workers' adviser and substitute delegate, France) — Our discussion is once again taking place against a backdrop of a huge upsurge in tension in the region, just when it appeared that there was a glimmer of hope for peace.

I would like to reiterate, on behalf of my organization, the General Confederation of Labour, our utter condemnation of any terrorist act, whether it is perpetrated by suicide bombers, or the Israeli army. At a time when the Palestinian Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas, is calling for an end to the armed intifada and for continued opposition to occupation through peaceful means, it is vital that the Israeli Government cease the helicopter raids, shellings and summary killings which are merely undermining the prospects for any peaceful settlement. Let us hope that the process begun by the road map proposed by the Quartet can be pursued. This presupposes, of course, that it is fully accepted and applied by both parties. It would then set in train a process which would break the cycle of occupation, violence and repression.

By stressing that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could not be settled by military force, the Palestinian Prime Minister last week clearly heralded what might be a new era. Let us hope that the door is not slammed shut again. But this new era will not bear fruit unless it is rapidly reflected in an improvement in the living conditions of the Palestinian people.

This year, yet again, the Report of the Director-General on the situation of workers of the occupied

Arab territories gives us a clear picture of the situation prevailing in these territories. During various missions to Gaza and the West Bank many delegations of our Organization sadly came up with the same findings.

We completely endorse the statement in the preface of the report that the present situation is untenable and cannot be allowed to continue. Allow me, however, to stress the gap which exists between the analysis of the situation in the Report and the relatively feeble ability of the ILO so far to alter the course of events.

Let us hope that the new resources made available will allow for real progress. It is by forging links between all participants who wish to escape from this hellish cycle of violence by trying to promote rapprochement that it will be possible to pick up the thread of dialogue and give peace a real chance. The social partners and the trade union movement in particular must support this goal.

The broad thrust of the Director-General's Report seems to bear this out, as does the request to the ILO to propose the basis for a dialogue on labour questions between Palestinians and Israelis. My organization intends to continue its advocacy of dialogue for peace.

Original Arabic: Ms. AL-JABI (Minister of Social Affairs and Labour, Syrian Arab Republic) — The appendix to the Director-General's Report concerning the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories this year is much more detailed than last year and has taken into account the observations which we had made previously. This attention paid by the Director-General is appreciated by us, but we have to give a more complete picture of the reality in the occupied Arab territories.

I would like to concentrate on the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan. There are a number of observations which should be taken into account, and we have submitted a memo to the Director-General and he has approved them in an official letter, and promised that these things will be taken into account in future. For this we express to him our appreciation.

Since Israel occupied these territories on 5 June 1967 and expelled the Syrians citizens by force, uprooting them from their villages in the Syrian Golan and obliging them to seek refuge elsewhere. It has pursued its policy of aggression and inhuman acts against Syrian Arab citizens who have continued to live under occupation and who have been subjected to different forms of oppression, contrary to international law and to resolutions adopted by the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council, in flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of humanitarian law.

The policy pursued by Israel has been condemned in the four corners of the globe, and resolutions Nos. 242, 338 and 425, which obliged it to withdraw from all the territories occupied since 1967, have been violated by Israel. Neither has it respected Security Council resolution No. 474, which considered Israel's decision to impose its laws and jurisdiction on Syrian Golan to be null and void, and demanded that Israel cease its actions against Syrian citizens. Israel has also ignored the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights, along with the resolutions of other international organizations including ILO.

We are fully aware of the fact that these resolutions are all well known to the international community and, alas, I do not have time to list them here today. We have mentioned this however in the annual report which we presented to the Director-General, which also contains a description of the situation in the Syrian Golan under Israeli occupation: the absence of healthcare and the suppression of the Syrian Arab curriculum, in addition to unfair fiscal policy towards Syrian citizens. As regards the conditions of workers in the Golan, they are part of the general suffering of the Syrian citizens under Israeli occupation. The sufferings of the workers in the occupied Syrian Golan have been described in previous reports, and this situation continues, along with new actions.

Israel's policy against the workers in the Golan can be summed up as follows: the policy is aimed at not allowing them any employment opportunities, failing to pay their wages, arbitrary dismissal of Syrian workers in the Golan, continual discrimination between Arabs and Israeli workers, and a policy of arrest and detention of citizens and different forms of repression because of national positions against the occupation.

Finally, there is the policy of settlement which is being pursued by Israel. This policy is based on the confiscation of land and water in the occupied Golan, and the number of settlers has increased, whilst the existing settlements have been expanded. There are about 40 Israeli settlements in the Golan which have been established on the ruins of Arab villages destroyed by the occupying forces.

As regards the appendix to the Director-General's Report, we would like to make some remarks and to repeat our thanks to the representative of the Arab Labour Organization for his assistance.

In footnote (1) on page 1, the text does not mention the fact that Israel is violating Security Council resolution No. 479 in its declaration. It also talks of "the Golan inhabitants" instead of designating them as Syrian Arab citizens in the occupied Golan. Similarly, on page 8, the items "indigenous Arab population" and "Druze inhabitants" are used in paragraphs 39 and 40 respectively, whereas in fact what is referred to is the occupation of Syrian territory, and not the territory of one part or another of the Syrian population. On page 8, paragraph 41, it says that the report submitted by the Syrian Minister of Labour and Social Affairs includes a phrase which states that "only Israeli citizens are allowed to form trade unions". This reference is incorrect. Such a phrase has never been used by a responsible official, since we are talking here about settlers and occupiers, not about citizens. There is an evident distortion which is contrary to the reality of the occupation.

On page 35, under the heading "Meetings in the Golan", it refers to "members of the Arab community", whereas in fact the mission held meetings with Syrian Arab citizens from the Golan, the true owners of the territory.

We call upon the international community, through the International Labour Organization, to put an immediate end to the Israeli occupation, its attempt to expand its settlements, violations of the human rights of the population, the imposing of an economic blockade, the demolition of houses, and the destruction of infrastructure and agricultural land.

The establishment of a lasting peace is extremely important for the stability and security of the region. Israel must withdraw from all the territories occupied

in 1967. An independent Palestinian State must be established, with Jerusalem as its capital, and the resolutions of the Security Council must be implemented, since it is perfectly clear that occupation is the worst form of terrorism.

We call upon the ILO to establish a permanent committee to ensure monitoring of the situation of Arab workers in Palestine and the other occupied Arab territories and to provide them with technical and financial assistance.

Finally, I would like to underline the financial burden shouldered by Syria as a result of this occupation, since Syria devotes a large part of its budget to this matter, which necessarily affects the implementation of social and economic development plans intended to improve the level of income of the population.

Lord BRETT (*Workers' delegate, United Kingdom*) — This debate, in the present situation, I believe, demands cool heads and not hot words.

The General Council of the Trades Union Congress has continued to follow events in the Middle East with great concern and has paid increasing attention to the problems facing Palestinian workers and the devastating effects of the Israeli occupation of Palestine on their freedom and well-being. We have been distressed and disturbed by the appalling cycle of violence, including violence against innocent civilians, perpetrated by Palestinian terrorist groups on the one hand, and by the Israeli Defence Force on the other. We agree with Nelson Mandela that terrorism is the targeting of innocent civilians, regardless of the status of the perpetrators.

The TUC has long and deep friendships with both the Histadrut and the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions (PGFTU). Although our General Council was forced to postpone a visit to Palestine and Israel in April this year, we hope to be able to make that visit in the near future, and we continue to be in regular contact with both organizations.

We had the great privilege at our last Congress to welcome as our guest our friend, Shaher Sae'd, General Secretary of the PGFTU. In his address to our Congress, he explained the effects of illegal occupation, unending curfew, school and university closures, water shortages, the destruction of homes and olive groves, border closures, the violence against and harassment of those who do not have permission to cross and even the killing of those who cross without permission. The result of border closures on the employment and income of the working families of Palestine — and thus on its stability and on attempts to ensure a universal consensus for peace — has been devastating. These themes, and the severe consequences for the Israeli economy of the cost of military operations in the occupied territories and of the suicide attacks, are well reflected in the Director-General's report. Israeli workers, too, are suffering deeply, not only from the terrorist violence, but also from the recession that violence and occupation entail.

The Director-General proposes four areas of ILO action to address the needs of the social partners in Palestine: helping the authority in its reform agenda and the establishment of statehood; cooperating with the Ministry of Labour and with the social partner organizations to become fully functioning institutions in a democratic state; providing technical assistance for the Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection; and assisting in the creation of a system of

social protection. We agree with those proposals. The TUC General Council welcomed the creation of the Fund and urges all member States to contribute to it.

Of course, both Israel and Palestine need a peace dividend to promote investment and growth. Above that, they just need peace — peace with security, peace with justice, peace in line with United Nations resolutions, and peace in two free and independent states.

We hope that the road map may provide a kick-start to the renewal of the peace process. We recognize the divisions within both Israel and Palestine. We recognize that building trust is a necessity and that diverging from the road map — for example on the question of the illegal settlements, which must end if Palestine is to be a viable and secure geographical entity — will not help us down the road the map suggests.

The events of the past 48 hours, with the attempted assassination of senior Hamas political leaders, throws doubts, in our view, upon the Israeli Government's sincerity in this regard, but it no way justifies the horror of the latest bus bomb atrocity.

Instead, we recognize that the new Palestinian Prime Minister needs to be empowered and supported if he is to be able to convince the extremist groups that peace and a two-state solution is better than a war which can never be won. There are no sustainable military solutions to political problems — and that is a lesson that we have learned in the United Kingdom from our own long and bitter experience in Northern Ireland.

If you want peace, you must talk peace. You must empower and not undermine the interlocutors at the conference table so that they can bring their people with them. The TUC has recommitted itself explicitly this year to the cause of a just and lasting peace with security, full statehood and independence for both Israel and Palestine. We remain ready to contribute to that process in any way that would be helpful and in any way that is acceptable to our Israeli and Palestinian sister trade union confederations.

We believe, too, that the ILO is one of the best-placed organizations to support confidence building between the social partners and the parties in the region.

Original Arabic: Mr. EL AMAWY (*Minister of Manpower and Immigration, Egypt*) — In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate! On behalf of the delegation of Egypt, I would like to express our appreciation to the Director-General of the International Labour Office for having sent a high-level mission to enquire into the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories and Palestine. We would like to pay homage to the work of the mission, which accomplished its task despite the difficulties.

The decision by the 91st Session of the Conference to hold this special sitting to discuss the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories is a follow-up to all the other occasions on which the issue has been discussed and reflects the concern of the Organization about the difficult situation of these workers.

The Director-General spoke about the deterioration of the economic and social situation of Arab workers and their families in the occupied Arab territories as a result of Israeli policies and practices against the Palestinian people, who only wish to claim their legitimate human and national rights. The occu-

pation imposes circumstances that are unfavourable for any development of the standard of living and working conditions. Like last year, the mission concluded this was an untenable situation that must be remedied.

We agree with the Director-General that the economic and social crisis has deteriorated in the occupied territories and there are restrictions on movement of people and goods both within the occupied territories and between them and Israel. This has led to a spectacular drop in revenue, in consumption, and in employment, as well as an unprecedented contraction in economic activity, be it in production, trade, or investment. Unemployment in some Palestinian regions is at more than 80 per cent.

The Arab workers of the Golan still suffer discrimination in the use of land, water resources, agriculture, education, employment, and building permits. They are deprived of their right to choose their own profession, trade union rights and freedom of association rights.

These are violations and practices that run counter to recognized labour standards and also run counter to the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the other international instruments of the United Nations, the ILO, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and other non-governmental organizations.

The Israeli occupation and colonization has a very significant negative effect on the lives of workers and employers in the occupied Arab territories and it is unthinkable that the international community might not face its responsibilities in terms of putting an end to this inhuman situation.

While we recognize the efforts made by the ILO to put an end to this situation, we urge the Organization, pursuant to the principles and objectives of its Constitution and the Declaration of Philadelphia, to increase and enhance its technical cooperation programme in the occupied Palestinian territories, with a view to creating a Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection and to call on donor countries, as soon as possible, to support particular programmes aimed at certain professional groups, such as the disabled. We would also like to ask donors to give their assistance to all these projects.

There are measures that should be taken by the ILO in the very near future. A special bulletin should be published on the current special sitting which should be widely circulated on the ILO's web site in all the working languages of the Organization.

In addition, a standing committee should be set up by the Conference to consider the situation of social partners in the occupied territories and in the Golan Heights. Furthermore, an item should be included on the agenda of the November 2003 session of the Governing Body of the ILO in order to look into this issue and all related matters.

Egypt supports all efforts to reactivate the Middle East peace process and the road map, and affirms that, whilst awaiting for these efforts to achieve the desired results, it is necessary to use all possible means to improve the lot of Arab workers in the occupied territories, not only from a moral, humanitarian or civilizational perspective, but also to prevent the situation from exploding and to restore an atmosphere that will be a step forward on the road towards peace.

Mr. LEVY (*Government delegate, Israel*) — While travelling back from their workplace yesterday evening 16 innocent Israelis, young and old, men and women, were massacred by Hamas terrorists on a public bus in Jerusalem. Over 100 were injured, some of them gravely. This is just the recent toll of suicide bombings, following a genuine attempt by Israeli and Palestinian leaders to move the region from conflict to peace.

Last Sunday, 8 June, at 5 a.m. the first working day on the first week after two meetings between Prime Ministers Sharon and Abou Mazen and a three-way summit with President Bush in Aquaba, Israel decided to take a risk and increase the number of permits issued to Palestinian workers coming into Israel on a daily basis to 35,000 every day. As 15,000 workers lined up to enter Israel from Gaza at the area's checkpoint, three Palestinian terrorists, from three different groups (Fatah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad) infiltrated the line of workers. After 7,000 workers had passed through the checkpoint, the three terrorists jumped the fence to a nearby Israeli post and opened fire, killing three Israelis and wounding four others before they were finally subdued. The entry of the remaining 8,000 workers into Israel through that checkpoint was stopped.

Is it not clear who in actual fact is working against the interests of the Palestinian workers? Clearly, radicals in the Palestinian camp are trying to sabotage not only the daily livelihood of their brethren, but the peace process itself. Can Israel continue to take risks and increase the number of Palestinian workers entering Israel daily in the face of such abuse?

This is not the first case, nor is it an isolated one. Palestinian terrorist groups attacked industrial zones at Neveh Shalom, at Erez, Atarot and the Karni Passage, areas upon which many Palestinian workers, merchants and businessmen depend for their livelihoods and daily employment. The attacks have included shootings, ramming, setting explosive charges, throwing hand grenades and similar violent acts, resulting in many Israelis and Palestinians being killed and wounded.

My Government opposes, and has always opposed, this special sitting. This kind of sitting blatantly discriminates against a member State of the United Nations, contributes to the politicization of the agency and will contribute neither to the thematic work of this Conference, nor to the well being of the workers in the area. This discussion, regarding only one people in the world and their claims, is the worst manifestation of singling out a particular country, Israel. Dozens of conflicts spanning entire continents are now taking place around the world. Millions of people around the world subsist on less than US\$2 a day. Indeed, the figure was 2.8 billion in 1999, according to the Director-General's Report on *Working out of poverty* prepared by the ILO for this session. Yet only the Palestinian situation is deemed to merit a special debate, even though they are the largest recipient of aid per capita in the world.

This is not a debate on labour issues, and such politicization weakens the credibility of the organization that conducts it. Israelis and Palestinians are trying to re-stitch the fragile fabric of confidence. The new Palestinian Prime Minister, having just formed his Government is coming to Jerusalem to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Sharon for the first time. Is this the time to engage in one-sided resolutions? Is it not

rather the time to let the parties rebuild the necessary trust ever so slowly, in spite of the difficulties caused by the strong opposition to the peace process from the Palestinian side and by suicide bombers whose targets are not only Israelis but the peace process itself? Is this not the time to allow the parties to get together in a spirit of confidence-building, rather than blasting one side because a certain group in this hall considers that it commands an automatic majority?

The Israeli Prime Minister confirmed at the summit in Aqaba on 4 June that Israel has lent its strong support to President Bush's vision expressed on 24 June 2002, of two States, Israel and a Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security. The Israeli Government welcomes the opportunity to renew direct negotiations according to the steps set out in the "road map" which it has adopted. The Prime Minister has emphasized that it is in Israel's interest that the Palestinians govern themselves in their own State: A democratic Palestinian State, fully at peace with Israel, which will promote the long-term security and well-being of Israel as a Jewish State. He has also emphasized, however, that there can be no peace without the abandonment and elimination of terrorism and violence, and has pledged to work together with the Palestinians and other States to fight these phenomena.

