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Official Records

President: Mr. Holkeri (Finland)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Fall (Guinea), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 23

Cooperation between the United Nations and the Caribbean Community

Report of the Secretary-General (A/55/215)

Draft resolution (A/55/L.24/Rev.1)

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I give the floor to the representative of Antigua and Barbuda to introduce draft resolution A/55/L.24/Rev.1.

Ms. Lovell (Antigua and Barbuda): It gives me great pleasure to introduce draft resolution A/55/L.24/Rev.1, entitled "Cooperation between the United Nations and the Caribbean Community", on behalf of the member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

Other countries have indicated an interest in co-sponsoring this draft in addition to the countries listed on the document. They are: Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Costa Rica, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Japan, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Trinidad and Tobago and the United States.

The member States of the Caribbean Community are happy to report that interactions with the United Nations over the past two years have been both cordial and beneficial. This is particularly appreciated, as

CARICOM looks to the United Nations for understanding and assistance in dealing with the myriad of responsibilities facing small developing States. The draft resolution basically updates the one adopted by consensus in October 1998 as resolution 53/17.

In the fifth preambular paragraph, the draft notes with satisfaction that the second general meeting between the United Nations and CARICOM was held in the Bahamas on 27 and 28 March 2000. The meeting agreed that the future programme of work should be structured within the following framework: first, implementation of the CARICOM single market and economy; secondly, positioning of CARICOM in the global economy, particularly support for international policy formation, capacity-building and training; thirdly, human and social development, including human resources development, poverty alleviation, food security, the Plan of Action for Drug Control Coordination and Cooperation, a regional strategic plan on HIV/AIDS, and the strengthening of governance and security; fourthly, follow-up to the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States; fifthly, follow-up to General Assembly resolution 54/225 on promoting an integrated management approach to the Caribbean Sea in the context of sustainable development; and sixthly, development of a cooperation programme in the field of public information between CARICOM and the United Nations system.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.



Let me point out that the fifth and sixth points speak directly to the sixth and seventh preambular paragraphs and to operative paragraph 5, respectively.

Permit me to zero in on cooperation with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). ECLAC is considered to be of paramount importance to the countries of the Commonwealth Caribbean, and, through ECLAC and the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee, we are looking forward to more a direct and active implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. It was also through the collaboration of ECLAC and CARICOM that resolution 54/225 was adopted in December of last year, that CARICOM States are able to keep abreast of the follow-up to global conferences; and that the benefits of science and technology are being more fully utilized in areas such as agriculture, energy and marine affairs.

Two other bodies that are of vital importance to CARICOM States are the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). There has been continued collaboration between UNCTAD and CARICOM, and the computerized customs management system — which is part of UNCTAD technical assistance in trade and transport efficiency, notably in regard to customs modernization — has been particularly beneficial. UNDP support in the area of disaster management and preparedness has been deeply appreciated. This must be borne in mind, along with the fact that two CARICOM countries which normally are not subjected to the wrath of hurricanes were affected this calendar year. Suriname, which was considered too far south to be in the path of hurricanes, was surprised by Hurricane Joyce, while further north Keith took a significant toll on Belize.

Whereas the introduction of a draft resolution does not call for a mention of all the bodies or agencies from which CARICOM draws benefits, it must be stated that the region values the cooperation with the United Nations and, as such, enthusiastically recommends, in operative paragraph 7, that the third general meeting between representatives of the Caribbean Community and its associated institutions and of the United Nations system be held in 2002 in New York. It also requests the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its fifty-seventh

session a report on the implementation of the present draft resolution.

Having introduced the draft and pointed out some of its salient aspects, I urge that it be adopted by consensus. On behalf of the CARICOM States, I thank all those States that have joined in its co-sponsorship.

Mr. Bossière (France) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union X Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia X and the associated countries Cyprus, Malta and Turkey, as well as the European Free Trade Association country member of the European Economic Area, Iceland, align themselves with this statement.

The European Union notes with interest the Secretary-General's report on cooperation between the United Nations and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). The European Union considers that the joint statement adopted at the meeting in Nassau on 27 and 28 March 2000 between the United Nations agencies and the CARICOM Secretariat is a useful working framework for the future development of relations between the two organizations.

The European Union particularly welcomes the support provided to CARICOM by the United Nations in the areas of the completion of the guidance framework for the creation of the Caribbean single market and economy and of implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. For its part, the European Union is prepared to continue to cooperate actively with CARICOM in these sectors. In economic terms, diversifying national production, seeking economies of scale and enhancing competitiveness are factors that can contribute decisively to economic growth and development.

The European Union confirms its commitment to continue to provide technical and financial assistance in support of CARICOM's efforts.

The European Union wishes in particular to express its willingness to work with all the member countries of CARICOM to combat the damaging effects of drug trafficking and international financial transactions linked to criminal activities. Effective joint action against the laundering of the proceeds of

illegal activities is a common concern of all Member States. We acknowledge the commitment of the CARICOM countries in this matter and want to back them up actively.

Mr. Kobayashi (Japan): I would like to begin by expressing my appreciation to the representative of Antigua and Barbuda for her introductory statement, as well as for the draft resolution, which Japan has the honour to co-sponsor. We hope that it will be adopted by consensus.

The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) has as its objective greater regional economic integration, foreign policy coordination, and cooperation in the areas of health, medical care and education. Recently CARICOM has been coordinating a regional response to domestic issues and to disputes among member States over national boundaries, and has taken commendable initiatives to establish a single regional market and a Caribbean court of justice. Japan highly appreciates the essential and dynamic role CARICOM has been playing to achieve stability in, and sustainable development of, the Caribbean region.

Japan has long stressed the importance of cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations. It thus applauds the fact that the second general meeting between representatives of CARICOM and its associated institutions and representatives of the United Nations system was held in Nassau on 27 and 28 March 2000. Japan hopes that the cooperative relations between the two organizations will continue to flourish in various fields.

Itself an island nation, Japan recognizes that island nations are particularly sensitive to such problems as global warming and marine pollution, problems that affect all humankind. It is therefore up to countries such as Japan and the member countries of the Caribbean Community to alert the international community as a whole to the problems that lie ahead, just as a harbour pilot points out the shoals on which a ship could founder. Aware of this common bond, Japan welcomes opportunities to meet and exchange views with the leaders of other island nations.

