

Secretary Baker, Foreign Minister Pankin, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Palestinian delegation, I would like to extend our warmest gratitude to our host, the Government of Spain, for its gracious hospitality, and to King Carlos and Prime Minister Gonzalez. We thank the co-sponsors of this Middle East Peace Conference for their relentless efforts in convening this Conference. A special thanks is due from our delegation to the United Nations and to the nations of Europe and Scandinavia, for their consistent and principled support for the rights of the Palestinian people.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We meet in Madrid, a city with the rich texture of history, to weave together the fabric which joins our past with the future, to reaffirm a wholeness of vision, which once brought about a rebirth of civilization and a world order based on harmony in diversity.

Once again, Christian, Moslem, and Jew face the challenge of heralding a new era enshrined in global values of democracy, human rights, freedom, justice, and security. From Madrid we launch this quest for peace, a quest to place the sanctity of human life at the center of our world and to redirect our energies and resources from the pursuit of mutual destruction to the pursuit of joint prosperity, progress, and happiness.

We, the people of Palestine, stand before you in the fullness of our pain, our pride, and our anticipation, for we have long harbored a yearning for peace and a dream of justice and freedom. For too long the Palestinian people have gone unheeded, silenced, and denied our identity negated by political expediency, our rightful struggle against injustice maligned, and our present existence subsumed by the past tragedy of another people.

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, for the greater part of this century, we have been victimized by the myth of "a land without a people," and described with impunity as "the invisible Palestinians." Before such willful blindness, we refused to disappear or to accept a distorted identity. Our Intifada is a testimony to our perseverance and resilience, waged in a just struggle to regain our rights.

It is time for us to narrate our own story, to stand witness as advocates of a truth which has long lain buried in the consciousness and conscience of the world. We do not stand before you as supplicants, but rather as the torch bearers who know that in our world of today, ignorance can never be an excuse. We seek neither an admission of guilt after the fact, nor vengeance for past iniquities, but rather an act of will that would make a just peace a reality. We speak out, ladies and gentlemen, from the full conviction of the rightness of our cause, the verity of our history, and the depth of our commitment. Therein lies the strength of the Palestinian people today, for we have scaled the walls of fear and reticence and we wish to speak out with the courage and integrity that our narrative and his tory deserve.

The co-sponsors have invited us here today to present our case and to reach out to "the other" with whom we have had to face a mutually exclusive reality on the land of Palestine. But even in the invitation to this Peace Conference, our narrative was distorted and our truth only partially acknowledged. The Palestinian people are one, fused by centuries of history in Palestine, bound together by a collective memory of shared sorrows and joys and

sharing a unity of purpose and vision. Our songs and ballads, our folk tales and children's stories, the dialect of our jokes, the images of our poems, that hint of melancholy which colors even our happiest moments, are as important to us as the blood ties which link our families and clans.

Yet the invitation to discuss peace, the peace we all desire and need, comes to only a portion of our people. It ignores our national, historical, and organic unity. We come here wrenched from our sisters and brothers in exile to stand before you as the Palestinians under occupation, although we maintain that each of us represents the rights and interest of the whole. We have been denied the right to publicly acknowledge our loyalty to our leadership and system of government, but allegiance and loyalty cannot be censored or severed. Our acknowledged leadership is more than just the democratically chosen leadership of all the Palestinian people; it is the symbol of our national identity and unity - the guardian of our past, the protector of our present, and the hope of our future. Our people have chosen to entrust it with their history and the preservation of our precious legacy. This leadership has been clearly and unequivocally recognized by the community of nations, with only a few exceptions who had chosen, for so many years, shadow over substance.

Regardless of the nature and conditions of our oppression, whether the dispossession and dispersion of exile or the brutality and repression of the occupation, the Palestinian people cannot be torn asunder. They remain united, a nation wherever they are, or are forced to be. And Jerusalem, ladies and gentlemen, that city which is not only the soul of Palestine but the cradle of three world religions, is tangible even in its claimed absence from our midst at this stage. Its apparent, though artificial, exclusion from this Conference is a denial of its right to seek peace and redemption, for it too has suffered from war and occupation. Jerusalem, the city of peace, has been barred from a peace Conference and deprived of its calling. Palestinian Jerusalem, the capital of our homeland and future state, defines Palestinian existence - past, present and future - but itself has been denied a voice and an identity. Jerusalem defies exclusive possessiveness or bondage. Israel's annexation of Jerusalem remains both clearly illegal in the eyes of the world community and an affront to the peace that this city deserves.