Before the current unrest began, there were 120,000 Palestinians employed in Israel. The remittances of Palestinian workers employed in Israel contributed 32 per cent to Palestinian GNP before September 2000. Palestinian workers enjoyed, in addition to wages, the same social rights as Israeli employees, including pension rights, paid vacation, sick leave, accident insurance and other benefits.

Before the riots, employment in the territories had improved to a great extent. The rate of unemployment had been lowered by almost 50 per cent. 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. Preparations were under way for the creation of new industrial areas. Trade between both sides grew extensively. As a result, the Palestinian GNP grew by eight per cent in 1998 and seven per cent in 1999. It is important to note that because of the improved security situation at the time, there were hardly any days of closure between 1998 and the start of the unrest in 2000. All those positive trends came to a halt at the beginning of the riots. Regrettably, one of the first groups in Palestinian society to be hurt by the violence initiated by the Palestinian Authority was the workers. The deteriorating security situation in the area, fuelled by 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 to minimize the risk of potential terrorist acts by Palestinian radicals. This situation brought about a significant decrease in the number of Palestinians who were employed in Israel.

Suffering is not only felt by Palestinians. Some might be surprised that Israelis are suffering as well. We are burying our dead — over 800, if we include yesterday's victims; all victims of terrorism, car bombs, sniper attacks, ambushes along the roadways. In hospitals we are treating our wounded, victims of continuous terrorist attacks. And even those who have suffered no physical injury have sustained

mental and psychological wounds. People are afraid to ride the buses because suicide bombers board those buses, having been brainwashed by fundamentalist zealots to blow themselves up along with innocent civilians.

The young are afraid of frequenting clubs. Israeli Jews and Arabs are fearful when entering a restaurant, or attending a wedding ceremony. Not only did the economy of the Palestinian Authority suffer setbacks and loss of revenues as a result of the rioting, the Israeli economy has been facing major hardships as a result of the same riots, as the Director-General's Report clearly indicates.

The Report on the situation of workers of the occupied Palestinian territories and this debate itself ignore the Palestinian violence: Israel's response is taking place in a vacuum, five suicide bombers did not blow themselves up in Jerusalem, Hebron and Afula in May 2003 alone, not to mention yesterday's tragedy, Israel's defensive reactions occur without any provocation. The security, life and health of Israelis are not considered to count.

Every year we are treated to a series of eloquent speeches and one-sided resolutions. I wonder why those who speak with such apparent conviction about the plight of the Palestinians has yet contributed to the alleviation of their plight. The focus in the ILO should be on technical cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians under the auspices of the ILO, which has the necessary expertise to work with both parties for the furtherance of those goals. Indeed, during the visit of the mission we made concrete proposals for technical cooperation between the two sides under the auspices of the ILO.

In conclusion, I must say that this debate will contribute nothing to the welfare of Palestinian or Israeli employees. The way to move ahead has been pointed out in the recent summit in Aqaba: ending violence, creating confidence, working together to rebuild understanding, trust and the peace process itself. Only when violence, extremist rhetoric and terrorism are abandoned will Palestinians and Israelis be able to build bridges for the future, create employment, improve both their economies and work together towards the noble goals to which all Members of the ILO aspire.

Mr. RYDER (*representative, International Confederation of Free Trade Unions*) — The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTW) welcomes the Report presented by the Director-General as an objective analysis of the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories and for its contribution to fixing and advancing the important role that the ILO can play in line with its mandate and its responsibilities in this area.

The Report provides a portrayal of a deepening tragedy, of two peoples whose futures are inextricably intertwined, locked in terrible and deadly conflict. And there is a single over-riding obvious conclusion that we must all draw from it. That the situation of working families — above all Palestinian, but also Israeli — depends crucially on putting an end to the conflict. It is striking indeed just how closely the conditions of workers vary with the intensity of the conflict. The Report records a stabilization in economic and social conditions in recent months, as levels of violence had eased. But this is at levels which condemn Palestinians to massive poverty, and place decent work and decent lives well beyond their reach.

The ICFTU, with affiliates in both Palestine, the PGFTU, and Israel, the Histadrut, believes that it has a particular opportunity and responsibility to meet the challenges raised in the Director-General's Report, and, above all, the challenge of peace.

With the acceptance of the road map, the ICFTU, together with the PGFTU and the Histadrut, has called on leaders on both sides to take the bold steps necessary to achieve this peace.

The Report before us reflects the spirit of optimism and opportunity that the road map has brought. But, as we know, since the Report was written, we have all witnessed the renewed cycle of violence which, with almost sickening inevitability, is the reaction of those whose aim is to sabotage peace. We condemn them. They will not easily be forgiven.

We look forward to the ILO being able to redirect its efforts from the imperative of providing basically humanitarian assistance towards activities which can contribute centrally to promoting just and sustainable development in the territories. The Report explains persuasively exactly what the ILO's role can and should be in institution-building and in addressing the specific and serious issues affecting Palestinian workers and their trade unions. It rightly and particularly stresses the problems faced by those amongst them who have worked, or still do work, in Israel. As and when Palestinians and Israelis travel the route set out in the road map, the ILO can and must accompany them, within the international community's overall commitment, and make its own and unique contribution to deepening democracy, building peace and bringing social justice.

But, for this to happen, we will all need to convert our solidarity, our rhetoric and our commitment into material support. The ICFTU has consistently backed the creation of a Palestinian fund for employment and social protection and we express our satisfaction that this has now been formally established. Our affiliates around the world have called on their governments to contribute to the fund so that the potential of this Organization can be fully realized to the benefit of Palestinian working families.

The ICFTU's constant interaction with our Palestinian and our Israeli affiliates show just how deeply each feels that its members are victims of a conflict that they do not want and for which others are responsible.

The PGFTU has played a remarkable and admirable role in maintaining basic services to members in circumstances in which normal working life and trade union activity has become virtually impossible. It has also spoken out courageously against violence and for peace and claimed the ground of independent worker representation, which is central to state-building in Palestine. The ICFTU expresses its continuing solidarity and support for its struggle.

Histadrut, whose representative has spoken before me, finds its members also paying the price of the conflict, as the Israeli economy has gone into its deepest recession ever and the Government has reacted with draconian proposals for anti-worker measures. The ICFTU equally expresses its solidarity with the struggle of Histadrut in defence of worker rights and interests.

The conclusion of our debate is really very simple. It is, indeed, universal. Working people always pay the heaviest price in war and in conflicts. They have the most to gain from the dividend that peace would

bring and their common interests as workers must always prevail across the contours of confrontation, however insurmountable they may sometimes seem to be.

If the road map is followed, it would lead to the creation of a sovereign Palestinian State existing in peaceful and secure coexistence with Israel within a defined timeframe. It would make a reality of our vision of welcoming the State of Palestine, its employers, and its free trade unions into full membership here at the ILO. At the ICFTU, we want to see this happen as soon as possible. We will work for this. We will oppose those who want to stop it and we urge all others to join with us and with the ILO in what is one of the truly historic endeavours of our time.

Original Arabic: Mr. ALFARARGI (*representative, League of Arab States*) — I am pleased and honoured to address you in the name of the League of Arab States. I salute the social partners for their determination to hold this special sitting in order to discuss the Report of the Director-General, *The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories*.

While I appreciate this effort, I would like to express some remarks before this distinguished gathering. Many parts of the Report of the Director-General describe the situation of workers and employers in Palestine as a result of occupation. These are disastrous conditions in the full sense of the word and not near-disastrous, as described by the report. There is no need for any evidence for it because we know it through the media every day. But the question is how long these conditions and the policy of destruction, closure, exile and starvation, stubbornly exercised by the Israeli occupation authorities — how long will these policies and conditions continue?

We do express our appreciation for the good and sincere desire of the International Labour Organization to contribute to ease the suffering of Arab workers in occupied Arab territories but readers of the Report will notice that there seems to be a sort of psychological terrorism which prevents calling things by their proper names as recognized by the international community and international organizations. It is not a question of Palestinian/Israeli dispute which led to instability in the region. Why does the Report not state things explicitly and use the terms recognized by the international community regarding the reality of the situation, which is that the conflict is between an occupying force, Israel, and a people suffering under that occupation, the Palestinian people.

Most unfortunately, the Report could not avoid an attempt to reconcile contradictions and so it addresses the social partners as if the matter were an unimportant dispute between two equal partners, and therefore it talks about the tragic situation of Arab workers and the consequences of the policy of occupation of destruction for the infrastructure, and then it asks the Palestinians to cooperate with occupation authorities in order to resolve problems over which they have no control. So, in other words, how can people who are under occupation face the Israeli military machine, equipped with the most modern tools of war and destruction, which destroys its livelihood and makes life impossible for them.

When it talks about the economic situation in Israel, the Report attempts to link it to the conditions of Arab workers, as if the prosperity of the Israeli economy is dependent on the submission of Palestin-

ian workers to the will and wishes of the occupation authority, which requires Palestinian workers to be submissive and to cooperate with the occupation authorities in exchange for freedom of movement and wages. The same thing applies to granting the Palestinian authority the tax benefits of Palestinian workers, which is tied to impossible political conditions. This is a compulsory action imposed on Palestinian workers, in contravention of all international labour legislation.

When the Report talks about capacity building at workers' and employers' organizations, it mentions three main challenges facing Palestinian organizations, one of which is democratic representation. The ILO is right when it considers democratic representation as the cornerstone for the success of any true attempts to achieve economic or social goals. But the Report should have mentioned that democratic representation requires freedom — there cannot be any practice of democracy without freedom.

We are back once again at the question of who is depriving the other of freedom? Assuredly, the occupation forces are the main reason. Support for the Palestinian people, workers and employers in the occupied territories is urgently needed. To be effective, action must be taken at the same time to remove the causes which have brought the entire region to this situation, and can be simply summed up in ending the occupation of the Palestinian territory, the Syrian Golan and the Shabba Farms in Lebanon.

Original French: Mr. THYS (*representative, World Confederation of Labour*) — Once again, the World Confederation of Labour (WCL) feels the need to use this democratic forum to repeat its position and to call on the ILO to bear it in mind when defining its policies and activities with regard to the issue of living and working conditions in occupied Palestine.

The World Confederation of Labour is very much concerned by the deterioration in the living conditions of the Palestinian people and workers. The economic strangulation of the Palestinian territories caused, inter alia, by the closure of frontiers, curfews and the existence of so many checkpoints, is leading to hunger and despair. In fact, it appears that the level of unemployment has gone up, that 62 per cent of the population is living on less than \$2.15 per day, and that more than 63 per cent of the population of Palestine is living on external humanitarian aid.

The WCL is also very concerned by the occupation policy and by the violence and destruction that has spread throughout occupied Palestinian territories. This situation has gone on for too long. From attack, to reprisal, from reprisal to attack, it has become almost impossible to stop the vicious circle. Too many children have paid the price of this conflict with their lives. We should not forget that more than 80 per cent of these children are Palestinians killed by the occupying forces.

The WCL repeats its rejection of all kinds of violence, wherever it comes from. We reject suicide attacks as much as the assassinations that are carried out "legally" by a State. The WCL is still convinced that the main cause of the violence and the suffering of the people and workers of Palestine is the continuous violation of the United Nations resolutions which provide for the right of the Palestine people to their own sovereign state and territory.

At the moment, we are once again speaking of a hope of achieving peace. The road map is on

everyone's lips. The WCL hopes that this initiative, the objective of which is to create a Palestinian State and to put an end within two years to the lengthy conflict between Israel and Palestine, will in fact yield results, despite recent events. Although it offers no answers to many issues which are key to the Palestinians, this road map does have the merit of existing and we welcome it. Nonetheless, we would like to recall that the essential ingredients for achieving a fair and lasting peace are real political will and a conviction that people have a right to self-determination, respect for resolutions and the abandonment of the double standards policy which is so clearly visible in this part of the world. Furthermore, we still think that the deployment of a peace force led by the United Nations to guarantee respect for the United Nations resolutions is more necessary than ever. No other force led by any country should take over this task, which is a matter for the United Nations.

The United Nations agencies have a crucial role to play in this part of the world. The WCL appreciates the importance attached by the ILO to the difficult and necessary task of unravelling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The WCL therefore congratulates the ILO on the efforts it has put into the enhanced programme of technical cooperation for the occupied Palestinian territories, particularly with regard to the strengthening of labour institutions, which help Palestinians to find decent work and to support their families.

Social dialogue is no doubt an important part of nation building. Workers' organizations will therefore have to continue not only to meet the humanitarian needs of workers, but above all, will have to work as social partners in their own right, by acting as spokespersons for the aspirations of Palestinian workers and their families in forums for social dialogue which will have to be strengthened or set up. To do this, it is necessary to build the capacities of all workers' organizations.

The WCL is a strong advocate for pluralism, democracy and justice. This is why the WCL calls on the ILO to take into account all of the trade union organizations that have been recognized by the Palestinian Authority in all of the technical assistance and cooperation programmes implemented in occupied Palestine. The recognition of trade union pluralism has to start within this respectable forum that is the ILO.

The WCL calls on the ILO to intervene with a view to putting an end to the illegal practice of deducting one per cent of the salary of Palestinians working in Israel. For reasons of justice, we also think that all deductions on salaries should be given to Palestinian organizations.

I would like to conclude, like the conclusion of the Report, by quoting a passage from the Declaration of Philadelphia which states that "poverty anywhere constitutes a danger to prosperity everywhere".

To remove this risk, the WCL calls for a redoubling of efforts to fight against poverty, but also for a just and lasting peace between Palestine and Israel. This is an absolutely essential prerequisite for peace in this part of the world, and can only happen if Israel withdraws from all of the territories which it has illegally and unjustly occupied.

Mr. LEVINE (*Government 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. It singles out one member State for

treatment different from all others. It has become a forum for political diatribe, rather than a constructive discussion of what the ILO can do to help improve the situation of Palestinian workers.

The ILO should focus its efforts on expanding its technical cooperation programme in the region. This is the area in which we can make a real difference. These special sittings are an anachronism and should be discontinued once and for all. The Director-General's Report is an objective and compelling description of the dire economic and social crisis facing Palestinian workers and their families. Clearly, the need for ILO assistance has never been greater. I am pleased to note that US\$1.4 million has already been allocated from the ILO's cash surplus to support the establishment of a Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection, and other components of the enhanced programme of technical cooperation the Director-General proposed at this Conference last year.

We believe this programme represents a clear and technically sound strategy for addressing labour problems on the West Bank and Gaza. Meanwhile, we are increasing our own assistance to the region, by adding US\$50 million to the US\$75 million already provided this year for rebuilding infrastructure, creating jobs, supporting civil society institutions and other programmes that contribute directly toward improving the lives of Palestinian workers and their families.

This is a moment of promise for the cause of peace in the Middle East, with the potential for unity against terror, the birth of a new Palestinian nation and broader peace among peoples of the region. Achieving these goals will require courage and vision on every side. As President Bush said last week: "The Holy Land must be shared between the State of Palestine and the State of Israel living at peace with each other and every other nation of the Middle East."

The ILO has a small, but significant role to play in bringing this about, and we should devote all of our efforts to this end.

Mr. SMITH (*Government adviser and substitute delegate, Australia*) — We have read with concern the Director-General's latest Report on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories.

We thank the ILO officials involved for their work. The Report highlights the fact that the troubles which began in September 2000 have had a terribly adverse affect on the lives and livelihoods of Arabs and Israelis alike.

Australia supports the ILO's technical cooperation activities in the region described in the Report, and we associate ourselves fully with the detailed statements which have been made in the last two sessions of the Governing Body on behalf of the Asia and Pacific Group. We particularly urge the Office to take an inclusive approach in its work to encourage and support dialogue on labour issues between the Palestinians and Israelis. Notwithstanding this, we agree with the comment in paragraph 47 that "genuine recovery will require a set of conditions that only a political settlement can provide". In this context, I repeat the comments which we made when a special sitting on this issue was last held in 2001. While we of course support, in an appropriate forum, consideration of the technical issues discussed in the Report and of other issues within the ILO's mandate, we are concerned that debating political issues in the Inter-

national Labour Organization, a technical body of the United Nations, is unhelpful.

Australia has warmly welcomed the recent release of the road map to peace, and we have called repeatedly on the two sides to redouble their efforts to bring the conflict to an end. As the Australian Foreign Minister said last month, no one can afford more squandered opportunities or squandered lives.