During the Millennium Summit, for example, Prime Minister Mori of Japan hosted a reception in honour of the heads of State or Government of small island States and landlocked developing countries, at which he had the pleasure of meeting with a number of his counterparts from the Caribbean region. Japan has

also held a series of high-level consultations with Caribbean nations since 1993, and is pleased to announce that tomorrow, 8 November, Japan is convening a Japan-CARICOM ministerial-level conference in Tokyo, which will be attended by representatives from 14 CARICOM member States. It will be the first time such a meeting has been held at the ministerial level. It is hoped that through the discussions at this conference the partnership between Japan and CARICOM will be further strengthened, particularly as regards the economic and social development of Caribbean countries and their greater integration into the global economy. It is also hoped that such dialogue will facilitate joint responses to global issues and joint efforts in international forums between CARICOM and Japan. This ministerial-level conference is thus one of the ways in which Japan is assisting the development efforts of Caribbean countries as well as the cooperative activities of those countries and the United Nations.

In conclusion, I wish once again to commend CARICOM and the United Nations for their efforts to strengthen peace and security and achieve economic and social stability throughout the region. I would also like to confirm Japan's full support for the activities of CARICOM aimed at further developing the region and urge the international community to lend its broad support to their efforts.

Miss Durrant (Jamaica): At the outset, I wish to associate my delegation with the statement made by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda on behalf of the member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

Jamaica is particularly pleased with the progress in cooperation and coordination on a range of development and humanitarian initiatives that has been achieved between the United Nations system and the Caribbean Community. Let me thank the Secretary-General for the report contained in document A/55/215, which provides a comprehensive account of the activities undertaken during the period under review and also reports on the second meeting between representatives of the United Nations system and the Caribbean Community.

I now wish to highlight a few of the areas in which cooperation has been undertaken, as well as some in which we would wish to encourage further collaboration.

The programme of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) aimed at promoting adolescent sexual and reproductive health continues to make an extremely valuable contribution to the efforts of the Governments of the Caribbean to deal with an issue which remains a formidable challenge to our health and social sectors. Also worthy of mention is the collaboration between the University of the West Indies and UNFPA towards the development of a multi-disciplinary diploma in population and development, which will foster institutional and technical capacity in the region at the executive and operational levels. In addition, the presentation of UNFPA Caribbean Media Awards, begun in 1999, has encouraged excellence in reporting on population and development issues in the region.

Jamaica takes this opportunity to place on record its appreciation to UNFPA for its continued demonstrated commitment to advancing the welfare of CARICOM countries in the field of population. This has been due in no small measure to the leadership provided by the Fund's Executive Director, Dr. Nafis Sadik. Indeed, her contribution to the region was recognized by the University of the West Indies last Friday, 3 November, when, at its commencement exercises, the University conferred on her the degree of Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*. We take this opportunity to congratulate Dr. Sadik, to thank her for her stewardship and to wish her every success in her future endeavours.

The need for strong mechanisms for emergency response in the Caribbean region, which is prone to hurricanes and other natural disasters, cannot be over-emphasized. This season, it was Belize that suffered from the ravages of Hurricane Keith and Suriname from Hurricane Joyce. The cooperation that continues between the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA), with emphasis on the exchange of information on early warning and on the coordination of relief and rehabilitation efforts, is very important. We will see further concrete expression in the training session in disaster assessment and coordination to be organized for the Caribbean early next year.

Cooperation between the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and CARICOM, which has been enhanced by the appointment by CARICOM and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) of a

Regional Maritime Safety Adviser, should also result in very positive developments in an area of increasing concern to the region, namely, the protection and preservation of the Caribbean Sea. Jamaica is extremely pleased with the report of the close working relationship established between the IMO and CARICOM, which has resulted in the definition of programmes designed to address the specific maritime development objectives of our subregion. We record our appreciation for the project sponsored by the IMO, UNDP and CARICOM to strengthen national, legal and administrative regimes for more effective implementation of the Caribbean Memorandum of Understanding on Port State Control. We look forward to the continued collaboration of the IMO with CARICOM in this important area. We also wish to express our appreciation to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) for its work through the regional coordinating unit, as well as for the strengthening of the regional seas programme.

We continue to look to the United Nations system for support in the region's effort to grapple with two scourges that have been threatening the safety and security of the subregion. I speak of the illicit traffic in narcotics and the proliferation in small arms that attends this deadly trade. We welcome the ongoing cooperation between CARICOM and the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP), particularly in the identification of the priority needs of the Caribbean. Of particular importance have been the joint UNDCP/CARICOM missions to evaluate the drug control situation in the CARICOM countries over the past two years.

We also look forward to increased collaboration with the newly revitalized United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Lima. We believe that this Centre can play an integral role in assisting our Governments in better understanding and controlling the problem of illegal traffic in small arms. This is an area in which we believe greater cooperation between the United Nations and CARICOM is possible, particularly through the Centre's programme of seminars, workshops and other activities aimed at strengthening national and regional efforts to control the illegal flow of firearms.

CARICOM cooperation with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) Port of Spain office is very well established, and the extensive joint activity is clearly demonstrated

in the Secretary-General's report. We take this opportunity to thank the Director of the subregional office for the valuable programme between CARICOM and ECLAC which has been fostered under her leadership. We look forward in particular to ECLAC's continued technical support as the interim secretariat for implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

Jamaica also expresses appreciation to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) for the long-standing collaboration with CARICOM on the implementation of the UNCTAD computerized customs management system. As member States of our region seek to meet the increasing challenges brought by globalization and trade liberalization, Jamaica would welcome greater collaboration between CARICOM and UNCTAD in analysing of the needs of CARICOM States within the context of the existing global economic climate.

Jamaica welcomes the practice of holding regular consultations between representatives of the United Nations system and of the CARICOM secretariat, and we agree that these meetings should be institutionalized on a biannual basis. We encourage continued dialogue and action in regard to the areas identified for future programming, including capacity-building and training, in particular in information technology. We also look forward to the early establishment of the proposed website to monitor the implementation of the programme of cooperation.

Finally, Jamaica is pleased to co-sponsor the draft resolution presented by the representative of Antigua and Barbuda and to commend it to this Assembly for adoption by consensus.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with General Assembly resolution 46/8 of 16 October 1991, I now give the floor to the observer of the Caribbean Community.

Ms. Barnett (Caribbean Community): It is an honour to participate in this debate on cooperation between the United Nations and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) in this millennium year.