We come to you from a tortured land and a proud, though captive, people, having been asked to negotiate with our occupiers, but leaving behind the children of the Intifada, and a people under occupation and under curfew, who enjoined us not to surrender or forget. As we speak, thousands of our brothers and sisters are languishing in Israeli prisons and detention camps, most detained without evidence, charge, or trial, many cruelly mistreated and tortured in interrogation, guilty only of seeking freedom or daring to defy the occupation. We speak in their name and we say: set them free.

As we speak, the tens of thousands who have been wounded or permanently disabled are in pain: let peace heal their wounds. As we speak, the eyes of thousands of Palestinian refugees, deportees, and displaced persons since 1967 are haunting us, for exile is a cruel fate: bring them home. They have the right to return. As we speak, the silence of demolished

homes echoes through the halls and in our minds: we must rebuild our homes in our free state.

And what do we tell the loved ones of those killed by army bullets? How do we answer the questions and the fear in our children's eyes? For one out of three Palestinian children under occupation has been killed, injured, or detained in the past four years. How can we explain to our children that they are denied education, our schools so often closed by army fiat? Or why their life is in danger for raising a flag in a land where even children are killed or jailed? What requiem can be sung for trees uprooted by army bulldozers? And, most of all, who can explain to those whose lands are confiscated and clear waters stolen, the message of peace? Remove the barbed wire, restore the land and its life-giving water.

The settlements must stop now. Peace cannot be waged while Palestinian land is confiscated in myriad ways and the status of the Occupied Territories is being decided each day by Israeli bulldozers and barbed wire. This is not simply a position; it is an irrefutable reality. Territory for peace is a travesty when territory for illegal settlement is official Israeli policy and practice. The settlements must stop now. In the name of the Palestinian people, we wish to directly address the Israeli people with whom we have had a prolonged exchange of pain: let us share hope instead. We are willing to live side by side on the land and the promise of the future. Sharing, however, requires two partners willing to share as equals. Mutuality and reciprocity must replace domination and hostility for genuine reconciliation and coexistence under international legality. Your security and ours are mutually dependent, as entwined as the fears and nightmares of our children.

We have seen some of you at your best and at your worst, for the occupier can hide no secrets from the occupied, and we are witness to the toll that occupation has exacted from you and yours. We have seen you anguish over the transformation of your sons and daughters into instruments of a blind and violent occupation - and we are sure that at no time did you envisage such a role for the children whom you thought would forge your future. We have seen you look back in deepest sorrow at the tragedy of your past and look on in horror at the disfigurement of the victim turned oppressor. Not for this have you nurtured your hopes, dreams and your offspring.

This is why we have responded with solemn appreciation to those of you who came to offer consolation to our bereaved, to give support to those whose homes were being demolished, and to extend encouragement and counsel to those detained behind barbed wire and iron bars. And we have marched together, often choking together at the non-discriminatory tear gas or crying out in pain as the clubs descended on both Palestinian and Israeli alike. For pain knows no national boundaries, and no one can claim a monopoly on suffering.

We once formed a human chain around Jerusalem, joining hands and calling for peace. Let us today form a moral chain around Madrid and continue that noble effort for peace and the promise of freedom for our sons and daughters. Break through the barriers of mistrust and manipulated fears. Let us look forward in magnanimity and in hope.

To our Arab brothers and sisters, most of whom are represented here in this historic occasion, we express our loyalty and gratitude for their life-long support and solidarity. We

are here together seeking a just and lasting peace whose cornerstone is freedom for Palestine, justice for the Palestinians, and an end to the occupation of all Palestinian and Arab lands. Only then can we really enjoy together the fruits of peace: prosperity, security and human dignity and freedom.

In particular, we address our Jordanian colleagues in our joint delegation. Our two peoples have a very special historic and geographic relationship. Together, we shall strive to achieve peace. We will continue to strive for our sovereignty, while proceeding freely and willingly to prepare the grounds for a confederation between the two states of Palestine and Jordan, which can be a cornerstone for our security and prosperity.