We welcome the acceptance by both sides of the road map, and are encouraged by the strong support received from the international community for the road map, but note that debates such as these are unlikely to help the process.

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.

Original Portuguese: Mr. ALVES TRINDADE (*Workers' adviser and substitute delegate, Portugal*) — On the social, labour, political and humanitarian situation in Palestine, in particular that of Palestinian workers, the road map for peace in Palestine submitted by the Quartet of the United States, the Russian Federation, the United Nations and the European Union could be a decisive factor in moving towards peace, but one should note that the Palestinians once again accepted the negotiation path while it took the Tel Aviv Government a further month to make up its mind and express its willingness to negotiate.

The implementation of this peace plan means that Israel has to accept the setting up of a Palestinian State by the year 2005 but the road to this is fraught with many obstacles. The road map timetable shows that the more difficult aspects of solving this conflict, such as the settlements issue, the genuine sovereignty of Palestine within its boundaries, the status of Jerusalem, and the return of around 4 million Palestinian refugees will only be debated in the third phase of the road map, which means that these decisive matters will involve a much more lengthy decision than would be desirable. This is precisely the issue that causes us to have serious misgivings about the road map, since it does not establish as its main objective the end of Israel's 37 year illegal occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and east Jerusalem.

Furthermore, the plan only requires Israel to draw back its occupying military forces to the areas it occupied in September 2000, that is to say at the beginning of the second intifada and to halt new building, so all the settlements that were established before September 2000 and even up to March 2001 can stay in place.

If you examine what the Special Rapporteur to the United Nations said at the end of May on the situation you will see how clearly linked the Israeli occupation and the Iraq war were. He said that the Iraq situation had been used by the Israeli authorities to step up violations of Palestinian rights, by demolishing more houses, confiscating more land and destroying more commercial establishments than in the last two years. The Rapporteur himself said that the road map "is not sufficient" to solve the Palestinian and Middle Eastern problems. He upheld the fact that the only possible solution was to put an end to the occupation and to have the Israeli troops effect a complete withdrawal from the occupied territories with the full dismantling of the settlements, and then to send a protection force in immediately to protect the Palestinians.

The large numbers of American troops sent to Iraq during and after the war there act as a powerful

instrument of pressure, giving the Israeli authorities the impression that they are better supported in negotiations on the road map, which will lead them to demand from the massacred and occupied Palestinians that which they cannot give.

The road map has demanded a lot of the Palestinian people. They were even required to remove President Yasser Arafat from the equation and to choose a new Prime Minister.

We have serious misgivings as to whether the objective of Washington and Tel Aviv might not be to change the rules of the game in order to undermine the Palestinian political culture created over the past 50 years to resist occupation, a national project unique in its democratic, sovereign, independent and secular content. This liberating political project has merited the support of the forces of peace the world over and was embodied by the United Nations, principally in Security Council resolutions Nos. 242 and 338.

Despite all these doubts and dangers, the Palestine people once again shows that it is willing to be engaged in direct talks with Israel and willing to meet the first requirements of the road map.

Every opportunity to solve the conflict and establish an independent Palestinian State should be taken up. However, new ways have to be found for Israelis and Palestinians to live together peacefully, while not undermining the will and the rights of the Palestinian people to live in freedom and in full sovereignty. As President Arafat himself said, only the Palestinian people can determine their own political future. This is why we should redouble our efforts to achieve peace in solidarity with the Palestinian people. They need our support even more urgently at this complex point in their heroic history of resistance and struggle.

Original French: Mr. CAMARA (*Government delegate, Senegal, speaking on behalf of the Member States of the Organisation of Islamic Conference*) — The adoption on 24 June 1980 at the 66th Session of the International Labour Conference of a resolution on the implications of the Israeli settlements in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories, in connection with the situation of Arab workers, is a solid basis for the regular examination, without complacency, of the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories.

In fact, paragraph 6 of that resolution establishes a mechanism whereby the Director-General must give an annual account of the development of the situation.

For the second consecutive year, the Report that we have before us is based on the results of a high-level mission that the Director-General sent to the occupied Arab territories, in particular to Palestine and the Golan.

On behalf of the Member States of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, I would like to thank the Director-General for his efforts and to encourage him to continue in this direction because this will help to keep this question in the spotlight.

I would also like to welcome the fact that once again we have the opportunity to examine the situation of Arab workers in the occupied territories in a special debate on this subject.

In paragraph 107, the Director-General's Report says that "during the period covered by the Report there has been a further marked deterioration in the situation in the occupied Arab territories" and this

remark alone is enough to make us realize how serious the situation has become.

Three factors are behind this trend: the phenomenon of closures, the construction of the separation wall and military incursions.

On the matter of closures the Report says “the immediate impact of the closures is felt in a drastic increase in the resources and time spent on travel — much of it wasted queueing at checkpoints”.

Furthermore, these closures lead to a “feeling of insecurity among Palestinian workers” and “violence occurs daily and at any time”. As for the separation wall, its immediate effect will be that “12,000 Palestinians will be physically separated from the remainder of the occupied territories,” with everything that implies in the denial of the fundamental right to work.

Finally, on the matter of military incursions, the Report mentions in paragraph 28 mentions that they have led to the demolition of more than 120 companies over the last few months, which means the abolition of so many jobs as well, the source of individual and collective livelihoods.

As you can see, this picture is far from being idyllic, on the contrary it reflects the highly precarious situation in which Arab workers live in the occupied territories in Palestine and the Golan.

The ILO, as an organization which defends social justice, must react, hence the point of the debate today, which should serve as a guide for future action by the Director-General. The road map now supplies a new framework for political dialogue and will be able to facilitate the implementation of ILO measures.

We mention in this respect the Director-General’s recognition of the important role of the ILO in providing “technical assistance to institutional reforms in the labour, employment and social protection fields”.

While waiting for the initiatives resulting from the road map to achieve success, we must attach great importance to the effective activation of the Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection.

In this respect the Organization of Islamic Conferences demands that all actors concerned meet together as soon as possible, because this is a necessary stage in trying to accelerate the activation of the Fund.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm the principle set out in paragraph I(c) of the Declaration of Philadelphia and rightly mentioned again in paragraph 108 of the Director-General’s Report: “Poverty anywhere constitutes a danger to prosperity everywhere.” We can deduce from this that the prosperity of Israel is intrinsically linked to an improvement in the situation of Palestinian and other workers in the occupied territories, something that can only occur if there is mutual respect, and respect for the right to life, which also includes the right to decent work in normal political conditions. That can only be accomplished by Israel’s total withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories.

Original Chinese: Mr. LIU (Government adviser and substitute delegate, China) — We are currently at a crossroads. On one hand, the international community involved in the Middle East peace process has witnessed positive progress, on the other hand, violence and conflicts continue, and this has taken a heavy toll and led to financial losses. We are very concerned about this situation.

The Government of China has discovered that employment, salaries, working conditions, social security

and other legitimate elements — including the interests of the workers — cannot be guaranteed. Moreover, the security of workers is also threatened as a result of constant tragic events. This scenario violates the fundamental principles of the ILO Constitution and the Declaration of Philadelphia as well as international labour standards. Therefore, it triggers worldwide concern.

The Government of China calls upon the parties concerned to seize current opportunities and cooperate actively with the international community to stop the violence and resume peace talks as soon as possible. Only in this way can the workers’ legitimate rights in the occupied territories be effectively safeguarded. The ILO should, within its jurisdiction, do its utmost to widely protect its technical assistants, help workers in the occupied Arab territories to improve their working and living conditions, and commit itself to decent work in this region.

Original Arabic: Mr. AOUN (Government delegate, Lebanon) — I would like at the outset to express my objection to the practice seen here in the plenary sessions over the past few days, of interrupting speakers in the general debate when they talk about the Israeli occupation, under the pretext that there is a special sitting devoted to this purpose. This forum, the forum of the United Nations and this venue, the Palais des Nations is the headquarters of the United Nations, should not prevent any organization or individual from condemning the occupation of these territories. The United Nations was established in the first place in order to consecrate the freedom and independence of people to work for the downfall of imperialism and occupation everywhere, in order to build and consolidate world peace. Is it not enough that the United Nations has issued more than 500 resolutions against the Israeli occupation of Palestine and the occupied Arab territories, none of which has been implemented? The Israeli occupation was based on the Zionist settlers’ scheme which was to be achieved through the military expansion, killing, plundering and deportation of the owners of the land and bringing Zionist immigrants from all parts of the world to settle in Palestine and in the Syrian Arab Golan and the south of Lebanon.

Occupation is the most atrocious crime against human civilization, against the United Nations Charter, and against the human rights laws. It is condemned in all international forums, particularly those which raise the banner and the slogan of the United Nations.

The special sitting devoted to the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories was organized as a preliminary cultural contribution by the tripartite constituents, through the ILO. Their contribution has been to unmask the practices of the Israeli occupation of Palestine and the occupied Arab territories, and particularly its violation of international labour standards, international law and its decisions pertaining to the legitimacy of the Palestine State.

The ILO is therefore called upon to go beyond the requirements of the routine report of its mission, and not to confine itself to a special sitting, which does not lead to any result. A permanent committee should be set up to follow-up on the consequences of the occupation of the occupied Arab territories, along the lines of the special permanent committee established to follow-up on the struggle against racial discrimina-

tion in South Africa, which continued its work until the downfall of the apartheid system in South Africa.

We call upon the Director-General to issue a conclusion on the special report of the special sitting, along the lines of all other special sittings held during a session of the International Labour Conference.

The Report of the Director-General, while objective as regards statistics and figures, nevertheless, because of the national rights consecrated by the decisions of international legitimacy, has tended to ignore or obliterate the identity of the land and the identity of its lawful owners, the Arab Palestinians and Syrians.

The Report has insisted for many years on describing the Syrians and Palestinians as the original inhabitants. If it does this, it has to describe the Israelis as colonists, who have been brought from all parts of the world in order to occupy the Syrian Golan and Palestine and settled there.

The three parties in Israel — Government, employers and workers — are occupiers, and their roles reinforce one another in enhancing the settler expansion and military occupation. But they have to remember, the Arab region in history has witnessed many occupations, and all have come to an end. They have to know that the road map, whether they accept it or reject it, is not going to obliterate the map of Palestine, from the sea to the river, and will not obstruct the right to return.

International and regional peace will not be achieved unless this peace is just and comprehensive and based on respect for the legitimate national rights of peoples.

Mr. FERGUSON (*Government adviser and substitute delegate, Canada*) — Canada is speaking in this special sitting, because we hope that our discussion here can make some contribution to the problems faced by Palestinian workers. That is the role of the ILO and that should be our objective here today. Inappropriate references to matters which do not belong to this forum will serve neither the mandate of this particular organization, nor the interests of the Middle East peace process.

Canada thanks the Director-General and the ILO secretariat for their Report on the situation of Palestinian workers. We reiterate Canada's strong support for the efforts of the ILO within the purview of its mandate to contribute to addressing this important issue. We also commend the concrete projects of the ILO enhanced technical cooperation programme to build the capacity of Palestinian workers, employers and the Ministry of Labour to address current problems. The creation or reform of solid institutions to improve the economic and social environment in the territories is key to the sustainable overall development of the region.

Canada is pleased that the ILO's programme has enjoyed the fullest cooperation of all parties on both sides, as well as that of the other major United Nations organizations and the World Bank. We welcome this collective effort to increase opportunities for employment creation and to eliminate child labour. We continue to support drawing on the ILO surplus to finance this important programme.

Like others, Canada has welcomed the road map and called on all parties to take steps towards its implementation. In this regard, we welcome recent, positive indications and actions from all sides. Canada

urges all parties to take advantage of the current momentum and pursue the path to peace. We also encourage the ILO to adjust its programmes, as appropriate, in the context of new developments.

Original Arabic: Mr. DAHLAN (Employers' delegate, Saudi Arabia) — On the basis of the fundamental principles and rights of the International Labour Organization, and in conformity with the Constitution of the Organization and international labour law, I feel, unfortunately, that certain rights are being violated or disregarded and certain international labour standards are not being applied. Furthermore, the economy is not growing and there are people who are capable of working and producing, but they are being prevented from doing so.

Lands have been burnt, crops have dried and up and produce has been left in storage because it cannot be taken to market. Above all, there is a lack of peace which is what we are seeking so that we can work, in accordance with international resolutions and on the basis of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, 1998.

These are the main features of the Report of the Director-General, *The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories*. We are all trying to achieve a just peace for the Palestinian and for the Israelis and to promote justice and equality for these two peoples, and we would like to ensure peace in one of the holiest parts of the world.

The employers in the Arab world is looking forward to being able to work and cooperate with the International Labour Organization in order to make the fundamental principles a reality and to ensure the rights of employers and workers in the occupied Arab territories. We reject and condemn the terrorist acts, even if they are a reaction to unjustified action. We would like to help those who are looking for peace to achieve it.

Let us use all of our resources to achieve peace and to build a strong economy. Let us use our full potential, in order to create two states, a Palestinian one and an Israeli one, which will complement each other. Let us work with the international organizations in order to attain the goals that we have set.

Let us also recall and commend the honesty of the Report of the Director-General, *The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories*. Let us also call on the Director-General to double efforts and to devote funds, for technical cooperation in this region. Let us support the Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection in order to help Palestinian workers. This is a good occasion to call on donor countries to increase their support for this Fund, which has no parallel in other organizations. Let us work in order to alleviate the suffering of a people that is unable to enjoy the basic right to work and particularly to decent work.

Original Arabic: Mr. HIJJAWI (Employers' representative, Palestine) — This special sitting is being held at a time in which the Palestinian people is experiencing extremely difficult conditions, which call for solidarity on the part of the international community in order to help the Palestinians to overcome their plight and rebuild the infrastructure destroyed by the Israeli military machine, which has destroyed people, property and houses in order to crush the

Palestinian economy which had started to grow under the Palestinian authority.

Many Palestinian and other investors had contributed to building a national economy, together with the employers who have been living on our ancestral land throughout the years of occupation. This led to economic growth which reached 6.5 per cent in 1995, as well as providing employment opportunities and reducing unemployment in the year 2000. In that year more growth was registered in all areas of life in Palestine, particularly in the economy. Many infrastructure projects were completed, such as power stations, extraction of natural gas, the airport and to post facilities, sewers and other projects.

In addition international cooperation was implemented at the regional level. This economic growth was accompanied by social development, but all this has been destroyed since September 2001 by the Israeli military forces and their aggression against the Palestinian people.

The impact of this aggression has been unprecedented: destruction of land, confiscation of large areas in order to build settlements, a drop in sales of 47 per cent with ensuing bankruptcy and reduction of cash flows in all productive enterprises. As a result, there has been a rise in the cost of production and this has prevented enterprises from honouring their commitments, reducing production capacity to 50 per cent compared to 86 per cent before September 2000.

Competitiveness also declined because of the rising cost of transport and communication as a result of closures of cities and villages. The cost of raw materials rose by 26 per cent, which made it impossible to import directly and forced Palestinian producers to resort to Israeli intermediaries in order to meet their production requirements.

In addition Israeli checkpoints, prevented imported goods from reaching the occupied territories and this led to an increase in the cost of these goods of 46 per cent. Unemployment reached its highest level ever: 60 per cent of the workforce lost their jobs as a result of workers being prevented from going to their workplaces either in Israel or in the territories because of closures and military checkpoints.

Per capita income declined with a higher incidence of poverty (people living on less than \$2 a day), and this led to a reduction in the volume of imports and exports and as a result, a drop in GDP, accompanied by a decline in industry, tourism, agriculture and construction. Assessing the damage caused by Israeli aggression in Palestinian areas is very difficult, since the destruction perpetrated by Israel does not cease so long as the occupation continues.

We ask all States of the world to make every effort to end the Israeli aggression against Palestinian people, and help the Palestinians to rebuild their own country and live in peace and free from occupation. We hope that all the efforts that are made will lead also to support for the Palestinian private sector, by improving working conditions and social protection for workers, and by creating jobs. An investment fund should be set up to help the sector, and to support enterprises. This could supply working capital in support of those firms, so that they could adjust to the new conditions. This could take the form of subsidies or loans on favourable terms.

In conclusion, I would like to express my thanks to donor countries and donor organizations which continue to offer support to our people so that we could

reconstruct our economic and social enterprises and work peacefully, free from occupation and Israeli settlement, in an independent Palestinian State with its capital in Jerusalem.