States Members of this Organization have already marked the year with some major activities, the primary one being the Millennium Summit last September. In this year also, the United Nations and its

specialized agencies met in March with the CARICOM secretariat and the associate institutions of the Caribbean Community in the Commonwealth of the Bahamas. At that forum, we focused on issues of concern to the wider Caribbean, assessed the status of our cooperation and exchanged ideas on other areas for possible cooperation, in full recognition that the viability of our Caribbean region is integrally linked to global and hemispheric developments, for the Caribbean is an integral part of those global and hemispheric developments.

Evolving global and hemispheric developments have brought new challenges and new opportunities to the dynamic process of human, social and economic development in the region. In charting its way forward, the Caribbean Community has placed people at the centre of its agenda. The Community has also resolved to strengthen its institutions so that they are well equipped to function effectively in the increasingly competitive global economy. Good governance and democracy will remain the hallmarks of our political, social and economic development. These are some of the elements of the vision of our region as our Community seeks to participate fully in the hemisphere and in the wider international community.

We invite the international community to share this vision with us, a vision that places priority on the human potential, on our people — all our people. This is in keeping with the focus of the Millennium Summit on the world's people. The Secretary-General's report entitled "We the peoples: the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century" inextricably linked the United Nations to the welfare of the world's people. We consider this an essential creed, binding on all members of this world community.

For some time, the nations of the Caribbean have been calling for greater focus on the Agenda for Development, which embraces growth with equity. We are pleased to note that the United Nations systems have waged a successful campaign that has broadened the comparative basis of measuring development, introduced into the consciousness of a global community the notion of international public goods, and insisted on a more concerted effort to reduce poverty and to mainstream issues related to gender. At the same time, we recognize the importance of conflict resolution and peacekeeping in times of hostility. We emphasize, however, that the prevention of hostilities

is, in the long term, the most effective means of peacekeeping.

Poverty is the worst form of violence against humankind. Poverty and underdevelopment are fertile fields for hostilities in families, within countries and among neighbouring countries. Development, which removes or reduces poverty and deprivation, is the most effective weapon in peacekeeping. Poverty can be eliminated only by empowering the poor through access to life skills and by making social and economic investments. Aid and debt relief, although necessary and critical measures, will not by themselves uplift the lives of the many poor in the world.

In this context, we strongly support the initiative of the United Nations to convene early in 2001 the High-level International Intergovernmental Event on Financing for Development. We urge the international community, and particularly the more developed and prosperous members, to treat this initiative with the seriousness which it deserves. Let it not be just an event, an opportunity for regrets and added frustration. Let it be a meeting where the excellent ideas, the wise words expressed during the Millennium Summit, are translated into concrete and meaningful activities to address the real issues of the world.

In our discussions with the United Nations and its specialized institutions earlier this year, the Caribbean representatives highlighted the efforts to deepen cooperation in our Community, particularly the establishment of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy and the positioning of CARICOM in the global economic environment to participate more effectively in international and hemispheric economic negotiations and policy-making, including the negotiations of the World Trade Organization in agriculture and services, the international telecommunications negotiations, follow-up to the tenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the thrust to focus on the social and environmental factors in sustainable development. We call for the strong support of the United Nations and its specialized agencies for these objectives and initiatives. We also look to the United Nations and its specialized agencies and the wider international community to support the region's efforts as it seeks to overcome the challenge of the digital divide.

We look to the United Nations and its specialized agencies, and we do so in full recognition of what our collaboration can achieve. Most recently, with the collaborative assistance of the Pan American Health Organization, the World Health Organization and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, we have developed a comprehensive plan of action for HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean, which is garnering financial and technical support from a cross-section of international agencies. The United Nations Population Fund has pledged to work with us in the conduct of the 2000 Round of Population and Housing Censuses in the Caribbean. The Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, based in Trinidad and Tobago in the Caribbean and established to serve the Caribbean, provides valuable support in the area of economic and social activities in the Caribbean region. Its work needs to be acknowledged and further supported.

The small States in the Caribbean are very vulnerable to international developments and natural phenomena. This was clearly demonstrated in the report of the Commonwealth Secretariat/World Bank Joint Task Force on Small States, entitled "Small States: Meeting Challenges in the Global Economy", which was completed earlier this year. Hurricane Keith most recently provided one of our annual reminders last month. As Deputy Secretary-General of the Community and as a national of Belize, I take this opportunity to thank the countries and agencies which have contributed to the relief effort in Belize in the aftermath of Hurricane Keith. The Commonwealth Secretariat/World Bank report demonstrates that these are not infrequent, random events, but a constant threat to small States, demanding systematic and sustained efforts of the international community to reduce the vulnerability of these States. We urge the international community, including the multilateral agencies, to adopt and implement the conclusions and recommendations of the report. Let us recall that many of the actions necessary were signalled to us in the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

In the vein of the reduction of vulnerability, the Caribbean Community wishes to thank the international community for the resolution on promoting an integrated management approach to the Caribbean Sea area in the context of sustainable

development, adopted at the fifty-fourth session of the United Nations in December 1999. While the resolution does not embody the full concept of the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development, it moves significantly in the direction of securing this patrimony and lifeline for future generations of Caribbean people. We in the Caribbean are organizing ourselves to implement the resolution. We are acutely aware, however, that success requires international cooperation.

We trust that at this session the General Assembly, in considering the Secretary-General's report on the resolution, will not only encourage the further development of the integrated management approach to the Caribbean Sea area, which, in the Caribbean context, must take the nexus between the activities on the land and the sea into account, but, in doing so, will positively consider the wider concept of recognizing the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development. For, let us face it, the Caribbean Sea is the most important natural resource shared by all States in the Caribbean region, and for many economic and social purposes. If properly defended, managed and recognized by the international community as an integral part of the region's development efforts, it will be preserved for the continued use and ongoing activities of future generations of people of the Caribbean and of the world.

The Caribbean Community, as a community of small States, needs a strong United Nations and a responsive international system. The democratic norms that are generally shared and encouraged within countries must also be the hallmark of relations between countries and within institutions. The messages of the last few years in these halls, in the various international forums and from the streets — from Seattle through Washington to Prague — have all been heard and recorded. As the international community considers reform of this global Organization, let the message of democracy be the guiding principle. As small States in the Caribbean, supportive of multilateral approaches to problem solving, we can ask for nothing less. Should this fail, our hopes and aspirations to be leaders, to make substantial contributions to world peace and development, cannot bear fruit.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

Before we take a decision on the draft resolution, I would like to announce that since it was introduced the following States have joined the sponsors: Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/55/L.24/Rev.1.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/55/L.24/Rev.1?

Draft resolution A/55/L.24/Rev.1 was adopted (resolution 55/17).

