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Statement to the International Conference on the Question of Palestine**

Submitted by Gideon Spiro (Israel) on behalf of the Committee Against the War in Lebanon and the Committee of Solidarity with Bir Zeit, non-governmental organizations accredited to the International Conference on the Question of Palestine.

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** The designations employed, the presentation of material and the views expressed in this paper are those of the submitter and do not necessarily reflect the views and practices of the Secretariat of the United Nations.

Mr Chairman,
Thank you for giving me this opportunity and honour to address this distinguished assembly.

The Israeli government is not represented at this conference, and there is a good reason for this absence. It is almost impossible to defend the policy of the Israeli government. There is a well-known Jewish proverb which says, 'Don't do to others what you would not like them to do to you.'

This proverb has been forgotten by all Israeli governments, especially the present one, which has consistently treated the Palestinians, both in deed and in word, in a manner in which would indeed be greatly disliked by Israelis were it applied to them.

Israel believes that a denial of basic human and national rights to a people is a recipe for solving the problems of that people. The Israeli government worships power. It believes that with an army and weapons it is possible to break the spirit of a people and to dictate to neighbouring countries its own policies.

It is in this context that we must see the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Israel lost the ability to make realistic evaluations when it thought that with a sophisticated modern war machine it could break the PLC as the sole representative of the Palestinian people and make Lebanon a puppet state by installing a Phalangist regime.

Now, a year after the war, more and more Israelis recognise the stupidity of this policy; more and more Israelis - but as yet not enough - understand that Israel did not achieve even one of its declared objectives of the war. Israel is stuck in the mud of Lebanon. Its hands have been dirtied by war crimes such as the massacres of Sabra and Shatila, and the bombing of Beirut which killed and wounded thousands of civilians, including women and children, and destroyed hospitals and schools.

How can a small state with no natural resources and only 4 million citizens stand such enormous expenses as the war in Lebanon, which is still costing Israel one million dollars a day; how can it support one of the most sophisticated armies in the world; how can it continue the costly occupation of the West Bank and Gaza; how can it finance the huge cost of the settlements; how can it manage with an inflation rate of 140% - how can it finance all this and still provide its citizens with a reasonable standard of living?

The answer is: foreign aid. Despite Israel's claims that the 'whole world is against her', there is no country in the world which receives such massive quantities of foreign aid as Israel. Israel receives over 30% of the total annual American foreign aid budget, amounting to over 3 billion dollars - more than India receives from America in absolute terms. (May I remind you that ^{India} has a population of 700 million and Israel only 4 million). If we add to this American aid the contributions from world Jewry and European nations we arrive at a total figure of foreign aid to Israel of between 4 and 5 billion dollars per year.

From this you can understand that the private Israeli citizen does not have to contribute to his own government's adventures. In Israel therefore

it is easy to be a chauvinist because it does not cost anything; this is what one might call luxury chauvinism. Only a drastic cut in foreign aid to Israel will force the Israeli citizen to choose what he really wants - annexation or a car; settlements or fuel; war or a trip abroad.

Words will not help us here. The United Nations must convince the United States, the key government, to cut from its aid to Israel the expenses of the war in Lebanon and of the settlements in the Occupied Territories. Aid to Israel should be sufficient to ensure her own defence, but not help her to reshape the Middle East.

Sixteen years of occupation and oppression has created a new Israeli with a colonial mentality, and Israeli who is a racist, an Israeli who tries to cover his government's brutality and ignorance with quotations from the Bible. This Israeli, which I would call the ugly Israeli, the occupier and the oppressor, calls on the assistance of the Almighty, and thereby sanctifies the torture of Palestinians, their expulsion, the confiscation of their land, the denial of their basic rights.

In the Occupied Territories there is already a system of apartheid - one law for the native Palestinians and another for the master race, the settlers.

This is a sad story. Israel, which was supposed to be a haven for the victims of racism has itself become a racist state. Israel, which wanted to create a new kind of Jew, free and productive, has become one of the world's major arms producers, exporting weapons to oppressive regimes all over the world.

The Palestinian readiness for a political solution, demonstrated in the speeches at this conference of Farouk Kaddoumi and Yasser Arafat,

is thrown into sharp focus by the Israeli refusal to negotiate.

The two committees on whose behalf I now speak join in the call for the unconditional withdrawal of all Israeli forces from the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights and Lebanon; the removal of fascist Israeli militia known as "the settlers"; the recognition of the right of Palestinians to self-determination and to the establishment of their own independent state alongside Israel. Until this is recognized by Israel, the Committee understands that as well as other means, the PLO is forced to employ active resistance to the Israeli occupation. The Committee joins the international community in its condemnation of the Israeli violation of Palestinian human rights, demanding the immediate dismantling of the El Ansar prison camp in Lebanon, and to the immediate cessation of the torture of prisoners in the occupied territories.

The Committee hopes that this International Conference will encourage the dialogue between peace forces in Israel and the PLO who both share a common goal of mutual recognition and peace.

The Committee tries to work on both sides: it tries to convince Israelis of the dangerous consequences of their government's policy, and it also tries to join hands with Palestinians in the occupied territories in their struggle against occupation.

The war in Lebanon introduced a previously unknown phenomenon into Israeli society: The refusal of soldiers to serve in the army either in Lebanon or in the occupied territories. Allow me, Mr.

Chairman, at this point a personal note: I am proud to belong to those Israeli reserve soldiers who refused to take part in the Israeli aggression in Lebanon.

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I also

notified the Chief of Staff of the Israeli Army that I will not serve in the West Bank and Gaza Strip because my oath to the army did not include the oppression of another people and the denial of the human and national rights of the Palestinians. I would like to ask the conference to consider in their draft resolution a section which will support the Israeli soldiers who refuse service either in Lebanon or the West Bank. It is important to emphasize in the resolution that this refusal corresponds with the declaration of human rights and principles against racism adopted by the United Nations, both ratified by the Israeli government but as yet unobserved.

"Further, I would like to focus your attention on the fact that Israel has already introduced atomic weapons to the Middle East and that this has forced an atomic race in the area, thus threatening world peace. Israel has refused to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. If we want to see one day the rights of the Palestinians fulfilled, we have to prevent any possibility of using atomic weapons in the Middle East conflict. This possibility is not only theoretical if we take into consideration that Israel is run by national and religious fanatics who believe that they have a direct line to God. I suggest you include a section demanding that Israel sign the Treaty and to allow its atomic reactors to be internationally inspected."

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am not sure whether the following proposal falls within the competence of this assembly. But it is related to the subject under discussion in this conference: I mean the war crimes committed in Lebanon for which two Israeli leaders, General Sharon and General Eitan are chiefly responsible. The Khane Commission Report and other official information gave enough evidence for these two men to be brought to trial for war crimes committed in Lebanon, but they have not been brought to trial. On the contrary, General Sharon has been proposed as Minister of Settlements in the new government. My proposal is that this conference recommend the setting up of an independent judicial body to decide if these two men should be brought to trial.