Mr. EDSTRÖM (*Workers' delegate, Sweden*) — Let me first say that we deeply deplore the recent acts of violence from both sides which constitute obstacles to true and effective peace negotiations and where innocent people are being killed.

This year's Report from the Director-General on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories can only be described as a Report showing a situation that has worsened since last year. And the Director-General makes the same conclusion as last year: the situation is untenable and must not be allowed to continue.

The ILO's technical cooperation with the Palestinian tripartite constituents is under way, in the form of programmes with the Federation of Palestinian Chambers of Commerce, with the Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions and the Ministry of Labour of the Palestinian Authority. And the technical setting of the Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection has now been completed. But the funding is missing. The recently held meeting in Jerusalem with the donor society has had a very modest result so far.

The Swedish workers already last December, asked our Government to contribute to the Fund and the decision is still awaited. From our contacts and cooperation with our brothers and sisters in the PGFTU we know of their positive evaluation of the idea of the Fund, but they are eagerly waiting for it not only to come in place but also to get the necessary economic means.

The Director-General highlights four major orientations to the ones already expressed in last year's Report. None of them are new, merely a slightly different way of expressing the same ones. The Swedish workers support the goals of the ILO work in Palestine. We believe that the promotion of human security, rights of work, incomes, access to employment and social protection are essential tasks for the ILO programme.

In today's Palestine the workers are denied jobs, security, income and social protection. We cannot and must not accept the rise in absolute poverty for the Palestinian workers in the last year. We have also seen a dramatic economic deterioration in Israel with very negative effects on the Israeli workers.

In our contacts with Histadrut, we know their need for assistance and support to fight the negative effects of the declining economy on the workers' situation.

The need for capacity building of the social partners in Palestine is crucial, both to promote social dialogue as well as to give professional service to their members. They must reach a status and capacity as labour market institutions also capable to participate in and contribute to economic recovery, social development and working conditions.

The Swedish labour movement is heavily engaged in contributing our part to promote this to happen. We have very recently started a capacity-building project with the PGFTU. We hope this will be of help for them to participate in tripartite policy dialogue and for democratic representation of the Palestinian workers. We welcome the PGFTU affiliation to the ICFTU last December and hope this will enhance

the capacity of the PGFTU to improve its structures and administration as well as their capacity to increase and serve their membership.

We believe that in spite of the present situation of occupation and total lack of employment and rights of the Palestinian workers, the emphasis must be put on the role and capacity of the social partners in a future Palestinian State. This is why the ILO fund is needed and what the programmes coming out as a result of donor funding must specialize in. None of the other 30 ongoing multilateral programmes for this region are focusing on the strengthening of tripartism or have the capacity to do so. That is the work of the ILO.

Original Spanish: Ms. LAU VALDES (*Government delegate, Cuba*) — The situation of the workers in the occupied Arab territories has been decried on many occasions within this Organization, and it is truly unsustainable. This is why this special sitting is a timely and important venue for international debate until such time as this problem is solved. It is unacceptable that the workers of the Arab and Palestinian occupied territories illegally occupied by Israel should still be the victims of the grave situation that has been imposed upon them, and which in practice deprives them of the right to live because of attacks, insecurity, poverty and lack of assistance, among other things.

We therefore support all efforts, from whatever quarter, provided they include and stipulate recognition of the Palestinian State and condemn Israeli aggression against this people.

The closure of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank by Israel has meant that tens of thousands of Arab and Palestinian workers are denied jobs, social protection, any form of income, and their very livelihood, which obviously inevitably increases poverty and suffering, as there can be no question of other labour rights, which are non-existent or simply not feasible in these circumstances.

This situation has paralysed the Palestinian economy and, increased unemployment, the incidence of poverty and the lack of social protection and constitutes an ongoing violation of the fundamental principles and rights at work that the ILO promotes, as well as other rights.

Freedom of movement within Palestine, of health workers and paramedics has been hampered and curtailed, which not only seriously affects, work and labour rights, but, prevents essential medical services from being provided to save lives.

The ILO must continue to pay attention to this sensitive and distressing problem, and support the only possible solution for the workers of the Arab and Palestinian territories.

This delegation demands this solution, namely the cessation of the occupation of the Arab and Palestine territories by Israel, and recognition of the Palestinian State. These people should enjoy the legitimate and inalienable right to self-determination. Until such time as all the occupied Arab territories are returned, including the Syrian Golan, there can be no just peace for these peoples, nor will their workers be able to exercise their rights.

(Mr. Wojcik takes the Chair.)

Mr. HEFDAHTAN (*Government delegate, Islamic Republic of Iran*) — In the name of God, the Merciful,

the Compassionate! The Director-General's Report regarding workers in the occupied territories, which rests on article 29 of the ILO Constitution, once again puts global wisdom to the test. This Report clearly testifies to the violation, of the basic and vital rights of the oppressed Palestinian people and the non-compliance of the Israeli racist regime with United Nations resolutions, the ILO Constitution and its core Conventions. The International Labour Organization has a brilliant record in the area of combating injustice and has made many efforts to champion global humanitarian causes, for example by combating apartheid. In recent years the ILO has been exploring and promoting new mechanisms to improve accountability and monitor compliance with obligations and has been placing greater emphasis on the realization of core Conventions.

In the current situation, Palestinian workers are facing tremendous challenges. Not only to their historical rights, but also the very right to the existence of a nation with centuries of history has been flagrantly violated. We should be more than alarmed to read the passage in the Director-General's Report where he asserts that "there has been a further marked deterioration in the situation in the occupied Arab territories. Human security, rights at work, incomes, access to employment and social protection are under constant threat". We appreciate the preparation of such a report by the Director-General and the secretariat in view of the military and political atmosphere in the Middle East region.

Palestine is a symbol of modern, militaristic hegemony over, and the oppression of, a nation. Nowadays, all workers in the occupied territories, be they Muslims, Christians or Jews, have all equally suffered the effects of oppression. We have gathered in this august Organization to try, through collective efforts and common sense, to take steps to resolve this crisis and thus be rationally accountable to the just claims of Palestinian workers and the Palestinian nation. We would like to emphasize the need for all member States to support the Director-General and his policies in this connection. It is therefore imperative that we do not forget the Palestinian people and that we pay due attention to their troubles.

Mr. AHMED (*Workers' delegate, Pakistan*) — On behalf of the Workers' delegation of Pakistan, I take the opportunity to convey our appreciation for the decision of the Governing Body to place this item on the agenda, and to commend the Report of the Director-General, which highlights the human, social and economic suffering of the people living in the occupied Arab territories.

On the first page, the Director-General acknowledges that in the occupied Arab territories in general, and the West Bank and Gaza in particular, the economic and social protection of the workers and their families has worsened. The Report goes on to refer to the "unprecedented" drop in per capita income. As a result of the cumulative drop, per capita income in 2002 was 47.7 per cent of that in 1999.

Paragraph 56 of the Report highlights the World Bank estimate of the incidence of poverty in the occupied Arab territories, based on a poverty threshold of US\$2.15 per day per person. The data indicate that the proportion of the population living below the poverty line trebled between 1999-2002.

Paragraph 25 acknowledges that the continuous military incursions into the Gaza Strip and the West Bank have led to repeated demonstrations against the excessive use of force and extra-judicial killings, which have been deplored by the United Nations Secretary-General.

Social security funds have not been returned to the Palestinian authority. Low wages and poor working conditions have been highlighted. All these matters require to be rectified, and this can only be done if there is a state of peace, independence and freedom of the people of Palestine and if they can live in peace and dignity.

In this respect, we appreciate the technical cooperation being offered by the ILO, and will continue to seek greater resources for employment, poverty alleviation, skill development, youth and gender programmes, child labour and other issues, in order to improve the economic and social conditions of the people of the occupied Arab territories.

We believe that an independent Palestinian State and the return of all occupied Arab territories is clearly a prerequisite for peace in the region and for the prosperity of its people. We therefore fully endorse the calls for justice, peace and freedom for the people of Palestine, and urge the international community to bring its full weight to bear on the situation so that peace, the dignity and freedom of the people of Palestine, can be established in accordance with United Nations resolutions. We believe, as this great Organization acclaims in the Declaration of Philadelphia, that all human beings, irrespective of race, colour or creed, have rights for their well-being and their physical, spiritual and mental development in the spirit of freedom, dignity and economic security. We therefore continue to support, not only the cause of peace and freedom for the Palestinian people, but also the technical cooperation assistance intended to improve their economic well-being and alleviate their suffering.

Mr. KURTTEKIN (*Government delegate, Turkey*) — First, let me add my voice to those who have commended the Director-General, Mr. Somavia, for the comprehensive, factual and thought-provoking Appendix to his Report — *The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories*.

The Report paints a gloomy picture of the disastrous conflict in which the two parties have been caught up. It also depicts once again the absolute need to put an end to the vicious circle of violence and counter-violence. It is a clear reminder to us all, but first and foremost, to the parties to the conflict, that the situation we have been witnessing for the last two-and-a-half years is a no-win situation, and that the move forward towards a viable peace will transform these unacceptable conditions into a win-win situation.

In this respect, Turkey welcomed the recent initiative launched by the United States President, Mr. Bush, to put an end to the Israeli-Palestinian clashes and to introduce peace, stability and welfare in the Middle East. We believe that the positive messages which came out from Sharm-el-Sheikh and the Aqaba Summit are strong indicators that the problems in the region could be resolved through dialogue and that peace is not unobtainable for the peoples of the region who have suffered for so long in an environment of clashes and instability.

The road map submitted by the Quartet and agreed to by the parties, based on the vision of full Palestinian statehood, and a lasting peace and state of normality in which all States in the region will reside side by side, within secure and recognized boundaries, no doubt constitutes an opportunity that should not be missed.

We hope — and we appeal to the parties — to make use of this chance. We stand ready to support all efforts in that direction and to work together with all the parties concerned.

Another feature of the Report of the Director-General is that it reflects the importance and value of the interest and efforts of the ILO in defusing the situation. The cooperation of all parties, both Arab and Israeli, with the mission sent by the Director-General, demonstrates the confidence that the ILO enjoys in its efforts. In this context, we hope that the conclusions of the ILO mission and its recommendations will contribute to the improvement of the overall political, economic and social conditions in the region. These will help to improve the living conditions of the Palestinians and to support the Palestinian reform process.

We therefore support the ILO technical cooperation programme for the occupied Arab territories comprising projects for capacity building of employers' and workers' organizations and the Ministry of Labour, as well as the Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection, and the promotion of social dialogue.

In conformity with the road map, measures are being taken to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Palestine and the occupied territories and to improve the living conditions of Palestinians, aimed at the resumption of normal economic activity. The market economy will require effective cooperation of the actors of the international community. In this context, the ILO has a privileged role to play in helping to achieve the goals fixed by the road map.

Social security in Palestine will constitute one of the major challenges. On the other hand, one of the pillars of the new statehood will be the strengthening of the institutions for social dialogue between the social partners. The future success of the process will also depend on the extension of financial and technical aid. The priority before us now is to change the nature of the cooperation and to provide the necessary long-term development assistance. The establishment of the Fund in this context is of vital importance. We believe that all efforts should be made to activate the Fund. Turkey, on its part, will explore ways and means to extend technical assistance in other programmes concerning social or labour life in Palestine.

Mr. ZELLHOEFER (*Workers' delegate, United States*) — Once again I address this special sitting in the hope that finally it will be the last one on this subject.

The American labour movement, the AFL-CIO, has consistently, over the years and today, expressed its concern that these special sittings are not the place to debate issues that are, in reality, not in the competence and mandate of this specialized, tripartite United Nations organization.

These special sittings really only undermine the credibility and effectiveness of the ILO. Unfortunately, there are some who would wish the ILO weak-

ened or worse, and we know that there are some who intend the road map to peace to lead nowhere, or worse.

While drawing borders and determining wider essential security issues are beyond the mandate of this Organization, the ILO and its constituents are, however, in the unique position to contribute to practical efforts in social and economic fields such as those outlined in the Director-General's Report.

We commend the Report as the ILO's practical contribution towards the wider road map that is within the ILO's mandate, and that it also challenges the donor organizations to come forward and match their commitments with tangible contributions.

The Report correctly concludes that the Israeli and Palestinian economies are very much dependent on each other. The ILO needs to intensify its efforts to strengthen its technical cooperation advocating the protection of workers and the promotion of decent work.

Importantly, there must be other programmes to build the capacity of the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions, indeed the capacities of the social partners and the Ministry of Labour in order, to ensure that the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work will be a guiding tool in helping to create decent and sustainable jobs.

The programmes for labour, employment and social protection, including the establishment of a Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection, need the visible and tangible support of donor member countries and, of course, especially that of the UNDP and the World Bank.

To support the road map as best we can requires resources and, importantly, courage, vision and political will.

The work of the ILO in promoting protection and dignity of workers everywhere is now more important than ever. In this context, and especially in the wider surrounding region of the area being addressed in this sitting, it is a deeply unfortunate but very real fact that there is a gaping absence of fundamental human and labour rights.

The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, just the day before yesterday, released its annual survey of violations of trade union rights. That report noted that trade unions are not tolerated in many countries, are banned outright in three states, and in others only a single union is permitted but it is kept under the strict control of the ruling party.

In nearly every country, laws impose extensive constraints on trade union rights and activities. The resulting appalling poverty and lack of democracy are breeding grounds for extremism and escalating violence.

Helping the development of democracy through promoting fundamental human labour rights is the real underlying challenge for the ILO in the wider surrounding region.

Mr. WISNUMURTI (*Government delegate, Indonesia*) — It is with great pleasure that my delegation welcomes the Report of the Director-General on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories.

It is the second consecutive report resulting from in-depth missions and with implementable recommendations, it confirms that the ILO can play a very constructive role in the territories.

Further, due to the urgency of the matter, this evidence of ILO ability means that the Organization should continue to strengthen its role and keep exploring ways in which it can make a difference in resolving a conflict situation while remaining true to its mandate.

Hence, it is only fitting for my delegation to join previous speakers in expressing our appreciation to the Director-General and commending him for this inspiring Report.

It is especially significant since all the efforts and work undertaken in the course of compiling the Report were conducted under difficult circumstances.

I would also like to support and associate myself with the statements of the delegations of Malaysia, speaking on behalf of the non-aligned movement, and of Senegal, speaking on behalf of the OIC.

In its preface, the Report refers to the hope of many that there will be a light at the end of the tunnel. At the time of the previous special sitting on the situation of workers and the occupied territories two years ago, the Middle East peace process had broken down some months before and the occupied Arab territories were experiencing an escalation of violence.

In fact, the Report states that the present situation is as untenable as last year's. It even reports a deterioration in the situation. While the road map launched at the Aqaba summit last week has raised hope for peace, the recent resumption of violence has set back these hopes.

Those opposing a peaceful solution to the problem are as strong as ever and, judging from the recent events, the practice of using the might of a standing army to bear on civilian targets has not been completely discarded.

Recent developments, especially the missile attack by the Israeli forces, have cast a doubt on the commitment of Israel to implement the road map. Be that as it may, the important thing here is that, regardless of how developments turn out in the near future, the ILO's increasing role will be crucial.

In our intervention during the previous special sitting two years ago, my delegation emphasized the importance of implementing the ILO plan of action and of maintaining close links through technical cooperation projects and to promote job creation and safety at work. The technical cooperation for social dialogue, capacity building of employers' and workers' organizations and the establishment of the Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection deserve our support and special mention.

Hence, it is heartening to learn that the programme has largely been implemented. This asserts to the need for, and feasibility of, those projects as well as to the commitment of all relevant sides to these efforts.

More than that, I believe that we should support the further role of the ILO in assisting the Palestinian Authority and in technical cooperation on labour matters, as well as on the creation of a system of social protection.

In this connection, I would like to encourage commitment on the part of donor countries and institutions, including the involvement of regional donors and development funds in this process.

In its conclusions, the Report notes that the ILO has been asked to contribute in the framework of the road map. This recognition certainly is a very welcome development. Indeed, the ILO has a legitimate role to play in a number of fields in the occupied terri-

tories, experience of which can be significant for other efforts at addressing problems in other conflict situations.

In line with its mandate, the ILO has a role in aspects of human security, rights at work, access to employment and social protection. Success in those aspects in the occupied territories would help alleviate the suffering and generally enhance the situation of the many hundreds of thousands of workers in the occupied territories. Certainly, an end to the vicious circle of violence and a real betterment of the living and working conditions in the territories cannot be achieved without a lasting political solution.