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): May I take it that the General Assembly decides to conclude its consideration of agenda item 23?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 36

Bethlehem 2000

Draft resolution (A/55/L.3)

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I call on the representative of Senegal to introduce draft resolution A/55/L.3.

Mr. Ka (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): I am confident that I express the opinion of all members when I say that the discussion on this agenda item should have taken place in a more relaxed atmosphere. Nevertheless, we are all aware that since Christmas 1999, right up to the recent regrettable events, thousands of people have flocked from all over the world to the Palestinian city of Bethlehem to celebrate in joy and in peace the two-thousandth anniversary of the birth of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and thus to welcome the dawn of the third millennium. Attracted by the city's sacred and historic character, the visitors were also particularly aware of its eternal message — a message of tolerance, harmony, reconciliation and peace. In 1997 the Palestinian Authority launched the Bethlehem 2000 Project, providing for the restoration of many religious and historic buildings in the city and for reconstruction of the city's infrastructure in order to host the millennium celebrations. Due to the preceding years of conflict in the region, the renovation of the city was very difficult. From the start it was clear that for the Project to be implemented well, and in time, considerable help from the international community would be needed — help that was both diverse and well coordinated. To help the Palestinian people to

complete this enterprise successfully, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People took on the job of promoting the Project and raising the awareness of international public opinion regarding its goals.

At the request of our Committee, and given the universal importance of the Project, the General Assembly decided to include in its agenda, at both the fifty-third and fifty-fourth sessions, an item entitled "Bethlehem 2000", and adopted without a vote resolutions 53/27 and 54/22, in which it expressed its support for the Bethlehem 2000 Project and appealed to the international community as a whole to strengthen its support and its commitment in order to ensure the success of the Project.

In response to these appeals by the General Assembly, the Committee has systematically given a special place to the Bethlehem 2000 Project in its various activities and in its programme of work. The most recent such event was the United Nations Seminar on Prospects for Palestinian Economic Development and the Middle East Peace Process, which took place in Cairo on 20 and 21 June 2000 under the auspices of the Committee. That Seminar stressed the need to continue the drive to raise public awareness of this project and to obtain still more partners in its support. The Bureau of the Committee has also had regular meetings on this important issue with representatives of intergovernmental organizations such as the European Union, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the League of Arab States, as well as meetings with non-governmental organizations as well.

When this question was dealt with during intergovernmental meetings, in which I was a participant during the course of the year as Chairman of our Committee, particularly meetings that took place within the framework of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Organization of African Unity or the Non-Aligned Movement, at such meetings I diligently and systematically promoted the goals of the Bethlehem 2000 Project and gave an account of the kind of activities undertaken by our Committee.

The Division for Palestinian Rights of the United Nations Secretariat continues to post information on the Project on the Internet in the context of the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL). Moreover, consistent with

resolution 54/41, the Department of Public Information opened a special web site entitled "Bethlehem 2000".

I am particularly happy to recall here one event of considerable importance that took place last March. I refer to the historic voyage by His Holiness, Pope John Paul II, to the Holy Land. When he went to the holy cities of Bethlehem and others in Israel he preached a message of peace. In Bethlehem it took place in the Nativity Square itself, which was a source of inspiration and spiritual uplift for all. It is particularly encouraging to note that the sovereign Pontiff, in his message, welcomed the fact that resolutions on Bethlehem 2000 were adopted unanimously by the international community.

The initiative to raise the profile of the project and its goals throughout the world has succeeded in bringing in substantial contributions from Member States. Contributions have also been received from intergovernmental organizations and representatives of civil society. I should like to stress here that the Committee is particularly grateful to all Member States who have supported in the past, and who continue to support, our initiatives in this important field.

However, there is still much that remains to be done over the next few years, not only in the city of Bethlehem itself, but in other West Bank Palestinian towns, as well as in the Gaza Strip. We consider Bethlehem 2000 to be a kind of pilot project that could help launch similar development projects in many other places in Palestine. For this much international support and aid will be necessary. We need to help the Palestinian people if they are to be able to conclude successfully the enormous tasks of reconstruction and development, and support from donors remains indispensable if we are to improve the economic and social position of the Palestinian people and, in this way, establish a viable Palestinian economy.

Bearing in mind the importance of coordinated international action needed in order to conclude this project successfully, the Committee would like to repeat its appeal to the international community to continue its support and assistance to the Bethlehem 2000 project and support to other Palestinian towns and villages as well.

The Committee remains confident that once the situation is back to normal, pilgrims and tourists will continue to flock to Bethlehem from all over the world. They will go back to Bethlehem again, because it is the

place where Jesus Christ was born and also to pay homage to the rich, historic, religious and cultural traditions of the Palestinian people, and they will do it in a climate of peace and reconciliation, reconciliation for all peoples of all beliefs and all religions.

On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I now have the honour of presenting draft resolution A/55/L.3 entitled "Bethlehem 2000".

But may I begin by listing the countries who have also joined in sponsoring the draft resolution: Andorra, Argentina, Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Chile, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kenya, Kuwait, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Luxembourg, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Netherlands, Norway, Oman, Panama, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Spain, Sweden, Togo, Tunisia, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Venezuela, Ukraine.

In this draft resolution the General Assembly welcomes the world-embracing and historic demonstration that took place in Bethlehem at the beginning of the third millennium and which should be a symbol of the hopes for peace among all peoples of the world. It manifests its support for the Bethlehem 2000 Project and welcomes the efforts undertaken in this respect by the Palestinian Authority. The Assembly notes, with appreciation the worldwide support for the Bethlehem 2000 Project and requests the international community as a whole, including the private sector, to increase and speed up its support and its commitment to the Project in order to ensure the success of this great initiative. It requests the Secretary-General to continue to mobilize the relevant organizations and institutions within the United Nations system to redouble their efforts in order to provide the overall financing for the Bethlehem 2000 Project.

The draft resolution also welcomes the participation of His Holiness Pope John Paul II, heads of State and Government, eminent personalities, as well as religious leaders, who by their presence enhanced the anniversary ceremonies.

Finally, the draft resolution proposes that the Assembly should conclude consideration of the item entitled "Bethlehem 2000" at the current session.

In conclusion, I wish to take this opportunity to express once again the Committee's deep gratitude to the States, bodies of the United Nations system and international and non-governmental organizations which, over the past three years, have responded to the appeal and supported this particularly worthwhile Project. Thanks to their generosity, the Palestinian people have been able to achieve one of their many dreams and aspirations. It is to be hoped that the good will created by the Project will have a lasting effect on the region and that it will allow peace to take root in hearts and minds, in the interest of the peoples of the region.