To the community of nations on our fragile planet, to the nations of Africa and Asia, to the Muslim world, and particularly to Europe, on whose southern and neighborly shores we meet today: from the heart of our collective struggle for peace, we greet you and acknowledge your support and recognition. You have recognized our rights and our government, and have given us real support and protection. You have penetrated the distorting mist of racism, stereotyping, and ignorance and committed the act of seeing the "invisible" and listening to the voice of the silenced. The Palestinians, under occupation and in exile, have become a reality in your eyes and, with courage and determination, you have affirmed the truth of our narrative. You have taken up our cause and our case, and we have brought you into our hearts. We thank for caring and daring to know the truth - the truth which must set us all free.

To the co-sponsors and participants in this occasion of awe and challenge, we pledge our commitment to the principle of justice, peace, and reconciliation based on international legitimacy and uniform standards. We shall persist, in our quest for peace, to place before you the substance and determination of our people, often victimized but never defeated. We shall pursue our people's right to self-determination, to the exhilaration of freedom, and to the warmth of the sun as a nation among equals.

This is the moment of truth; you must have the courage to recognize it and the will to implement it for our truth can no longer be hidden away in the dark recesses of inadvertency or neglect. The people of Palestine look at you with a straightforward, direct gaze, seeking to touch your heart, for you have dared to stir up hopes that cannot be abandoned. You cannot afford to let us down, for we have lived up to the values you espouse, and we have remained true to our cause.

We, the Palestinian people, made the imaginative leap in the Palestine National Council of November 1988, during which the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) launched its peace initiative based on Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, and declared Palestinian independence based on Resolution 181 of the United Nations, which gave birth to two states in 1948: Israel and Palestine. In December 1988, a historic speech before the United Nations in Geneva led directly to the launching of the Palestinian-American dialogue. Ever since then, our people has responded positively to every serious peace initiative and has done its utmost to ensure the success of this process. Israel, on the other hand, has placed many obstacles and barriers in the path of peace to negate the very validity of the process.

Its illegal and frenzied settlement activity is the most glaring evidence of its rejectionism, the latest settlement being erected just two days ago.

These historic decisions of the Palestine National Council wrenched the course of history from inevitable confrontation and conflict towards peace and mutual recognition. With our own hands, and in an act of sheer will, we have molded the shape of the future of our people. Our parliament has articulated the message of a people with the courage to say yes to the challenge of history, just as it provided the reference, in its resolutions last month in Algiers and in the Central Council meeting this month in Tunis, to go forward to this historic Conference. We cannot be made to bear the brunt of other people's "no." We must have reciprocity. We must have peace.

Ladies and gentlemen, in the Middle East there is no superfluous people outside time and place, but rather a state sorely missed by time and place - the state of Palestine. It must be born on the land of Palestine to redeem the injustice of the destruction of its historical reality and to free the people of Palestine from the shackles of their victimization. Our homeland has never ceased to exist in our minds and hearts, but it has to exist as a state on all the territories occupied by Israel in the war of 1967, with Jerusalem as its capital, in the context of that city's special status and its non-exclusive character.

This state, in a condition of emergence, has already been a subject of anticipation for too long. It should take place today, rather than tomorrow. However, we are willing to accept the proposal for a transitional stage, provided interim arrangements are not transformed into permanent status. The time frame must be condensed to respond to the dispossessed Palestinians' urgent need for sanctuary and to the occupied Palestinians' right to gain relief from oppression and to win recognition of their authentic will. During this phase, international protection for our people is most urgently needed, and the de jure application of the Fourth Geneva Convention is a necessary condition.

The phases must not prejudice the outcome; rather they require an internal momentum and motivation to lead sequentially to sovereignty. Bilateral negotiations on the withdrawal of Israeli forces, the dissolution of Israeli administration and the transfer of authority to the Palestinian people cannot proceed under coercion or threat in the current asymmetry of power. Israel must demonstrate its willingness to negotiate in good faith by immediately halting all settlement activity and land confiscation while implementing meaningful confidence-building measures. Without genuine progress, tangible constructive changes and just agreements during the bilateral talks, multilateral negotiations will be meaningless. Regional stability, security, and development are the logical outcome of an equitable and just solution to the Palestinian question, which remains the key to the resolution of wider conflicts and concerns.