Hence, it is also important for all of us, especially those with real influence on the course of the road map process to encourage and bring continued pressure to bear on the parties involved. In the meantime, wholehearted and steady support towards the ILO is needed to enable it to fulfil its important role, not only in creating a situation more conducive to dialogue and peaceful processes, but also to enhance its capability to assist in the establishment of the State of Palestine.

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

The Report resulting from the ILO mission provides objectives and impartial information. There is, however, a danger that the importance of the Report will be undermined if the Government of Israel does not consider the proposals and recommendations. This tendency has been seen in the past and might explain the terrorism and continuous violation of international law taking place in the occupied Arab territories.

As shown in the Report, the policy of closure and collective punishment, the destruction of homes and fields and the colonisation of Palestinian territories have all led to a significant economic and social decline, creating unemployment and serious poverty. Workers are physically prevented from getting to and from their jobs. They are prevented from collecting their wages, and are thus unable to feed their families properly. This is underlined by the World Bank's estimation of poverty in the occupied territories. The data from the World Bank indicate that the share of the population living below the poverty line tripled between 1999 and 2002. Another United Nations report referred to in the Report estimates the population below the poverty line in 2002 at 70 per cent in Gaza and 55 per cent in the West Bank.

In such a situation, it is almost impossible for the trade unions to function properly. They are not able to collect dues, and union leaders are prevented by the Israeli police from visiting the different workplaces. The PGFTU is, however, doing a remarkable job in feeding and assisting workers and their families.

Another factor making the situation even more extreme is the building of the so-called separation wall in the West Bank. LO-Norway considers this an unacceptable action. The wall will separate farmers and villagers from their land, water resources and markets, and serve to confiscate land used and needed for farming. The land confiscated so far is estimated at 1,150 hectares, with as many as 83,000 fruit and olive trees uprooted.

LO-Norway has adopted clear resolutions and practical measures showing our full support to the Palestinian people and workers, including their right to establish their own independent Palestinian State in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and to have the refugee problem solved, according to the United Nations General Assembly Resolution No. 194.

We demand respect for human and trade union rights, as established in international Conventions of the United Nations and the ILO. This includes the right of the Palestinian workers to travel to and from their places of work in Israel and the occupied territories and to practise their normal trade union activities. This also puts an obligation on the Histadrut to secure and defend the rights of the Palestinian workers. The PGFTU and the Histadrut have an important role to play in this extreme situation and should voice joint concern for the situation of the workers of the occupied territories.

I will conclude by saying that in spite of the many agreements signed between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, in particular the Oslo Agreement, the prospects for peace are not good at present.

LO-Norway will, however, continue our efforts in supporting the peace process in the Middle East. We believe that trade unions have a crucial role to play in this process of trying to replace violence and terrorism with peace and dialogue.

We call upon the ILO and the international trade union movement to do its utmost to achieve this goal.

Mr. ZAINAL (*Workers' delegate, Malaysia*) — While we are gathered here discussing and deliberating on the situation in the occupied Arab territories hundreds of thousands of Palestinian civilians, including the old, handicapped, women, children are living in poverty, political uncertainty and social exclusion.

Many innocent civilians have been killed, gravely injured, lost a limb, permanently disabled, young children have lost a parent, many women have lost a husband, families have lost their sole breadwinners. Many workers have lost their jobs and those urgently needing employment cannot find any.

This is the kind of life that Palestinian workers and their families do not deserve. Do they not deserve a life of peace and security as members of a civil society and service, comfort, prosperity and progress for themselves and their loved ones? Why should the children of Palestine, the citizens of tomorrow, be compelled to accept lives of social and economic depression imposed on them today?

These are some of the important pointers which I hope this special sitting may wish to consider for future action.

Right from the day the Israeli forces occupied the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in September 2000, we have seen a marked escalation in the stress factors of Israeli-Palestinian relations. This does not in any way mean there has been any settlement whatsoever on the principle causes of Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which began in the year 1940.

The Israeli-Palestinian accord, which was signed by the Palestinian President, Yasser Arafat, and former Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, granting Palestine sovereign rights over the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the reconstruction of Palestine, has not been honoured by the Israeli leaders who succeeded Rabin after his regrettable death.

We are certain to see the Palestinians being forced to allow 60 years of peace in development slip away from their hands, through no fault of their own.

Two generations of Palestinians have grown up not even knowing what a peaceful life is all about, as they have not experienced it since they were born. The primary cause of the misery is a lack of understanding on the part of perpetrators of the violence. The expectations and aspirations of the Palestinian people could have been achieved.

There has been a dramatic rise in child labour in the occupied Arab territories as these children have to work to support their families. It is sad to note that all this is happening in the midst of the ILO having adopted Convention No. 182 in 1999. To eliminate the worst form of child labour, it is actively promoting this cause through ILO/IPEC worldwide.

There has been a proposed peace plan, or road map to peace in the occupied territories.

I do not know whether this road map is going to heaven or going to hell, because I have seen many times many road maps lead nowhere and nothing is coming up concretely, nothing has been settled so far.

In any case, we hope that the recent three-way summit will bring about peace in Palestine and put an end to the sporadic violence that has claimed the lives and limbs of hundreds and thousands of innocent civilians. We feel the road map or any other peace plan will only be able to achieve its intended objective if there is sincerity on the part of all parties concerned to bring peace and stability to the region by respecting the sovereign rights of the Palestinian people.

Human and workers' rights should take priority over narrow, sectarian interests, to achieve sustainable development through social stability.

It is indeed a laudable initiative to bring the issue of occupied Arab territories to active public focus, particularly during the Conference; the setting up of the Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection is very timely.

Apart from ILO assistance, we would also like to see wealthy countries and people, particularly Middle East states and genuinely concerned individuals, donating generously to the social, financial, and mental well-being of the Palestinian people, particularly children, demonstrating their duty of care for the less fortunate.

The workers should be able to enjoy sustainable development. They should be able to exercise the fundamental right of association, and collective bargaining in stability and security.

The prevailing rate of joblessness in Palestine is a cause of great concern to all of us. Job creation is an important requirement that national Government has to address as a matter of priority if their desire is to create peace and harmony.

People of occupied Arab territories have suffered untold misery for far too long. The world recently witnessed dire social and economic concerns of armed aggression in Iraq. It is the right of the people of Palestine and Israel to work and live in peace, security, and harmony on their own.

Many people have said that this will be the last special sitting. I have been sitting in this hall, I have been a workers' delegate for many years and I have not been speaking at this special sitting but this time I stand firm, I say, because I can no longer stand what is happening in Palestine. Many people are killed. I will continue to support special sittings always until the

Palestinian state has been recognized by the Israeli Government.

Original Arabic: Mr. AZZOUZ (Workers' delegate, Syrian Arab Republic) — On behalf of the Syrian Government and people I would like to very warmly greet you. I would also like to thank the Director-General of the ILO and the mission of inquiry which has conducted its work in the occupied Arab territories.

Since 1967 Israel has occupied the Syrian Golan Heights, part of my country. Despite Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, Israel decided to annex the Golan Heights in 1981. This was a unilateral decision. They resorted to force, in total contravention of international law.

Those who flout international law should not speak here within this Organization. Those who have taken the floor here today are those who are rejecting the rule of international law.

We reject the annexation of the Golan, whose inhabitants have found themselves expelled from their land and homes because they did not want to take Israeli nationality. In the Golan, settlements have taken a heavy toll in terms of loss of innocent lives. Workers are denied the right to work. Skilled workers have been unable to find jobs, denied this very basic right, quite apart from the security measures which deprive us of other fundamental rights. This is the policy of fait accompli by means of military force, by means of an imbalance in the region in favour of Israel. Israel has constantly flouted international law, international resolutions and agreements. Its policy involves the demolition of houses and collective punishments. Israel tears down trees and burns the land. These practices will not contribute to the establishment of peace in the region.

The international community has to act, and this is what it has done since the Rogers Initiative in 1988, and of course the Madrid Conference in 1990. At the Beirut Summit in 2002, the Arabs presented an initiative, not counting of course the road map, which has been approved by the Arabs.

After the Aqaba conference, Mr. Al-Rantissi was the victim of a murder attempt when Israel wanted to expel him from southern Lebanon, although he was an innocent citizen who was and is struggling to defend this legitimate cause. We have heard people talk about the resistance and struggles of combatants who struggle all over the world to free themselves from occupation. We have seen how combatants who demand their rights and freedom and fight to get their land back succeed in expelling the occupier by various means, by attacking the occupier. So why are these means, which are based on resistance, regarded as heroic actions when used by some, but regarded as terrorism when we use them?

The occupation of the Arab lands could well plunge our region into a hellish spiral of violence. This will have a negative impact on plans for peace and on our economic prosperity.

As regards the problem of unemployment, the International Labour Organization is one of the forums that are best placed to deal with this subject. In view of the unemployment problem in our region, we must condemn all these practices. The land must be handed back to its owners.

Palestinian Arab citizens must enjoy their ownership rights and their right to self-determination. The

Arabs have proved that they do respect the agreements to which they are party and that they will fight only until their lands have been liberated.

The Syrian Arab Republic and the Kingdom of Jordan have proved this: When the Israeli forces withdrew from these two countries, the war between Israel and those two countries was interrupted, despite the fact that Israel has constantly flouted these agreements, unlike the Arabs. In southern Lebanon, the national Lebanese resistance was able to expel the occupying military forces and it was then possible to reconstruct Lebanon.

We call on all our friends in Europe, Africa, the United States and in Asia, we urge all trade unions and all workers, to chant the slogan of peace.

We want everyone to combine all their forces to liberate the occupied Arab territories in Palestine, in Iraq, in southern Lebanon and the Golan.

Peace will not come as long as the occupation continues.

Mr. ZHARIKOV (*representative, World Federation of Trade Unions*) — I take opportunity to congratulate the Conference for deciding to hold this sitting, to thank the ILO Director-General, Mr. Juan Somavia, for sending a high-level mission and to thank members of the mission for undertaking efforts to investigate the situation and to present this remarkable Report.

Even through this Report was confined to describing mainly the situation of Palestinian workers and was prepared in a balanced manner, interviewing the occupied Palestinian side as well as the occupying authorities, and even though it was written with a visible attempt to exercise soft diplomatic language, it still represents the scenario of a modern-day horror film, a nightmare that is difficult to believe in its description of present reality — reality in which one of today's nations, the Palestinian nation, lives.

Almost 2,000 Palestinians have been killed in less than two and a half years, including 275 children and youths. In April this year alone, more than 5,000 Palestinians were detained or imprisoned, according to the Report. Hundreds of houses and enterprises were demolished, leaving people homeless and without work. The share of the population living below the poverty line, tripled between 1999 and 2002. Part of the Palestinian population is “virtually encircled by a fence and an eight-metre high-concrete wall ... including a concrete wall, guard towers, electric fencing and large ditches, with buffer zones and patrol zones of various depths”, and living in conditions equal to reservations for indigenous people, Bantustan or concentration camps. We agree with the conclusions in the Report, that “the current disastrous, economic and social situation in the territories will not be improved by a new labour law, no matter how progressive it may be”, because this is a situation of genocide exercised over the Palestinian nation as a whole.

We have to encourage the honourable work of the ILO within its competence. And we have to say from this rostrum, clearly and loudly, that to stop this genocide a comprehensive solution is necessary. The parameters of this solution have been well known for decades. They have been defined in the respective United Nations Security Council resolutions calling for the end to the illegal occupation by Israel of Arab lands in Palestine, Syria and the Golan, and parts of Lebanon, and to establish a sovereign Palestinian

State with Jerusalem as its capital, to provide all Palestinians with a genuine home.

We welcome any initiative in this direction that might bring a genuine solution but not a solution which will lead to increased violence. Peace will not be lasting if it is not just.

In thanking the mission for this Report that it has submitted, we would like to point out that during this visit to the occupied Arab territories it did not contact the General Union of Palestinian Workers, affiliated to the World Federation of Trade Unions and the International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions (ICATU), which has waged a long and comprehensive historic struggle for the rights of Palestinian workers. We think that this is a serious mistake and we hope that this omission will be corrected in future ILO activities concerning the Palestinian situation.

In terms of further ILO action, we strongly support the suggestion to establish a permanent body to follow the situation of the occupied territories of Palestine and other Arab lands. This situation, which is becoming daily more intolerable, is changing day by day and it is not enough that one mission of a few days' duration is sent to monitor and to describe this situation once a year.

Original French: Mr. DIOP (*representative, Organization of African Trade Union Unity*) — The Organization of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU) is honoured to participate in this Special Session of the 91st International Labour Conference dedicated to the troubling situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories. On behalf of the African Trade Unions affiliated to the OATUU, I would like to thank the Governing Body for organizing this special session.

The permanent criminal blockade imposed on the occupied territories has led to the unemployment of the great majority of workers, who are prevented by Israeli forces from making their way to the workplace everyday.

My organization is deeply alarmed by the sad social, cultural and economic dimensions of this policy of occupation, and condemns the pursuit by Israel of its policy of expansion and colonization, in flagrant violation of the pertinent United Nations resolutions, notably Security Council resolution 1402, which calls for withdrawal of Israel from Palestinian cities.

The OATUU urges the ILO, which has never ceased to represent the universal conscience, and which has always made decent work its central concern, to play a more effective role in promoting peace through constant efforts in its various areas of expertise, so as to impress upon Israel the need to respect international labour standards and end violations of human rights, including trade union rights.

Has the ILO not demonstrated, even relatively by recent past, that it can indeed play this role, by responding in the appropriate way when faced with apartheid in South Africa and Namibia? The present situation in Palestine and in the other occupied Arab territories is a challenge to the international community, which has the right as never before to take decisive and direct action to put a definitive end to coercion, to genocide, and to the suffering which results from Israeli aggression against unarmed men, women, the elderly and children, who, nevertheless, have never wavered in their faith that theirs is a just cause.

The OATUU, my organization, remains convinced that it is time to provide genuine and effective prospects for the future to the Palestinian people. We call for the establishment of a Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as its capital, in the West Bank and in Gaza, within the 4 June 1967 borders. There is no doubt that this State would live in peace and in good neighbourly relations with the people of Israel. The only condition which can bring peace to the Middle East is the withdrawal of Israel from Lebanon, Syria and Palestine. So the OATUU appeals urgently to the international community, to all women, to all men in the world who believe in peace and justice, to demand that the Sharon administration put an end to genocide and the confiscation of Arab lands.

We urge the ILO to give greater attention to the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories. Furthermore, we hope that the ILO will work further to strengthen the capacity of these workers to improve their living conditions, through training and further training programmes, and through the creation of decent jobs. This is how the ILO can effectively participate in strengthening the peace process and development of the Middle East.

The rightful struggle of Palestinians for the grace of God will be crowned with success. Millions of African workers behind me in the OATUU wish to express their solidarity with the Palestinian people.

I would like to state in conclusion that my Organization urges the International Labour Conference to set up an ad hoc committee similar to the Committee on Apartheid so that we can closely examine all violations of human rights and trade union rights in the Palestinian Arab territories.

Original Arabic: Mr. ABU AL-RAGHEB (Employers' adviser and substitute delegate, Jordan) — In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate!

Given that this Organization has a tripartite structure, and that it sets out to create decent working conditions for the workers of the world, we must draw attention to the disastrous situation in the occupied Arab territories of Palestine, the Golan and the Shebaa Farms in Lebanon, where people have not received justice, are deprived of their rights and are under the domination of the Israeli occupiers who flout United Nations conventions and resolutions and ILO decisions.

The ILO should bring every conceivable kind of pressure to bear on the Israeli authorities to make them respect international law. People in the occupied Arab territories are living under the poverty line. We have heard about this abject poverty; we have been talking about it for days. Alleviating its disastrous effects is the responsibility of this Organization. The situation has arisen as a result of excessively repressive measures by the Israeli authorities, which impose restrictions on the free circulation of persons and goods, destroy factories, burn agricultural land, impose restrictions on the freedoms of peoples and build settlements. They deprive citizens of their property rights. They do not allow them to build houses and all of this fuels unemployment, with the result that breadwinners cannot feed and support their families, so they experience despair and frustration and their families are dejected. What will become of these breadwinners?

Yesterday, I was very sad to learn what happened in the Israeli bus. But two days ago the Israelis were

shelling the Palestinians and so they were also engaging in violence. I therefore call on the ILO to find solutions and to make Israel submit to international law and international conventions. We must establish a Palestinian State with Al Quds as its capital.