Finally, I wish to express the hope that, as last year, the draft resolution will receive massive support, with adoption by consensus once again.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): Before calling on the next speaker, I wish to inform members that in a letter dated 21 September 2000 addressed to the President of the General Assembly the Permanent Representative of Sweden to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chairman of the Western European and Others Group for the month of September, requests that the General Assembly hear in plenary a statement by the observer of the Holy See during the debate on agenda item 36, "Bethlehem 2000". Taking into consideration the importance attached to the issue under discussion, it has been proposed that the General Assembly should take a decision on that request.

May I take it that there is no objection to hearing a statement by the observer of the Holy See in the debate on agenda item 36, as proposed?

It was so decided.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I call on the observer of Palestine.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Palestinian town of Bethlehem, the birthplace of Jesus Christ, is still being subjected to attacks by the Israeli occupation army. Its residents and those of other Palestinian towns and villages are still being subjected to a new bloody campaign of suppression, a crazy campaign that has so far claimed more than 150 martyrs and injured 3,000 Palestinians over 40 days. This is not the climate we had hoped for to renew the celebration in the General Assembly of Bethlehem 2000. We had called for postponement of consideration of this item, because we cannot celebrate while our

people are being suppressed. Regrettably, and despite that postponement, that reality still exists.

The Palestinian side has made tireless efforts, as has the entire world, to create a physical reality on the ground alongside the beautiful spiritual reality so that together we can mark the transition from the second millennium to the third millennium since the birth of Christ in the city of Christ, Bethlehem. The United Nations has made great efforts in this area. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People included this item on the agenda of the General Assembly along with other important programmes of action, for which we thank the Committee and its Chairman, Ambassador Ibra Duguène Ka.

For its part, the General Assembly adopted two resolutions by consensus during the last two sessions. The same was done by other United Nations programmes and organizations, attaching great importance to this matter. Since the adoption of the resolution last year, we have witnessed important events in the celebrations. Many Presidents, heads of Government and other international personalities participated in the Christmas celebrations in Bethlehem, at the invitation of President Yasser Arafat. We express our appreciation to them all for their participation. We also take pride in what was done during Christmas celebrations according to the Eastern calendar and the fact that all heads of the Orthodox Church got together for the first time and participated. That was followed by the blessed visit of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to the holy land. This, of course, included his visit to Bethlehem and the mass he celebrated in Manger Square.

We were preparing to continue these celebrations next Christmas through Easter 2001. Our Palestinian people have participated enthusiastically and with pleasure in this universally important work, since we are blessed by having the birthplace of Jesus Christ in our land. We had felt that all these events were fresh indicators that the suffering of the Palestinian people would end and that they, in their independent country, with Jerusalem as its capital, would join other countries in the celebrations.

We cannot celebrate these days, but we still believe that it is very important for the General Assembly to adopt for the last time the draft resolution before it. We also hope that it will be adopted by

consensus. Despite the pain we feel, we have not yet lost hope that we will be able to resume the celebrations and perhaps bring them to their culmination. Moreover, we are confident that in the near future we will truly be able to join the international community, represented in the Organization as Palestine, the State that encompasses Bethlehem.

In conclusion, let us pray together with all believers of the world for the current suspension of celebrations to end soon and for peace to be restored to the land of peace.

Mr. Dausá Céspedes (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Destiny has chosen that we should debate a lofty matter of such importance to the attainment of a fair, peaceful solution to the Middle East conflict at a time when the peace process in the region appears to be more a chimera than a reality, because of the brutal aggression unleashed by Israel against the Palestinian population.

Since it was launched by the Palestinian National Authority in 1997, the Bethlehem 2000 Project has become a process of profound thinking and searching for hope and peace by all the peoples of the world, and in particular by the Palestinian people. This commemoration, which celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ 2000 years ago in the city of Bethlehem, has enabled us to pay homage to the history, beauty and sanctity of a city in which the past, the present and the future converge in the hope of achieving a world free from hatred, a world of solidarity and cooperation. Many heads of State and Government, as well as a number of world personalities, including Pope John Paul II, have visited the city of Bethlehem, thereby contributing to the splendour and high profile of the celebrations.

Nevertheless, the unrestrained escalation of violence by Israeli forces against the civilian Palestinian population has not, unfortunately, spared Bethlehem, which has also suffered the consequences of this new aggression with a toll of civilians injured and killed. Bethlehem, a city with one of the world's richest historical, cultural and religious heritages, has, along with other Palestinian cities, suffered serious damage to its infrastructure as a result of its occupation over many years. In fact, one of the initial objectives of the Bethlehem 2000 Project was to restore many of the city's religious and historic sites, an objective that was

being accomplished, with the support of a number of governmental and non-governmental bodies, and, above all, through a great deal of effort by the Palestinian National Authority and the Palestinian people.

The ongoing nature of the Bethlehem 2000 Project and the major results achieved to date justify the pride and satisfaction my delegation feels, but at the same time they reaffirm our conviction that the international community should continue to provide every possible support. In that connection, we welcome the support for the success of the project given by United Nations agencies and programmes.

The Middle East peace process is going through one of its most complex phases. Once again, the entire world has seen how Israeli forces opposed to a peaceful, just and lasting solution to the conflict in the Middle East are attempting to make violence and aggression prevail over peace and negotiation. It is our collective responsibility to prevent the enemies of peace from having their way.

Weeks of escalating aggression, characterized by excessive use of military force, have left over 150 Palestinians dead, including over 30 children. Cuba strongly condemns the aggression and acts of violence committed by Israel against the Palestinian population, and calls on the international community to speak out forcefully against those crimes. We reaffirm our complete solidarity with the cause of the Palestinian people in their just struggle for the establishment of an independent, sovereign State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and for the return of all occupied Arab territories.

It is a real honour for my delegation once again to co-sponsor the Bethlehem 2000 draft resolution, as we have been doing since 1998. Far from detracting from the importance of the project, the current state of the Middle East peace process makes the Project an expression of the will of the international community to make progress in its noble cause of peace and understanding, and its interest in doing so. We must not allow 2000 years of history, tradition, religion and culture to be tarnished by the hatred and aggression of those who oppose a peaceful, just and lasting solution to the conflict in the Middle East. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that peace prevails. Cuba will always be ready to cooperate in this endeavour.

