

NGO Meeting on Palestine

The fourth international meeting of nongovernmental organizations (NGO) on the Question of Palestine was held September 7-9th, at the UN offices in Geneva. The meeting was opened by Massomba Sarre, chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the International Rights of the Palestinian People. Mr. Sarre stressed the urgent need for additional constructive efforts by all governments to convene an international peace conference on the Middle East without delay.

The chairman of the International Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine, Donald Betz, declared that 1987 was the Year of the Palestinian People.

Diego Cordovez, UN undersecretary-general for special political affairs, said that it is a primary responsibility of the UN to search for a solution to the Palestinian problem.

The opening session concluded with the speech of Yasir Arafat, chairman of the PLO's Executive Committee. Mr. Arafat stated that peace in Palestine is an indivisible part of international peace and that the Palestinian people insist on the convening of an international peace conference under UN auspices and based on international legality.

PANEL ON INTER— NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Later on the first day, the NGO meeting heard more speeches on the subject of «The Need for and the Urgency of Convening the International Peace Conference on the Middle East, in accordance with UN General Assembly resolution 38/58C.» The keynote address was made by US Congressman Nick Joe Rahall, who criticized the US administration for refusing to recognize and deal with the PLO. He stated that it was an injustice to label all Palestinians as terrorists.

Panelist Vladimir Vinogradov, minister of foreign affairs for the Soviet Russian Republic, stated that the PLO and its friends had advanced peaceful proposals aimed at a political settlement, while Israel had not ad-



vanced a single peace initiative. On the contrary, Israel has continued to block the convention of an international conference by putting forward various obstacles, such as opposing the participation of the USSR. Mr. Vinogradov stressed that splitting the peace process into bilateral efforts is unacceptable, particularly because this would give unilateral advantage to one party. He said that the only way to a peace settlement which would meet the interests of all parties concerned was within the framework of international efforts, through convening a conference under UN auspices.

Panelist Gordon Binley, member of Australia's parliament, declared that any comprehensive and durable settlement required recognition of the rights of all states in the region to live within secure and recognized borders, Israeli return of the occupied Arab territories, and resolution of the Palestinian problem.

Peter Jankowitsch, member of Austria's parliament, said that the major condition for the success of the international conference was the participation of all parties concerned with the conflict. This should include the Soviet Union, since any settlement in the region should enjoy Soviet support. He added that Europe should also participate and stressed the vital role of the UN.

Heath Nelson MacQuarrie, member of the Canadian parliament, spoke mainly about the tragedy inflicted on the Palestinian people for forty years. He advocated Israeli-Palestinian dialogue.

Dr. M.S. Agwani, rector of Jawaharlal Nehru University in India, said the unresolved situation in the Middle East has had disasterous consequences not only for the region, but for the whole world. He blamed Israel for continuing to rely on its military power. He added that the Camp David accords did not bring peace since Israel itself deviated from them by invading Lebanon in 1982. He emphasized the need for an international conference and called for a more realistic US attitude towards the Middle East problem.

A representative of the All-India Arab Friendship Association concluded the panel by reiterating that a durable and just peace could not be established in the Middle East until the Palestinians were able to exercise their inalienable rights to self-determination and to return to their homeland and shape their own future.

The panel on the international conference continued on September 8th. Ibrahim Abu Loghod, PNC member and professor of political science at Northwestern University in the US, characterized the Israeli policy in the Middle East as colonialist. He noted that Israel's continued negation of the peace initiatives and the Palestinian people's right to self-determination, and the US position on the problem, continue to stand in the way of a peaceful settlement in the region.

Shafiq Al Hout, PLO representative in Lebanon and PNC member, drew attention to the dangers emanating from the Iran-Iraq conflict and Israeli nuclear armament.

Mattiyahu Peled, member of the Israeli Knesset and professor at Tel Aviv University, criticized Israel's development of long-range nuclear missiles and its agreement to house VOA (Voice of America) transmitters in its territory. He denounced the Israeli and US attempts to exclude the PLO and the Soviet Union from the peace process, and pointed to the possibility of new Israeli acts of aggression.

The concluding panelist was Tawfiq