Original Arabic: Mr. IBRAHIM ABDO (Employers' delegate, Egypt) — In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate! The Union of Industries of Egypt thanks the ILO for having sent the mission inquiry to the occupied Arab territories and we deplore that the special report was published so late. We would have liked to receive it well before the Conference to have enough time to read its conclusions properly and to learn the facts within it.

As regards the substance and the details given in the report, we see that Israeli authorities continue to perpetrate their practices of repression, expanding their settlements and contravening flagrantly the conventions and resolutions of the United Nations and the 1999 Convention on the protection of civilians in the time of war. This is also a non-respect of international law. These practices are building into a vicious circle without precedent

Moreover, Israel is not committed to a just and lasting peace. Israel does not wish to submit to international law and respect peace and security. In fact the Israeli authorities continue to build settlements in the Arab lands in order to make it Jewish land and to deprive the Palestinians of the right to self-determination and create their own State. All of this, of course, is patent proof of the occupation by Israel which refuses to withdraw and makes it impossible to pursue a peace process.

Egypt and the Arab countries at the Summit in Beirut in 2002 and the Sharm-el-Sheikh 2003 Summit continued moving towards a just and universal peace, based on the references proposed on the initiative of King Abdullah II of Jordan at the Beirut Summit.

There were two resolutions passed in previous years which must be respected by Israel as international law is included in these resolutions put forward by the international community. We thank the Director-General for his efforts and we wish cooperation to be strengthened between us, the Security Council, and all of the institutions which are parties to this operation.

We also wish to bring an end to Jewish immigration. We must place pressure on the Israeli authorities to ensure that the Palestinian people regains its rights. Our federation calls for a strengthening of the Palestinian Fund for Labour and Protection which allows reconversion, retraining of workers and strengthening of institutions, as well as providing assistance to women and children, and it helps unemployed people to find work.

Finally, our Federation would like to see the establishment of a special Commission under the ILO to study on an annual basis this question of the situation of workers and all citizens in Palestine and the other occupied Arab territories. This is a subject of equal importance to all others on the agenda, and this commission must be set up since the mission has shown that the subject is a major one and it spoke of it last year when it discussed racial discrimination.

Ms. LUCERO (representative, Brotherhood of Asian Trade Unionists) — The World Confederation of Labour and its regional body in Asia, the Brother-

hood of Asian Trade Unionists, wish to congratulate the Director-General on his extensive Report and detailed analysis on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories. Likewise we are thankful for this opportunity to give a brief commentary on this issue affecting Palestinian and Israeli workers and their families. We share the renewed popular optimism that the road map proposed by the Quartet as a recent attempt to pursue peace and development in the region will succeed, despite negative observations, sometimes misgivings, from some quarters. Let us give peace a chance and, eventually, development, justice and prosperity.

During the recent ICATU-WCL Trade Union Summit held in Damas, the final declaration calls on continued awareness of these tragic events in Palestine to contribute to the establishment of peace in the world, and to oppose the racist intentions giving rise to the war of civilizations and the conflict between religions, in order to put an end to the seats of tension in the world, particularly in the Near East, by forcing Israel to comply with United Nations resolutions on the Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories in Palestine, Lebanon and Syria. The Summit reiterates its urgent demand to dismantle the colonies, to stop acts of violence against the Palestinian people, and to respect Palestinian institutions and holy places. This will lead to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, whose capital Jerusalem must not be annexed by the State of Israel. The Summit affirms the necessity of eliminating all weapons of mass destruction in the region.

We reiterate that our Organization 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. We uphold this vision and support the struggle for the creation, development and defence of economic, social, political and cultural institutions which will ensure the full development of each and every person, directing its action towards national authorities, international groupings and the community of nations.

Let us join in offering support to the initiative of the ILO and helping, however modestly, to ease the situation of Palestinian workers and their families, and, as clearly stated by the Director-General, to "nurture hope and move ahead".

Original Arabic: Mr. AMAOUI (Workers' delegate, Morocco) — I would have liked to take the floor under better conditions, when justice prevailed throughout the world and especially justice for the Palestinian people, that heroic people that have paid a heavy price, that have had so many martyrs, so many detained, so many widows, so many orphans, and in the course of their struggle against Jewish occupation.

We see, however, that the situation in the occupied territories is very disappointing. The efforts that have been made to change the infernal spiral in which the region is trapped have all failed. The closures and the policy of collective punishment are measures that undermine and damage all the initiatives that hope to solve the problem and prevent the application of the United Nations resolutions.

We are very grateful to the Director-General of the ILO for his concerted efforts in the region and his attempts to reassign to the parties their roles when

workers find themselves in a difficult situation. These efforts are very worthy, and are nonetheless so for having had no positive effect because of the terrible state of the economy due to the closures that prevent the free movement of workers, increasing unemployment, which of course has resulted in an increase in poverty.

The indicators are all disastrous; we cannot in any way be optimistic, because the occupying authorities have a policy of arrogance and these practices will no doubt undermine all our efforts.

The peace agreement is far from being fair and just; it does not guarantee the workers and the citizens of Palestine their rights, their inalienable rights as provided for by the resolutions, the right to return, the right to self-determination, the right to build an independent Palestinian State with Jerusalem as a capital, the release of all those detained, and withdrawal to the line of 5 June 1967. Any peace agreement that does not guarantee these points would fail, and a just and durable peace agreement must be accompanied by the will of the United Nations, without which all agreements, all other attempts, risk fuelling a destructive despair.

We urge the Director-General of the ILO to continue along the route of technical cooperation under the special programme devoted to it, which will help us to diminish poverty and to help the people of Palestine.

We hope therefore that the ILO will continue its work in the most objective way possible, and with the integrity that we have come to expect of it.

We believe that we should establish a standing committee to address the problems of the occupied Arab territories.

Finally, we would like at the next session of the Conference to be able to say that we have been able to attain this objective, the dream of all those who want peace. We must therefore join together in our efforts, to establish peace and stability.

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

First of all I would like to express, on behalf of the General Union for Egyptian Labour Unions and on my own behalf, our thanks to the Governing Body of the ILO for holding this special sitting in order to study the labour situation in Palestine and in the other occupied Arab territories, be it in Lebanon or the Golan.

In fact, this decision does not surprise us, because the ILO is an organization whose mandate includes a noble, humanitarian mission and has always confronted practices that fly in the face of the values and principles of the rights of mankind.

In fact, not so long ago, the ILO had to confront apartheid in South Africa and we have seen the success it had in helping to end that appalling system.

It is, in fact, most natural that the ILO has joined with the international community and with all the parties hoping for peace in condemning the brutal practices carried out daily by the occupying forces against workers and the Palestinian people in particular, but also in the occupied Arab territories.

Indeed, the Israeli occupying forces have gone beyond all other forms of aggression used recently or in the past using all types of violence, oppression and methods which varied between sanctions, embargoes,

blockades, the separation of Arab villages and cities, and even policies towards families, destroying homes with families inside, uprooting trees, burning harvests and using planes and helicopters in barbaric attacks.

All of this against a people whose only crime is to refuse the occupier and to aspire to a free life like all the peoples of the world.

Unfortunately, the occupying forces have been able to take for themselves the mantle of the opposers of terrorism and distort our heroic deeds by labelling them terrorist acts.

We know that violence engenders violence. The occupation itself is a culmination of aggression and violence.

The report of the mission that the Director-General sent this year to Palestine and the other occupied Arab territories confirms the deterioration of the economic and social situation, including living standards. Unemployment is rising, and it has reached levels never before seen.

If I were to criticize the report's conclusions, that is that there are two peoples who are prisoners of a conflict that is leading directly to catastrophe, it would be that this way of describing the situation does not recognize the occupation, and that occupation is, in fact, at the root of all of the problems we face today.

If we do not end the occupation as soon as possible, this disastrous situation is going to continue. We will see an upsurge in the violence between the two parties, there will no longer be stability or security and, what is contradictory is that the appeal for an end to the violence is directed only to the Palestinian people and the fact that the occupying State is the real culprit is forgotten.

If we pursue very carefully all the hopes for the road map to peace, which is meant to lead to an independent Palestinian State in 2005, we ask all the same how these hopes are going to become a reality after the failures recently and in the past of the Oslo plan, the Mitchell Report and all the other peace plans that have ended up buried alive as a result of Israel's determination to continue its occupation of the territories in Palestine, Syria or Lebanon.

To conclude, I would like, from this podium, to appeal to the world, so that all forces, all peoples who believe in human rights and peace show their solidarity to compel the occupying State to move towards the road to peace and to accept international forces to protect the Palestinian people from barbarous Israeli practices, so that we can put a definitive end to the occupation.

I would like to appeal particularly to my friends in all the workers' organizations in all countries throughout the world to condemn the occupation, to participate in a campaign to boycott products from Israel, so that we can ease the suffering of the Palestinian people and workers.

I also hope that the ILO will be able to set up a Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection as soon as possible. When all is said and done, the conclusions of previous reports of the International Labour Conference are still relevant today.

In fact, it is difficult to guarantee civil rights and liberties which encompass fundamental rights at work, in the situation as it stands today.

Original Arabic: Mr. GHOSN (*Workers' delegate, Lebanon*) — Israel is flouting the fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 relative to the protection of Civil-

ian Persons in Time of War. The State of Israel is violating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Declaration of Philadelphia, an instrument which has been incorporated in the Constitution of the International Labour Organization. The Israeli State is making a mockery of the resolution concerning the policy of discrimination, racism and violation of trade union freedoms and rights practised by the Israeli authorities in Palestine and in the other occupied Arab territories which was adopted by the ILO back in 1974 and which denounces the racist practices of Israel and the practices of the occupying authorities against the workers of the occupied Arab territories, in South Lebanon and the Golan. This very Conference has denounced the policy of confiscating land and the policy of depriving citizens of the natural resources of their country.

As for the road map, the road map is a Zionist road map in every respect. Indeed, it is a road map which attempts to undermine all the efforts being made by those who wish to establish peace with this policy of transfer.

Since 1948, more than 50,000 dunums of land have been burnt and more than 40,000 houses have been demolished, but the Israeli State is not content with this. It has demolished shops, businesses and factories: more than 5,000 have been destroyed and more than 20,000 dunums of Palestinian land have been confiscated in order to be "annexed" to Israel. More than 60 per cent of the Palestinian working population is unemployed.

What is more, more than 50 per cent of Palestinian citizens are poor. The towns and cities are encircled, their citizens are trapped. Restrictions are imposed on workers' freedom of movement and towns are blockaded. The most basic labour rights are violated and all this makes a mockery of international conventions and resolutions.

The Apache helicopters are continuing to bombard Palestinian citizens and this is resulting in the loss of human lives, the lives of men, women and children. And all of this is happening under the eyes of the whole world and the eyes of an impassive international community. A whole nation is suffering under the yoke of the occupiers and this nation is denied the right to struggle, the right to resist. It is denied the right to create an independent State. It is denied the right to choose Jerusalem or Al-Quds, as its capital.

This people has been engaged in a constant struggle and it is paying a heavy toll in order to guarantee its dignity and freedom. It is paying for its sacrifices with its blood and it is making these sacrifices on the altar of its nationhood.

This sacred land has been soiled by the occupying authorities. Is this not a people, is this not a nation which should enjoy international support and international legitimacy? Is this not a just and legitimate cause? Is this not a form of resistance which has nothing whatsoever to do with terrorism.

Original Arabic: Mr. DJEMAM (*representative, International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions*) — The Palestinian People's suffering under the Israeli occupation is one of the worst things history has ever seen. The occupying forces with their murderous arms have imposed a blockade, destroyed houses, economic and social institutions in the territories which has paralyzed the Palestinian people and this cannot be regarded other than as a flagrant violation

of human rights, of course, in flagrant violation of the principles of the United Nations and the ILO. I would like to quote the resolution 947 of 1980 concerning the annual reports on the situation of Arab workers in Palestine and in the occupied Arab territories. That year, this Organization sent a mission to the territories to carry out a study; and we thank the ILO for that, but unfortunately, the mission should have gone to the territories much earlier so that the Report could have been distributed much earlier to the participants of the Conference so that we could have examined the reasons for the present situation.

Equally, the Director-General's Report on the subject mentioned settlements in Palestine and the Golan but the resolution 947 of the United Nation Security Council, quoted in the report, failed to refer to the freedom and rights of the workers in Palestine and the invasion of Lebanon by the Israeli Army. So these two resolutions are extremely important in our view, and there is a further issue that we find extremely regrettable, the title of the Report is *The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories*, it should have said *of Palestine and of the occupied territories*; these workers are the real owners of the land and we cannot overlook that. In some paragraphs we have found mention of the inhabitants of the region and their sufferings. The inhabitants are Arab citizens whose identity has been totally undermined. We would have wished all of this to be mentioned in an international document and we ask the Director-General to set up a commission to study the issue as was done for apartheid in South Africa.

Finally, there will be no peace in this region without the creation of a Palestinian state with Al Quds as its capital, and without an Israeli withdrawal from the Lebanese territory. Their resistance to occupation is not terrorism it is a right. While the territories are invaded there will be resistance. First of all it is important for Israel to stop its own terrorist acts before asking others to do so.

Mr. HAGH-BAYAN (*Employers' delegate, Islamic Republic of Iran*) — In the name of God, the Compassionate and the Merciful! The Report of the honourable Director-General of the ILO contains a loud warning about the continuing suppression of human rights and the continuing ordeals that so many people endure throughout their lives.

The ups and downs of international relations and a global economy bring about deplorable results in the form of growing unemployment and a widening rift between countries. This special session has enabled us to address these difficulties. The formal financial support for reconstruction and employment in the territories is a positive, much appreciated initiative of the honourable Chairman and secretariat of the ILO.

It is to be hoped that this effort will be supported, especially by the industrialized countries, and will be taken seriously by the Members. Once the programme is adopted, we hope that it receives the support of the secretariat and is approved by the Governing body.

Unfortunately, repeated and flagrant breaches of the Charter of the United Nations, the fundamental instruments of organizations and fundamental labour Conventions, coupled with legal chicanery and repression have called the effectiveness of international agreements into question.

Today, we all look forward to economic and social convergence through the transfer of technology and the implementation of human rights standards as a means of protecting security and stability and ending the isolation of millions of human beings.

We hope that in this situation, we, that is to say, Christian, Moslem and Jewish workers and employers who demand lifelong human rights and a noble standard of living, might receive a reply.

Iranian employers are willing to act in keeping with the decisions taken by the employers' organizations represented in the ILO and they are also ready to shoulder national and universal philanthropic responsibilities.

Globalization has weakened the tendency towards regionalization. We must create universal understanding by seeking points of convergence, eliminating the after effects of the "cold war" and trying to prevent potential harmful effects.

All of the members of the International Organization of Labour can fulfil this mission.

It is hoped that permanent employment will be established in all the countries of the world living together in peace and friendship.

Original French: Ms. DIALLO (Workers' delegate, Guinea) — We are gathered here to discuss the Report, *The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories* and to reaffirm our solidarity with the workers and people of Palestine. The Report presented to us highlights the social and economic degradation which prevails in Palestine, the main characteristics of which are repeated closures, daily insecurity, the establishment of settlements, the construction of dividing walls, military incursions, destruction and the loss of human life.

Palestinian workers and their families are also confronted with increased unemployment, extreme poverty, frustration and despair. May I recall that women and children are the most numerous and the most vulnerable victims, and they pay a high price in situations of war and conflict. Palestinian women have been suffering for years because they and their families are on the frontline of death and poverty, and because, in a stifling economic context, they must invent and reinvent strategies in order to meet the basic needs of their families and to feed their children, in order to nourish the future of a Palestine which their children represent.

As a female worker, and on behalf of the millions of women who are members of my trade union, the National Confederation of Guinean Workers (CNTG), as well as the World Confederation of Labour (WCL), I would like to reiterate that we cannot support the fact that women and children continue to pay such a high price in a conflict which they have neither chosen nor asked for. Neither can we agree to a policy, an infinitely variable policy, which is so strongly in force in this part of the world. I would like to express our solidarity and support for Palestinian workers in general and to women workers in particular and to call on the ILO to take into account in its cooperation programmes the needs of Palestinian women workers.

I would also like to take this opportunity to highlight the importance for the international community in general, and for the ILO in particular, to continue their efforts to compel the Israeli Government to respect the United Nations resolutions, and particularly those which stipulate the right of the Palestinian

people to a free and sovereign State. This is the only way we can lay the foundations of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East and in the world.