Mr. Farhâdi (Afghanistan) (*spoke in Arabic*): Last February, a conference of paramount importance was held in Rome on this issue, "Bethlehem 2000", attended by eminent Catholic, Orthodox, Muslim and Protestant personalities, including representatives of the Coptic and Ethiopian churches. The commemoration of the birth of Jesus Christ last year in the holy land of Palestine will continue with celebrations until Easter 2001. The main objective of the Bethlehem 2000 draft resolution has been achieved in all its phases, namely, to support peace, tolerance and co-existence and acceptance of the followers of other religions, in particular those of the Abrahamic religion. That requires respect for Jesus Christ and adherence to his teachings.

Eminent religious leaders from everywhere in the world participated in the celebrations, including His Holiness Pope John Paul II, representatives of Orthodox and protestant faiths and a throng of other world religious leaders. Here, I must hail international contributions, including the help provided by the United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO), by States and by religious organizations. My thanks go in particular to Jordan and to Palestine for their valuable help and their good offices, and for the peaceful and secure environment they ensured during the celebration. Nor can I fail to express thanks for the assistance provided by the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Muslims believe that Jesus Christ was a messenger of God. The Holy Koran speaks of him as a messenger of God who disseminated a revealed religion. It speaks also of the Virgin Mary as a faithful servant of God. That is why a throng of eminent Muslims from all over the world participated in the celebrations. The holy places in Palestine are visited by those blessed with true faith and sincere reverence for God, by those who are filled with peace and goodness. Those heartfelt religious visits help consolidate peace and coexistence and bring goodness and blessings upon those sites and the areas surrounding them.

Those who harbour evil, who advocate bloodshed and who turn to violence seek only provocation. Their visits to these blessed places serve only to perpetuate oppression and to encourage the advocates of continued war, feuding and hostility. They are the oppressors, who devote all their efforts to racism. Peace has no place in their programmes and objectives. We hope that the places that are holy to all religions

will be protected against all evils of contemporary history, and that history will bear witness against those who harbour evil intentions and whose hands are stained with innocent blood.

We must continue to strive for the attainment of the lofty goals of those who wish the celebration of Bethlehem 2000 to provide an opportunity to support peace, coexistence and friendship. We hope that the General Assembly will adopt draft resolution A/55/L.3, entitled "Bethlehem 2000", by consensus and without a vote.

Mr. Levitte (France) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the associated countries Cyprus and Malta align themselves with this statement.

This year, the debate on the draft resolution (A/55/L.3) introduced by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is taking place in tragic circumstances. I therefore wish first and foremost to reiterate the European Union's deep concern and emotion at the very heavy toll exacted by the violence both in the Palestinian territories and in Israel, among all communities living in the Holy Land. Calm must be restored and negotiations on a final settlement must be resumed. The European Union welcomes the efforts undertaken by all to reach that goal; it wishes in particular to express its support for the diplomatic activities of the Secretary-General in the spirit of Security Council resolution 1322 (2000). The European Union strongly welcomes the convening of the Sharm el-Sheikh summit, the understandings reached on that occasion by the two parties, and the recent agreement between Mr. Arafat and Mr. Peres. It also welcomes today's announcement regarding a fact-finding commission.

Those results accord with the appeal made on 13 October by heads of State or Government of the European Union at the Biarritz meeting of the European Council. European leaders, given the real danger of a general flare-up, solemnly called on the Israeli and Palestinian leaders and peoples to halt the escalation and to bring an immediate end to all

violence. They also stressed that there is no alternative to the peace process.

In that context, the threefold message which the draft resolution bears — that there is a consensus within the United Nations; the region's unity in the celebration, without obstacles or restrictions, of the onset of the third millennium in Bethlehem; and assistance for the economic development of the Palestinian territories — is all the more welcome. The European Union is thus happy to be able to associate itself with that message. The members of the European Union, in order to underline the importance they attach to the event, have this year decided to join unanimously in sponsoring the draft resolution.

The European Union fully supports the Bethlehem 2000 Project promoted by the Palestinian Authority, the municipality of Bethlehem and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) with a view to preparing the city of Bethlehem for the third millennium. The Project is intended to restore historical, archaeological and religious sites of unique significance. It is intended also to improve tourism facilities so that Bethlehem can become a major destination beyond the millennium celebrations. Those development projects, along with the many activities of non-governmental organizations, are having an impact on the economic growth of the whole Bethlehem region.

The European Union has made the development of the Bethlehem region one of its key priorities in the Palestinian territories. The Union was closely involved in preparations for the Bethlehem 2000 Project, during the conferences convened in May 1998 at Brussels and in February 1999 at Rome. The Union has moreover financed specific projects, such as the modernization of Beit Jala hospital and the renovation of Manger Square in the Old Town. Many of its member States have also become involved, on an individual basis, in projects such as the building of a peace centre, the renovation of the Dar Mansour mansion to house a pilot unit for safeguarding and protecting the heritage of the Bethlehem district, and the rehabilitation of Salesian Street. The European Union wishes today to confirm its commitment to promoting improved tourism facilities for the site and to ensuring that the efforts of the international community extend beyond the symbolic date of the year 2000.

The European Union is pleased at the spectacular success of the Project, which has completely transformed the city and which has increased tourism development, thanks to the commitment of the Palestinian Authority and to the support of the international community. The Union hopes that the success of Bethlehem 2000 will serve as a model of international cooperation and a symbol of the contribution of tourism to peace in the Palestinian territories and the region as a whole.

The European Union hopes that the tragic events in the Palestinian territories will not have a negative influence on the development of the site. It is particularly important to ensure free and unrestricted access to the sites for tourists, believers or residents wishing to travel to Bethlehem, regardless of their nationality or religion. The European Union calls on all parties to preserve Bethlehem from confrontations that would affect either the local population or visitors.

Before concluding, I should like to take this opportunity to express the gratitude of the European Union to the Permanent Representative of Senegal, Ambassador Ibra Ka, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, for his tireless efforts to promote the Bethlehem 2000 project.

Finally, the European Union wishes to reaffirm once again its firm commitment to a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and in the spirit of the progress made to date within the framework of the peace process. Acknowledging the importance of a sound economy for ensuring social and political stability, the European Union intends to maintain its considerable economic and technical assistance to the Palestinians with a view to contributing to a more secure and prosperous future for them in the new millennium.

Mr. Moushoutas (Cyprus): At the outset, I should like to say that we fully associate ourselves with the statement just made by the representative of France on behalf of the European Union.

This is the third occasion on which we have participated in a debate on the item "Bethlehem 2000". As we have stated before, we consider the inscription of this item on the agenda of the General Assembly, and the commemoration of this historic event, to be very opportune and useful from a historical and

religious point of view. We again commend the Permanent Representative of Senegal, Chairman of the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, for having promoted the idea and for having the item inscribed on the agenda for consideration in plenary meeting.