In its confrontation of wills between the legitimacy of the people and the illegality of the occupation, the Intifada's message has been consistent: to embody the Palestinian state and to build its institutions and infrastructure. We seek recognition for this creative impulse which nurtures within it the potential nascent state. We have paid a heavy price for daring to substantiate our authenticity and to practice popular democracy in spite of the cruelty of occupation. It was a sheer act of will that brought us here, the same will which asserted

itself in the essence of the Intifada, as the cry for freedom, an act of civil resistance, and people's participation and empowerment. The Intifada is our drive towards nation building and social transformation.

We are here today with the support of our people, who have given itself the right to hope and to make a stand for peace. We must recognize, as well, that some of our people harbor serious doubts and skepticism about this process. Within our democratic, social, and political structures, we have evolved a respect for pluralism and diversity, and we shall guard the opposition's right to differ within the parameters of mutual respect and national unity.

The process launched here must lead us to the light at the end of the tunnel, and this light is the promise of a new Palestine - free, democratic, and respectful of human rights and the integrity of nature. Self-determination, ladies and gentlemen, can neither be granted nor withheld at the whim of the political self-interest of others, for it is enshrined in all international charters and humanitarian law. We claim this right; we firmly assert it here before you and in the eyes of the rest of the world, for it is a sacred and inviolable right which we shall relentlessly pursue and exercise with dedication and self-confidence and pride.

Let us end the Palestinian-Israeli fatal proximity in this unnatural condition of occupation, which has already claimed too many lives. No dream of expansion or glory can justify the taking of a single life. Set us free to reengage as neighbors and as equals on our holy land.

To our people in exile and under occupation, who have sent us to this appointment laden with their trust, love, and aspirations, we say that the load is heavy, and the task is great, but we shall be true. In the words of our great national poet, Mahmoud Darwish: "My homeland is not a suitcase, and I am no traveler." To the exiled and the occupied, we say: You shall return and you shall remain and we will prevail, for our cause is just. We will put on our embroidered robes and kafiyyas and, in the sight of the world, celebrate together on the day of liberation.

Refugee camps are no fit home for people who had been reared on the land of Palestine, in the warmth of the sun and freedom. The hail of Israeli bombs, almost daily pouring down on our defenseless civilian population in the refugee camps of Lebanon, is no substitute for the healing rain of the homeland. Yet, the international will had ensured their return in United Nations Resolution 194 - a fact willfully ignored and unenacted. Similarly, all other resolutions pertinent to the Palestinian question, beginning with Resolution 181, through Resolutions 242 and 338, and ending with Security Council Resolution 681, have, until now, been relegated to the domain of public debate, rather than real implementation. They form the larger body of legality, including all relevant provisions of international law, within which any peaceful settlement must proceed. If international legitimacy and the rule of law are to prevail and govern relations among nations, they must be respected and, impartially and uniformly, implemented. We, as Palestinians, require nothing less than justice.

To Palestinians everywhere: today we bear in our hands the precious gift of your love and your pain, and we shall set it down gently here before the eyes of the world and say - there is a right here which must be acknowledged, the right to self-determination and statehood;

there is strength and there is the scent of sacred incense in the air. Jerusalem, the heart of our homeland and the cradle of the soul, is shimmering through the barriers of occupation and deceit. The deliberate violation of its sanctity is also an act of violence against the collective human, cultural, and spiritual memory and an aggression against its enduring symbols of tolerance, magnanimity, and respect for cultural and religious authenticity. The cobbled streets of the Old City must not echo with the discordant beat of Israeli military boots; we must restore to them the chant of the muezzin, the chimes of the church bells, and the prayers of all the faithful calling for peace in the City of Peace.

From Madrid, let us light the candle of peace and let the olive branch blossom. Let us celebrate the rituals of justice and rejoice in the hymns of truth, for the awe of the moment is a promise to the future, which we must all redeem. The Palestinians will be free, and will stand tall among the community of nations in the fullness of the pride and dignity which by right belongs to all people. Today, our people under occupation are holding high the olive branch of peace. In the words of Chairman Arafat in 1974 before the U.N. General Assembly: Let not the olive branch of peace fall from my hands. Let not the olive branch of peace fall from the hands of the Palestinian people.