While I congratulate the efforts made in preparing the Report on the existing situation in the occupied Arab territories and the efforts carried out by the ILO, we would urge the Office to continue its efforts and appeal to workers throughout the world to strengthen their support and solidarity for Palestinian workers.

In conclusion, I would like to highlight the importance of the ILO's role in resolving this conflict and in improving the living conditions of the Palestinian people. To do this, the ILO must work in partnership with all actors — political, economic, social and union. The ILO must bring together all trade unions in programmes aimed at easing the suffering of the Palestinian people and at strengthening workers' organizations. Finally, I would like to reiterate the fact that my organization condemns all violence and all war. We advocate peace as the fruit of development, justice and democracy. I pray to God, the Compassionate, the Merciful, to help the Palestinian people in the occupied Arab territories.

Original French: Mr. AKOUETE (representative, Democratic Organization of African Workers' Trade Unions) — It is always with considerable emotion that we take the floor to address the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories. We feel it all the more acutely because every day brings new violence, killings, injuries, and maimings, and the situation in the territories is worsening.

From the Report of the Director-General, *The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories*, it is clear that the situation is far from brilliant and there has been no tangible progress over the past year.

Border closures and internal closures, the psychological, economic and social impact of the separation wall, the repeated military incursions, the construction of settlements, targeted attacks and the situation in the Golan — all this is a breeding ground for all sorts of the violations of the rights of Palestinian workers.

The reality I have just described is nothing new, and we all know that many peace plans have been drawn up with the assistance of the international community and have failed or have not yielded the intended results.

The last peace plan, known as the road map, which holds out hopes of a sustainable peace, may — if we are not careful — remain stillborn given the bloody events that occurred in the last two days in Israel and the occupied territories.

While it is true that the crisis has had an impact on the Israeli economy, it should be pointed out that the Palestinian workers pay a heavier price.

Working conditions are extremely difficult because of the border closures and repeated curfews. The social security system needs to be clear and objective, with the direct participation of Palestinian workers, and social dialogue needs to be ongoing with all the trade union partners.

To that end, our organization, the African regional affiliate of the World Confederation of Labour, is aware that violence can end only once the dignity and the territory of the Palestinian people have been restored and respected. It is also essential that the road map be discussed with all factions, so that every

group can identify with it and voice its views and convictions. We can only call for peace, for respect for the Palestinian people through a commitment by all to end the violence and uphold justice, for there is no power, however mighty, that can crush a people determined to obtain its freedom. The Palestinian people's aspirations for freedom cannot be crushed by force or by weapons, but I am convinced that respect for their rights and their territorial integrity, as well as their dignity will bring lasting peace to this region of the world.

Original Chinese: Mr. LIU (Workers' adviser and substitute delegate, China) — Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak on this occasion. Today it is our pleasure to meet during the Conference again. We are gathering here to discuss the issue of Palestine and to support the Palestinian people's just struggle for their legitimate rights and interests. Palestine is at the core of the Middle East issue. It is the Palestinian people's legitimate right to set up a Palestinian State. Failure to find a fair and reasonable solution to the long-standing issue of Palestine will undermine the peace and development of the Middle East and even the world.

For years, the ILO has made positive efforts to solve the Palestine issue. Before the International Labour Conference takes place every year, the Director-General of the ILO sends a high-level mission to the occupied Arab territories and Israel to gain an insight into the labour market, the employment situation of workers and their working and living conditions, as well as the role of the ILO in the occupied territories. At the same time, at almost every session, delegates gather in this conference hall to discuss the Palestinian issue and to show their support for the justified struggle of the Palestinian people. But a solution to the Palestinian issue has eluded us because of the hard line of the Israeli Government.

The Middle East peace process now has a new opportunity. In the light of the road map, the international community has intensified its efforts in this regard, and the Prime Ministers of Israel and Palestine have held talks, although there is still violence between the two parties from time to time.

The Middle East situation remains grave. We maintain that the Israel-Palestine conflict is due mainly to the illegal occupation of Palestinian territories by Israel. As a result, Palestine has been hit by economic recession and increasing unemployment, and the working people have suffered enormously. The Report on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories, submitted by the Director-General of the ILO to the Conference, points out that the economic and social situation in the territories was deteriorating daily, with a rising level of poverty and unemployment leading to an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. A crisis situation has now been reached. Workers and their families live in constant fear of the possible physical, economic and social consequences of occupation. Violence occurs daily and at any time, creating severe psychological stress. In our opinion, it is only when the Israeli Government withdraws its troops from the occupied territories and the Palestinian people regain their legitimate rights, that the Palestine issue will be addressed in a fair and proper way.

As sincere friends of the Arab countries, the Chinese trade unions and workers have always been

supportive of the just cause of the Palestinian people, and will continue to be so.

We express our appreciation of the tangible role of the ILO in promoting democracy, protecting workers' fundamental rights and interests, and promoting employment, as well as in combating poverty in the occupied territories. We hope that the ILO will continue to promote the peace process and strengthen technical cooperation programmes in the occupied territories, so as to improve the working conditions of the Palestinian workers and bring benefit to them and to the people.

We are willing to strengthen consultation and cooperation with all the parties concerned, and will make common efforts to achieve a just solution to the Middle East issue.

Original Spanish: Mr. PINZÓN SALAZAR (*representative, Latin American Central of Workers*) — I congratulate the Director-General of the ILO for his Report on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories. The examination of the situation by the high-level mission is an excellent contribution, giving valuable information on the situation in which workers and people in the occupied territories live, and affording the 91st Session of the Conference an overall picture of this critical situation.

I believe that the discussion during this special sitting will greatly contribute to our understanding, as well as extending support and solidarity to our brothers and sisters living and suffering from this tragedy.

In Latin America, we also suffered at the hands of invaders with a monopoly on power and weapons. We know only too well that the biggest victims are children, women and elderly persons. Therefore we can only hope that the so-called road map will be successful in achieving a fair, coherent and participatory process, in which all sectors of the population and workers may have their say. Any imposed or one-sided solution will have an irreversibly damaging effect.

The data contained in the Report concerning social deterioration: unemployment, health, education, housing and the destruction of infrastructure, is appalling, and requires that we must all, especially the United Nations and the ILO, continue supporting this process, in order to overcome the enemies of truth and justice, and the advocates of irrationality and death.

The road map must lead us to genuine dialogue, so that there can be a civilized agreement between Palestinians and Israelis to bring an end to violence, so that reason and the will to live can be restored, because in war, there are no winners, only losers, and so that we can improve the lives of the 62 per cent of the population in the occupied territories living on just US\$2.15 per day.

With regard to dialogue, the ILO has considerable expertise, as well as the capacity and quality to provide alternatives. Let us hope it can be successful in this regard.

Societies in conflict, especially radical elements which support violence whatever the cost, badly need useful and independent advice, in order to help them understand the special forces at work and to appreciate that they are responsible for shaping their own destiny. Hopefully, this may enable them to grasp both the possibilities and limits to the process. There are enormous challenges and all the actors must be

aware that a process of dialogue, negotiation and consensus requires a certain loss of individual freedom in the hope of reaching a collective and social good. We truly hope that this process gets under way and leads to popular, democratic and political solutions to the overall crisis affecting the occupied territories.

The initial results of the beginning of this month, which saw the freeing of Palestinian prisoners, and the commitment to withdraw from a number of settlements illegally built by Israel, with a view to implementing the road map, give us a glimmer of hope that promises may become a reality, and that one day the Holy Land may be shared between the State of Palestine and the State of Israel, at peace with one another.

Past history, such as the reconciliation between Germany and France, the process of reconciliation between the Nicaraguan army and guerrillas, and between El Salvador and Guatemala in Central America, gives us careful optimism for believing that the road map may be capable of leading to a brighter future for the occupied territories, which is why we must continue to support these efforts.

Ms. BEN-HAIM ROSEN (*representative, World Jewish Congress*) — As everyone present knows, this debate takes place in a theatre of the absurd. No one can doubt the good intentions and the professionalism of the ILO, which is attempting in good faith to apply its expertise and experience to resolve one of the most intractable political problems of our time.

How does one promote efficient employment practices, optimal employment conditions for an organized workforce and a cohesive social environment to enable the tripartite approach that the ILO symbolizes to facilitate a constructive effort to improve the plight of the Arab workers in the territories, in harmonious collaboration with their fellow workers and employers in Israel? A utopian dream, a realistic perspective for arriving at a workable solution or empty rhetoric?

Everyone is aware that today's debate is part of the game in which there has to be one sitting devoted to Israel-bashing and spleen-venting in order to prevent yet another futile resolution before the Conference being formulated and thereby further wasting the resources of the ILO's budget in the cynical abuse of the Conference's legitimate goals.

As is also equally well-known, the political parameters on which the authors of the Report rely are highly questionable. As an example, the reference in paragraph 26 of the Report cites the Special Rapporteur to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in his so-called findings of March 2003.

It is apparent from any objective examination of the very terms of reference and the context of the Special Rapporteur's report, and even from its very title, that it is fundamentally flawed, totally one-sided and irretrievably distorted.

The social and economic ethos of the founding fathers of Israel is based on respect for workers' rights, a desire to achieve high social standards and to maintain equilibrium between organized labour and the legitimate entrepreneurial ambitions of the employers. Israel's presence in the territories, following repeated wars of aggression in flagrant violation of article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter in 1948, 1967 and 1973, results from its undoubted exercise of the inherent right of self-defence under article 51 of

the Charter. Israel was, and continues to be, ever ready to arrive at a definitive and just peace agreement with its Arab neighbours, including the Arab population in the territories currently represented by the Palestinian authority, which, prior to the final Camp David round of negotiation in 2000, was placed in the position of being able to control practically the entire population of the territories and covered 97 per cent of the disputed territories.

The Israeli authorities responsible for the administration in the disputed territories prior to the creation of the Palestinian authority, handed over an elaborate infrastructure of health care and social security the like of which the inhabitants had never previously experienced, while introducing the concept of organized labour and workers' rights, which the ILO legitimately, but perhaps with a sense of futility, continues to promote.

The unfortunate reality is that reaping the dreadful harvest of 50 years of an ever-accelerating campaign of racist hatred inculcated in successive generations of schoolchildren and preached in mosques and taught in schools has brought about a situation in which the majority of the Arab inhabitants of the territories support a publicly proclaimed policy aimed at the destruction of Israel as the State of the Jewish people.

While Israel and the Palestinian Authority under Abu-Mazen have accepted the principles of the road map to peace, it has been rejected by the terrorist coalition of Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the El-Aksa Brigade, demonstrated by their publicly announced responsibility for the recent treacherous assault at the Erez checkpoint and yesterday's suicide bombing in Jerusalem.

There can be little doubt that all people of good will support the conclusions of the Report of the Director-General. Unfortunately, the closure of the territories and the security measures taken by Israel to which the Report refers are a direct result of the unrestrained campaign of terror that has exploited the movement of workers from the territories as a means of clandestinely introducing into Israel terrorist cells and supplies of state-of-the-art explosive devices for the use of intended waves of suicide bombers.

Terrorism, in fact, strikes at the heart of workers' employment and social rights and those of their families. The solution to this intractable problem must be found in a renewed and determined effort by the legitimate political representatives of workers' rights to extirpate terrorists from their midst and to return to the path of peace at the negotiating table of the road map.

Original Arabic: Mr. JRAD (*representative, Union of Workers of the Arab Maghreb*) — In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate! First of all, I would like to thank the Director-General for his Report, *The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories*. This Report is rich in information and statistics which demonstrate the full extent of the suffering of the people and the workers of Palestine, as well as the Syrian workers of the occupied Golan.

The Report reviews all of the repressive practices of the occupying authorities, which have exacerbated the situation in the region, particularly in the occupied Arab territories. Israel has subjected the territories to closures, confiscated houses, established settlements and destroyed infrastructure. This is a daily reality for the Palestinian people. Funeral processions of those

killed in the occupation have become a daily routine in the streets of Gaza and the West Bank. There is not a single Palestinian family that has not lost a member, or had one detained in an Israeli prison, or injured.

However, we would have liked for the Report also to mention the international conventions relating to occupied lands, and in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, for this constitutes a reference. This Convention prohibits collective penalties or expulsion and the destruction of property, and places the occupying power under the obligation to provide for the food and basic needs of the occupied people.

This year's Report of the Director-General is entitled *Working out of poverty*. This Report mentions that the world's most poverty-stricken region is that which is now under Israeli occupation. From September 2002 to March 2003, economic losses totalled \$12 billion, while GDP declined by 57 per cent. The Director-General mentions in his report that the cumulative drop in per capita income in 2002 is alarmingly high: it is now only 47 per cent of the 1999 level. Moreover, as a result of the closures, territories and the prohibition for workers to cross the green line, as well as attempts to undermine the Palestine National Authority, there has been an increase in unemployment, estimated at some 41 per cent by the Director-General's Report while the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics places it at 60 per cent.

Thus, marginalization and poverty are exacerbated by the occupation and have social and political repercussions which only make the situation worse.

According to the Director-General's Report, 60 per cent of Palestinians live below the poverty line, i.e. on less than \$2 per day. We can thus understand the despair in which most of the population in the occupied territories are living, particularly young people.

Peace is a strategic choice, but real peace is based on justice and the right of peoples to self-determination.

Of course we welcome the international community's efforts to assist the Palestinians, but we would like the ILO to strengthen its assistance. We would also like to strengthen the Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection. Such assistance remains limited because of the occupation. Over the past two years Israel has destroyed everything that Arab, European and international assistance had provided.

Therefore we must bring an end to the occupation. This requires the full withdrawal of the occupying forces from the West Bank, from East Jerusalem and from the Gaza Strip, as well as the Golan and the Lebanese Sheba Farms. An independent Palestinian State must be established, with its capital Al Quds and it is essential for the parties to the conflict to respect the agreements reached under the aegis of the international community. We must bring an end to the construction of settlements and to discrimination. All of these practices must end.

The ILO has a key role to play in laying the foundations for peace in this region, which must enable all of the workers of the occupied Arab territories to regain their rights and freedom.

To this end, we would like to strengthen the Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection and set up a special commission to follow up on the recommendation set forth in the Director-General's Report, in order to assist efforts to alleviate the suffer-

ing of the Palestinian people while establishing justice and freedom.

Mr. MAHADEVAN (*Workers' adviser and substitute delegate, India*) — I speak at this special sitting on behalf of the entire trade union movement of India.

The Report of the Director-General, *The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories*, based on a high-level mission, sheds a lot of light on the plight and deplorable conditions of workers, their families and dependents. It reveals that they are living in a catastrophic situation but still somehow struggle on. Of the four major orientations highlighted, the establishment of statehood and cooperation so that workers' and employers' organizations can become fully functioning institutions within a democratic State are emphasized.

While closures remain the dominant feature of daily life in the occupied territories, in addition to time lost due to closures, workers and their families live in constant fear of the physical, economic and social consequences of occupation. Violence occurs daily at any time, causing severe psychological stress. The plight of Palestinians separated from resources by a physical barrier has been documented in the press as "death by asphyxiation".

The construction of Israeli settlements in the occupied Arab territories has obviously remained a source of contention all along. The confiscation of land and other infrastructural resources for the construction of settlements and bypass roads that connect them to Israel has been detrimental to the development of these lands and resources, thereby seriously affecting the employment and livelihood of the local population, who usually — and rightly so — reject compensation if offered, for fear of this being construed as abdication of their rights.

The Golan had been occupied by Israel since 1967 and was unilaterally annexed by Israel, a decision that was never recognized by the United Nations, and the Security Council adopted resolution 497 calling on Israel to rescind its decision. The Report of the Director-General reveals that the economy of the occupied territories has suffered a massive shock, resulting from the closures, restrictions and the like.

In the light of the foregoing, we believe that the answer to many issues is the most basic need to remove all settlements in the occupied Arab territories and establish an independent nation of Palestine, with Jerusalem as the capital.

The ILO assistance — technical or otherwise — constitutes, amongst others, an important input in the right direction. But the re-construction is losing its meaning and becoming less of a reality because renewed destruction is taking place side by side. Even before the ink is dried on the recently proposed road map, violations to the very principles enshrined in the road map have been witnessed, including the recent attempt to murder a respectful Hamas leader, to the dismay of all of us. Therefore, ending the illegal occupation of all Arab territories is the most important prerequisite towards the path of re-constructing Palestine, ending once and for all the genocide of Palestine.