Bethlehem, in Palestine, is very close to Cyprus geographically, and even closer spiritually. Situated as we are at the crossroads of the Mediterranean, we participated in the programmed millennium events, which we also viewed as part of our contribution to the peace process.

The dignified celebrations of the birth of Jesus, the Christmas market in the city of the nativity and the festivals, concerts and street parades were attended by thousands of people from many countries, including a number of heads of State or Government. His Holiness Pope Paul II and other spiritual leaders, including our own Patriarch Bartholomew, contributed to the spirituality and universality of the project, which was aimed at bolstering understanding among different cultures and religions. It is our ardent wish that the spirituality which prevailed only a few weeks ago may guide our endeavours for peace and for the solution of problems during these critical times.

We had welcomed the peace process and the progress achieved in the Middle East, and we deeply regret the very recent bloodshed and loss of life. We are pleased to hear that the peace process may start again, and we hope that it will produce positive results. To this end, no effort should be spared to find a just and viable solution, based on United Nations resolutions. Cyprus is directly affected by any development in the region, whether it is conflict or peace. We live with the vision of a free and peaceful island, without occupation troops and barbed wire, hoping that success in the region will also have a beneficial effect on us.

The very recent tragic events and violence must not be allowed to push the peace process off track. We agree with the Security Council's call on the parties to end violence and to immediately resume negotiations within the Middle East peace process. We deplore the use of force and the resultant loss of life. In the light of these sad developments, special care must be taken for the security of the thousands of tourists and visitors expected in Bethlehem. Their free and safe movement and unhindered access to the holy places of the city

must continue, and the security and safety of the faithful of all religions must be of primary concern. As has been said, the Holy Land must be just that — a holy place of harmony, peace and hope.

Bethlehem 2000 is undoubtedly an enormous world undertaking, seeking to restore the religious and historical sites of the city, which have been negatively affected by years of conflict. We therefore reiterate our support for these historic events and commend the Palestinian authorities, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and other United Nations organizations, as well as the donor countries, for doing what needs to be done for the final success of this global undertaking.

Mr. Kafando (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): In the turbulent history of humanity, there are, fortunately, events that remind us that the world is not merely a place of war and conflict but that it sometimes brings opportunities emanating from praiseworthy initiatives and actions.

Within the overall sombre picture of the Middle East, where for more than one month there has been repeated rioting, Bethlehem 2000 takes on even greater significance and merit, offering a glimmer of hope to help dissipate the rancour and hate born of misunderstanding among people.

Bethlehem 2000 was conceived as a historical and cultural event to inaugurate the new millennium and to celebrate the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Christ. This event is more than a symbol; it was intended to promote the spirit of dialogue, reconciliation and brotherhood between peoples in the region, particularly between Palestinians and Israelis.

We welcome this undertaking precisely because of the contribution it could make towards achieving a rapprochement between the two communities. Let us not forget, however, that the Palestinian Authority was responsible for the laudable initiative that is Bethlehem 2000. This event of major religious and cultural significance reflects the heartfelt desire for peace in this land that is thrice holy, since it is the crossroads of the three revealed religions — Islam, Judaism and Christianity.

We also pay tribute above all to President Yasser Arafat, who, by proposing this initiative, has shown once again his love of tolerance.

We deem it important also to pay tribute to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and to its Chairman, Ambassador Ibra Deguène Ka, thanks to whom this item has been on our agenda consistently since 1998. This has made possible a fruitful exchange on the best way to bring this noble undertaking to a successful conclusion at Easter in 2001.

Since 1998, when the initiative was officially launched, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People has done a great deal of work. Among its notable achievements is the development of a far-reaching programme of activities, which have already received international backing. These have included the International Conference, held on 18 and 19 February 1999 in Rome in association with the Italian Government and the Holy See, which brought together eminent individuals from both the political and religious arenas, and the cultural exhibition held two years ago here in New York at United Nations Headquarters.

This undertaking would not have been viable had it not had the financial and logistical support of countries and organizations of goodwill, such as the European Union, the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, many non-governmental organizations, and so on.

We are confident that we speak for all of those who have supported the project in saying that we look forward with confidence to the full support of all to guarantee the success of the Bethlehem 2000 initiative, which will come to a close in spring 2001.

For us, the exceptional nature of Bethlehem 2000 is reflected first and foremost in its overarching vision. Indeed, it represents a symbiosis of mysticism and realism, of belief and rationality. These all are virtues that can foster peace in our hearts — that peace of the brave that is, now more than ever, so necessary in the Middle East.

In conclusion, I should like to recall the words of Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, President of the Committee for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, set up by Pope John Paul II to commemorate the third millennium since the birth of Christ. The Cardinal stated, during the Bethlehem 2000 International Conference:

“Bethlehem’s message of Bethlehem is a universal one ... All descendants of Abraham, the father of the faithful — Jews, Christians and Muslims — who together make up the population of the Middle East, are duty-bound to bear witness to true brotherhood before a disenchanting, disjointed world”

and, I would add, in the face of the tragic events that have taken place in the Middle East in the past few weeks.

It was also at Bethlehem that the angels whose task it was to announce the birth of Christ proclaimed peace on earth and goodwill towards men.

May this holy and vibrant message be reiterated at Bethlehem so that Palestinians and Israelis can come together once and for all. For that reason, Burkina Faso gives its full support to the Bethlehem 2000 project.

Mr. Al-Sulaiti (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): With respect to agenda item 36, allow me, at this 55th plenary meeting of the General Assembly, to thank the President of the Assembly and his predecessor for recommending this draft resolution for our consideration. I should like to express my deepest appreciation for the convening of this meeting, which is of great importance not only to the Palestinian people and to that region of the world but also to the international community. This is a very important moment of great religious, cultural and historical significance.

At the beginning of the third millennium in Bethlehem, the city of peace, Mr. Yasser Arafat and other participants in the celebrations released a number of white doves to symbolize the hopes of the entire world for peace. At that time, we were hopeful, as were other people of goodwill, that the era of war and hostility had been put behind us and that peace had arrived — peace as reflected in the tenets of Islam that respects other prophets, faiths and religious texts. Now, however, we see that the Bethlehem 2000 project is threatened, as is peace in the entire region.

