

which was faced with a PLO request for admission as a full member state; currently the PLO holds observer status. UNESCO's Director-General Federico Mayor tried to avoid this debate, stating that UNESCO should limit itself to increasing aid to Palestinians living in the occupied territories. Therefore, prior to the 159-nation conference, UNESCO's executive board recommended that the request be postponed until 1991. Shortly thereafter, the general conference, which is the highest decision-making body, confirmed this decision, but ruled to give the PLO a bigger role in UNESCO.

Israel objected to the decision, saying that the issue of Palestinian membership should be completely removed from the agenda, while the US and Britain said after the conference they would review their decision about returning to the body. The US stated that if Palestine (which over 100 nations have recognized as an independent state) was admitted, that would remove any possibility of its return. (Both the US and Britain quit UNESCO in the mid 1980's, claiming that the organization had become too politicized, spent too much money and was poorly managed under the former director.)

## FAO

Coinciding with the opening of the UN debate on Palestine, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization held its conference in Rome. On November 29th, the FAO approved a resolution which called for (1) cooperation with the PLO in distributing food to Palestinians in the occupied territories, (2) the PLO to assist with economic development in the occupied territories, (3) opposition to the Israeli confiscation of Palestinian land and expropriation of Palestinian water resources, and (4) the FAO to include the occupied territories in future programs. The vote was 96-2 (Israel and the US), with 14 abstentions.

The US threatened to cut off funds to the FAO if the the resolution were

to pass. This resolution can be viewed as a PLO victory, particularly in light of the pressure and monetary threats which the US has historically resorted to.

## Upgrading the PLO's status

Two days before the debate on Palestine was to begin, the PLO announced that several Arab countries planned to introduce a resolution in the General Assembly that would upgrade the PLO's observer status to observer nation. Presently, the Vatican, North and South Korea, Switzerland and others hold this status. If this resolution were to pass, the PLO would still be unable to vote or address the General Assembly unless invited to do so.

The PLO's announcement elicited an immediate US reaction: The State Department threatened to cut off \$216 million (one-fourth of the UN budget) which the US is obligated to pay annually. The US also owes the UN more than \$500 million in unpaid regular budget dues and payment for peacekeeping operations.

The resolution was formally introduced on November 29th, which not only opened the UN's debate on Palestine, but is also the UN-declared international day of solidarity with the Palestinian people, as well as the date of the UN decision to partition Palestine in 1947. The vote on this resolution was postponed on several different occasions.

Eventually, the PLO and the Arab countries postponed indefinitely the resolution for several reasons. First and foremost was the unprincipled US threat to cut off funding to the UN, which is used as a lever to pressure the international body, and in turn the PLO and the Arab countries, in order to have them withdraw the resolution. Another reason for the postponement was that Egypt and Morocco were not in favor of the resolution, thus not presenting a united Arab front, even at the UN.

In general, the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly, particularly

over the past two years, have been basically politically solid, condemning Israeli repression and supporting the Palestinian cause on various levels. On the other hand, UN Security Council resolutions have been limited to the most blatant Israeli violations of human rights, such as expulsions. This in large is due to the negative role the US plays in the Security Council and its use of the veto.

Concerning the Arab position, many Arab countries have proposed resolutions in the world body, but much more can be done on the international level. For example, the struggle for upgrading the PLO's status demanded a united Arab stance, but the historical link between US imperialism and the reactionary regimes led some of them to take negative stances vis-a-vis the question of Palestine. The Arab countries have not been effective enough in meeting the requirements of the intifada. What is needed now, more than ever, from the Arab states and the international community is to work for the isolation of Israel, as is the case with South Africa. This type of punishment is only fitting since Israel has displayed flagrant disregard for UN resolutions.

With increasing international consensus on the convening of a fully-empowered international peace conference, and awareness of the plight of the Palestinian people, the intransigence of Israel and its ally, the US, remain as stumbling blocks. This alliance is being exposed consistently at the UN. With increased condemnation of Israel by the international body, and resolutions such as 43/177 of December 1988 citing the usage of Palestine in place of the designation *PLO* throughout the UN system, the Palestinian people and the intifada are achieving more and more gains internationally, compounding Israeli isolation. Without a doubt, these gains are due to a large extent to the Palestinian intifada in the occupied territories; with its continued escalation, more can be expected.