Coming from India, the world's biggest democracy, we recall our struggle to throw off colonial rule for several decades. We have also witnessed the glorious struggle of the peoples of Africa against Apartheid and its disastrous consequences for generations. The

struggle for an independent sovereign nation of Palestine is a similar struggle. Therefore, we believe that a permanent ILO mission is the need of the hour, until the basic issues are resolved in favour of the Palestinian people as well as Palestinian workers.

What we have been witnessing in the occupied Arab territories, as rightly pointed out in the conclusions of the Director-General's Report, is marked deterioration in the situation, where human security, rights at work, income, access to employment and social protection are under constant threat.

Many people are without work and, therefore, without wages; neither is there any investment for productive purposes. The climate required for providing work, investment and resource mobilization does not exist.

In this connection, I would like to bring to the attention of this august body the fact that the Palestinian workers' legitimate right to work in Israel has been consistently denied. We are told that the entitlements, as calculated by the Palestinian workers' trade unions, work out at approximately US\$600 million, but they were thought to be settled at a meagre sum of US\$6 million. We feel that the ILO should also use its offices to see to it that the Palestinian workers are not deprived of the legitimate amount.

Original Arabic: Mr. ANSARI (*Workers' adviser and substitute delegate, Islamic Republic of Iran*) — In the name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate!

Allow me first of all to congratulate you on the convening of this 91st Session of the ILO Conference, on behalf of the Iranian delegation. It is an honour and a pleasure to address this distinguished gathering.

The International Labour Organization was founded with the aim of participating in the achievement of a universal and lasting peace. This great assembly can and must support the proposals put forward by the countries of the world, particularly the Muslim countries and the free countries regarding security and protection of workers' rights, especially in occupied Palestine. To do so, there must be coordination between the international trade union movement and the Palestinian trade union movement, to solve the problems facing the Palestinian workers and alleviate the suffering of the people and workers of Palestine as a result of the Zionist occupation.

There is no justification for violation of national sovereignty and the violation of the soil of the Muslim countries. Today we witness unilateral aggression against countries, in flagrant disregard of all internationally accepted rights and values.

Today, more than ever, we have to try harder to discharge our responsibilities in order to help the Palestinian people to overcome these crises which they face. We understand, of course, that the root of this whole problem is Israel — Israel which refuses to accept any proposal for peace, repudiating all previous agreements with Palestine. Furthermore, Israel pursues a policy of threats and intimidation against the Muslim countries, from the Arab Maghreb in north Africa to Iran and Syria. It behoves us to unite and to be alert in face of the expansionist Zionist goals and policies, on one hand, and to help and support the Palestinian people and other countries of the region, on the other.

Today, we are dealing with specific issues. We are dealing, among other things, with the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination. This is

one of the most important issues facing the Muslim peoples.

The sublime and exalted status of Jerusalem is not restricted to Muslims alone. It is also a symbol of freedom and justice in the world. The Palestinian people have the right to self-determination, and we must help them to obtain those legitimate rights.

The solution to the Palestine issue cannot be achieved without the unanimous support of the international community, for the realization of the legitimate rights of all the people in Palestine, be they Jewish, Christian or Muslim, and this on the basis of democracy and with the assistance of the United Nations.

Mr. HOSSAIN (*Government delegate, Bangladesh*) — This special sitting to examine the situation of the workers of the occupied Arab territories is most timely, as the situation of the workers in the region continues to deteriorate, assuming the proportions of a major humanitarian crisis. This sitting also reflects the concerns of the member States regarding the situation and their serious commitment to addressing the issue.

I thank the Director-General for his Report on the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories, based on the findings of a high-level mission to the region. The Report highlights the critical and precarious condition of workers living in these territories.

Today's debate gives us the opportunity to examine the situation in the region, to take stock of what the ILO has done to ease the conditions of the workers and, more importantly, to chart a future course of action for the ILO in terms of its mandate.

The picture given in the Report is grave. Poverty in the occupied Arab territories is increasing at an alarming rate. Young people are being denied the opportunity to work, while the destruction of economic assets continues, resulting in the loss of jobs and people being made homeless. People in the occupied territories are living in a constant state of fear. The Israeli forces have continued their atrocities in total disregard to human rights and with the utmost disrespect for human life and dignity. In short, economic and social conditions are worsening by the day in the area.

We agree with the Director-General that this situation is untenable and cannot be allowed to continue. We believe that a viable and lasting peace in the region is not possible until the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people are acknowledged and the Israeli forces withdraw from the occupied territories, pursuant to Security Council resolutions Nos. 242 and 338.

Bangladesh welcomes the road map, which envisages an independent, sovereign and democratic Palestine by 2005. Meetings such as the one held recently at Aquaba can help the process of finding a just and lasting peace in the region.

We commend the efforts of the Director-General to implement the enhanced programme of technical cooperation in the occupied territories. The ILO should continue its capacity-building efforts aimed at the Palestine Labour Ministry, and the employers' and workers' organizations.

We also encourage the ILO's efforts to facilitate dialogue among the social partners from both sides. In this regard, we believe the Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection is of critical

importance, and we hope that the Fund will become operational in the shortest possible time.

We request the Director-General to continue with his efforts to address the critical condition of the workers of the occupied Arab territories. We also hope that the donor community will continue its financial support and assistance in the interests of averting a humanitarian crisis in the region.

Original French: Mr. DE PURY (*representative, World Organization Against Torture*) — The World Organization Against Torture, also known by the French acronym OMCT, is above all a network of national and international non-governmental organizations which informs us about the most serious cases of human rights' violations. Of course these violations can harm the life and integrity of persons directly but they can also do so when, by attacking the economic, social and cultural rights of persons or sectors of the population of a country, the State creates conditions or allows conditions to be created which in turn are harmful to the life and integrity of the people who are victims of them.

Depending on the information received, the OMCT makes urgent appeals to ensure that the largest possible number of people or organizations apply to the authorities involved, asking them to respect the rights being violated. Obviously these appeals are useful items of information for the international community.

Unfortunately, in the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel, despite the relatively small size of the population concerned, the number of cases submitted to us is very large, even taking into account the necessity of not saturating the networks in order to keep them effective.

We have noted that in 2002 we made 19 urgent appeals concerning the Israeli authorities and we have already made seven in 2003. Among these cases there is a litany of cases of arbitrary detentions and ill treatment as well as summary executions but there is also a high proportion of very special cases which are in fact unique in the world: the destruction of houses of the resident population; restrictions on movement within and outside one's own territory; bans even on wearing shoes, coats and carrying sandwiches imposed on workers who are authorized to go on to the other side of the demarcation line.

And the Palestinians in the occupied territories are even banned from picking the olives from their own olive trees, allegedly on the grounds that this will protect them from possible aggression by the illegal settlers. In other words, the thousands of Israeli soldiers who are entrusted with the protection of the few hundred settlers, would not be able to prevent the latter from attacking the Palestinian farmers, and would therefore cause them to lose the fruit of their work — olives being the main agricultural product of the occupied territories.

These are only a few examples of the general situation which is amply described in the Director-General's Report following the high-level mission to the area concerned.

But the latter case shows clearly how the grounds for a security policy can be converted into a pretext for a policy of conquest in favour of one category of the population and into systematic impoverishment of the other. Here we see a kind of an *a contrario* demonstration of how accurate the Director-General's Report is.

Abolish the possibility to work and you will create poverty. We also see that it is discrimination, the subject of this year's Global Report, which is at the root of all this misery and all this suffering.

The discriminatory aspect of Israel's policy, which gives priority to Jews and penalizes non-Jews is clearly established in the conclusions of the Committee on the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adopted on 23 May 2003.

The consequences for work also emerged clearly from the Report. For those who live in Israel the unemployment rate in 2002 was 10.5 per cent, all categories included, but among the Arabs it was 13.5 per cent and even 15 per cent among the Bedouins.

As for the occupied territories, the unemployment rate has reached the alarming figure of 50 per cent.

The unemployment figures, however, indicate something different which in turn is pointed out by the Director-General's Report. The negative impact of the security policy is being felt not only by the Arabs, but by the whole population including the Israeli Jews. This is maybe one of the reasons why very recently the Head of the Israeli Government surprised the world by recognizing reality. The occupation is harming the Palestinians just as it is harming the Israelis. But the problems all result from the fact that there is a conflict, hence, there is only one solution, and one only: to put an end to the conflict.

World opinion is demanding this. The authorities who represent both parties to the conflict are also saying so these days. On this basis it becomes possible to negotiate and build peace.

With peace it will also be possible then to get people back to work in Palestine and in Israel to work out of poverty.

The PRESIDENT (Mr. WOJCIK) — Three delegations have asked for the right of reply and I would like to remind them, that there is a time limit of two minutes for the right of reply with the exception of a reply to a large number of statements. The reply should abide by parliamentary language, and avoid comments of a personal nature. There is no right of reply to the right of reply.

The first speaker on my list is Minister Khatib of Palestine, who wishes to respond to the speech of Mr. Peretz, Workers' delegate from Israel.

The second speaker will be Minister Al-Jabi from the Syrian Arab Republic who wishes to reply to the intervention made by Mr. Levy, Government delegate of Israel. And the last speaker on my list is Mr. Levy the Government delegate of Israel, who wishes to respond on various interventions. I now give the floor to Minister Khatib.

Original Arabic: Mr. KHATIB (Minister of Labour, Palestine) — First of all, I would like to express my sincere thanks to all the representatives who have spoken here, expressing their solidarity with the Palestinian people and sympathy for Palestinian workers, or condemning the Israeli occupation and crimes.

I have three short comments to make. First of all, the International Labour Organization organized this special sitting and sent its mission to the occupied territories because of the exceptional situation, namely Israel's continued violation of international law and of the principles upheld by the United Nations and the ILO, which constitute an attempt to behave as if it was

above the law. My second point is that we are tired of hearing speeches in which Israel paints itself as the victim. In fact, the victims are the people of Palestine, and the only solution is to put an end to this criminal occupation. When the peace process seemed to give the Palestinian people the possibility of finding a negotiated solution, we witnessed four very peaceful years. That is the only way to resolve the problem. However, the Palestinian people will never accept occupation, especially an occupation which consists of daily murders of civilians, the destruction of homes, and all the other atrocities mentioned in the Director-General's Report. The representative of Israel's workers stated that Israel is forced to close its borders for security reasons. Israel cannot carry on having its cake and eating it. It may close its borders, that is its business, but it cannot, at the same time, close down our borders with other countries, especially with Arab countries. If Israel wishes to close its borders, let it do so, but it cannot continue to control the Palestinian people, closing its cities and every area of residence. There is only one road to peace — namely to recognize the rights of the Palestinian people, enshrined in international law, which means ending occupation, setting up a Palestinian State and granting refugees the right of return.

Original Arabic: Ms. AL-JABI (Minister of Social Affairs and Labour, Syrian Arab Republic) — We have an answer to the statement made by the representative of the World Jewish Congress. Defence of our lands, our rights, our people, our nation, our homes, our values and our beliefs is an honour in a world where those who violate the rights of others consider surrender as a victory and those who strike out against legitimacy denigrate the nobility of resistance. The noble Palestinians decided in their intifada, or uprising, to defend their right to existence, their right to life, their right to land, their right to learn, their right to employment and to have a country. They have shed their blood to defend their land even though they are homeless and landless. The same goes for our people in the occupied Golan and in southern Lebanon. We are proud of all those free voices who today declared their support in the world for our people and their defence of our noble and just cause.

The world will not remain silent in the face of the many massacres to which the children of the Palestinian nation have fallen like the children of the Golan plateau and southern Lebanon. The massacres of Deir-Yacine, Kaffar Kassem and other places such as Jenin, Tulkarem and Nablus are neither the first nor the last perpetrated by the invader. All these massacres, violations, destruction of homes, confiscation of land will not cease.

Today, thankfully, modern communications have enabled the world to be fully informed of the policies of the Israeli occupation authorities, which have violated all UN resolutions.

Mr. LEVY (*Government delegate, Israel*) — I wish to respond to several themes raised by a number of speakers this afternoon.

Speakers mentioned closures, the inability of Palestinian workers to enter on a daily basis as they did prior to the riots when 120,000 of them came to work in Israel daily. We would like very much to create a situation again in which Palestinians can come into

Israel freely. In fact, we have tried to implement and ease restrictions and allow increasing numbers of Palestinian workers and merchants to enter Israel. Alas, each time restrictions were lifted, the system was abused, terrorists infiltrated into Israel in the guise of daily workers.

The case in point that I mentioned last Sunday when three terrorists came to a check point, at the time 15,000 workers from Gaza were about to enter Israel. The terrorists killed four Israelis and wounded others. Can anyone in this hall really expect Israel to abandon the safety of its citizens, allow the indiscriminate entry of Palestinians into Israel, as long as the Palestinian authority does not live up to its responsibility to end incitement, curb terrorism and to put an end to such abuse.

The call of those who spoke about closures are misdirected. They should be directed towards Palestinian radicals, who abuse the system and do not live up to their responsibilities. Would any government in this hall allow workers to enter its territory if a number of them had intentions of perpetrating massacres against their citizens.

A second theme present in the statements of several delegates, was a call to end the occupation. Some speakers genuinely spoke about a desire for peaceful settlement, regarding territories in dispute between Israelis and Palestinians. In this reference, Israel was ready to end the occupation. Our delegation came to Camp David in July 2000, presenting a comprehensive peace programme which would have effectively ended the occupation and peacefully settled all outstanding issues.

Why was this programme not adopted by the Palestinian authority? Why did Mr. Arafat reject it out of hand? Why did he order the beginning of the riots which brought only suffering to Palestinians and Israelis alike? In fact, the Minister who spoke before me testified to it himself, perhaps without noticing it when he stated there were several years of quiet when the peace process seemed to move ahead. So why did they stop this peace process in order to start the riots?

Once again, this last week there was an opportunity for Palestinians to move in that direction at the Aqaba Summit and Israel's promise, enunciated by the Prime Minister, gives them an opportunity to further these goals peacefully.

When other delegates spoke of an end to occupation, they disclosed the true goal which was truly enunciated in the Lebanese Government statement, and greeted by some Arab delegations with applause. He said, and I quote: the map of Palestine extending from the sea to river. For those of you in the hall who do not discern this precise meaning, the sea is the Mediterranean, the river is the Jordan River. In his

view the goal of so-called ending the occupation is practically eliminating the State of Israel and Palestine would take its place as he said, extending from sea to river. Is this the kind of policy which should be heard in the confines of this hall of the ILO?

Now I would like to remind the Lebanese delegate that when speaking so eloquently about ills of occupation he conveniently forgot to remind us about the occupation of Lebanon, his own country, by whom? by Syria since 1976. An occupation force of 20,000 Syrian soldiers is still stationed in Lebanon. Could the Lebanese delegate or the Syrian Minister name the first Syrian Ambassador to Lebanon, or the current one? Or are they unable to do so, because you do not nominate an ambassador to a region in your own State. Some delegations have raised the issue of a security fence being built by Israel. Israel was compelled to consider various ways to defend herself against an onslaught of terrorism and an attempt of groups to infiltrate.

We heard 50 of you speaking against Israel all day, so please listen carefully, I am going to speak about you in a moment. So Israel was compelled to consider various ways to defend herself against an onslaught of terrorism and an attempt to infiltrate suicide bombers into her midst, taking the lives of innocent civilians. In our view this fence represents the best preventive measure, to stop would-be terrorists in the absence of effective undertakings on behalf of the Palestinian authority. Finally, I would like to address the distinguished Syrian Minister. She spoke eloquently and passionately about massacres; she omitted the massacre which the Syrians perpetrated against their own people in 1982, when the Syrian regime killed 15,000 of its own citizens. But in response to a statement on terrorism I would just like to briefly read you a list of ten names; they are the names of the ten major terrorist organizations in Damascus. Five of them are also on the EU list of terrorist organizations, the Popular Front of Palestine, the Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine General Command...

(As the speaker had extended the time limit, he was interrupted.)

The PRESIDENT — We have come to the end of our business today. In accordance with the decision taken by the Governing Body at its 286th (March 2003) Session, it would be inappropriate to adopt any form of decision, or any formal conclusion, at the end of this special sitting. However, much of importance has been said, and I have no doubt that the action to be taken by the ILO will be inspired by the many ideas put forward. I declare this special sitting closed.

(The Conference adjourned at 8.30 p.m.)

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