Qatar would have liked, to see this discussion take place in an environment of real peace on the basis of the guidelines established by the peace process, the principles of international legality and resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) as well as the principle of land for peace. But the escalating violence in the region, particularly those acts of aggression perpetrated by the

Israeli forces against Palestinian civilians, runs counter to all United Nations resolutions, especially the Fourth Geneva Convention and could create a backlash on the part of the Palestinian people.

If we are to implement the peace process, it must be followed up in a close and detailed fashion, and the various sponsors, as well as other parties, must be seriously committed to ensuring that its goals are achieved. I call here on the Israeli Government in particular to abide by its commitments.

The United Nations Millennium Declaration, which we have unreservedly supported, has emphasized many values, including the sharing of responsibility. Nations of the world must share responsibility for ensuring economic and social development and must oppose all trends that might undermine these efforts. We must adopt a multidisciplinary approach, and all parties in the region must play a role in this particular initiative.

Accordingly, all States Members of the United Nations must assume their full responsibility by contributing to an international protection force, with a view to ensuring that hope can be maintained and that the peace process can be rescued. The State of Israel should accept an investigative fact-finding team on site, as laid out in the resolution adopted on 19 October 2000 at the special session of the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. Qatar has always supported peace in the region, and as such has expressed its willingness to pay for the team to carry out its work.

Our Government is very pleased to support the Bethlehem 2000 Project. We see it as a beacon of hope for the third millennium and for ensuring the protection of the holy sites of all religions in the region. My delegation calls on all Member States to ensure that the necessary material and political assistance is provided to the Bethlehem 2000 Project to ensure its success, so that it will be a beacon lighting the way for those who want to move away from struggle and conflict and work to achieve lasting peace.

Mr. Hønningstad (Norway): The year 2000 has not turned out as we had all hoped in the Middle East. The violence and massive destruction throughout the area — including in Bethlehem — that we have witnessed in the last weeks has shocked the whole world.

I would like to express my heartfelt condolences and sympathy to the victims of the latest violence and their families. In Norway we are all appalled by the large number of casualties.

The great efforts made by the Palestinians on the Bethlehem 2000 Project have had many positive results. The international participation has been most impressive. At the outset the common goal for the project was to provide a better future for Bethlehem and the whole Palestinian territory, in the context of nation-building and peace-building for the third millennium. Norway deeply regrets that the population of Bethlehem and the surrounding areas was unable to benefit from these results for as long as we had hoped.

The Norwegian Government is very concerned about the latest developments in the Middle East. We believe that the background to the violent riots is the lack of progress in the peace process. The Palestinians had a peace process, but they had no feeling that peace was really being built. The best way to end the violence, before it spreads even further, is to move as fast as possible towards a final agreement. This will, however, require willingness to compromise.

Norway was very pleased to participate in the preparations for the Bethlehem 2000 celebrations, as well as in the celebrations themselves. Since we announced our commitment to the Bethlehem 2000 Project at the conference in Brussels in May 1998, we followed the preparations with great interest and are proud to have been able to support the restoration of the city. Norway has welcomed the call for substantial international assistance and strong commitments to the project, and has viewed Bethlehem 2000 as an important opportunity to broaden the donor nations' commitment to reconciliation and peace in the Middle East.

It was therefore with great enthusiasm that Norway accepted the invitation from the Palestinian Authority to arrange a cultural week in Bethlehem. The Norwegian cultural week — Norway for Bethlehem 2000 — took place in September and was the fruit of close and successful cooperation with the Ministry for Bethlehem 2000.

We still hope very strongly that the most important achievements of the Bethlehem 2000 Project will survive the present crisis and help us attain our common goal of providing a better future for

Bethlehem and the whole Palestinian territory for the third millennium.

Mr. Bebars (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): It did not occur to any participant in the global celebrations in the town of Bethlehem marking the beginning of the third millennium since the birth of Jesus Christ that this town and some adjacent villages would be the scene of such a wave of aggression and military onslaughts by Israel as have been raging unabated for more than five weeks. The climate at the time of the celebrations, and until the middle of this year, was positive. The international community, including the United Nations agencies and the donor States, contributed a good measure of assistance to make the celebrations a success. The Palestinian Authority did its part to facilitate the global commemoration of this historic religious occasion. Celebrations were to have lasted until next Easter. However, it seems that Israel had decided to subject the Palestinian people to a campaign of military oppression, as if to remind them of its continuous, suffocating occupation.

Egypt hopes that the people of Palestine, together with the other peace-loving peoples of the world, will soon be able to celebrate in Palestinian Bethlehem the establishment of an independent Palestinian State on its territory.

Mr. Lancry (Israel): This year, Israel welcomed, and continues to welcome, thousands of Christian pilgrims from around the globe, coming to celebrate 2,000 years since the birth of Jesus in the ancient land then known as Judea. The event was a proud moment in the history of Christianity, uniting people from around the world on the very ground from which their heritage sprang forth.

As the nation that played host to these thousands of pilgrims and welcomed them at our historic sites, Israel was proud to take part in this momentous occasion. That is why our Government, through the Year 2000 Authority, worked extensively to enhance facilities, holy sites, hotels and roads in preparation for the festivities. Moreover, Israel invested close to \$1 billion to make this event as fulfilling as possible for the Christian pilgrims.

The Bethlehem 2000 events were an integral part of this goal. The city of Bethlehem is located just south of Jerusalem. Therefore, Israel's Year 2000 programme focused extensively on improving lodging conditions in Jerusalem and on easing access and transportation

between the two cities. In this context, Israel and the Palestinians implemented joint plans to improve and expand the main thoroughfare leading from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, known as Route 300. Similar improvements were also made in the crossing facility between Jerusalem and the Palestinian Authority-administered area of Bethlehem. Such steps eased access for tourists and Palestinians alike, while continuing to ensure security for all.

These efforts to enhance the pilgrimage experience follow a proud Israeli tradition of promoting religious freedom. Since the establishment of the State of Israel, we have enabled all groups to enjoy the benefits of the holy places, making these sites the freest and most accessible they have been in two millennia. The Christian community, for example, has enjoyed unlimited rights of religious activity, fulfilment and control in the holy sites of Jerusalem, Nazareth and other places throughout the country. That tradition has helped make this celebration of the birth of Jesus a more meaningful experience for all who participated.

All of this was highlighted by the recent visit of Pope John Paul II to Israel. The first-ever visit by a sitting Pope to Jerusalem marked a dramatic evolution in Christian-Jewish relations and set an important example of how coexistence can flourish in the land that is holy to the three great monotheistic faiths. The visit drew further attention to the extensive preparations undertaken by the Government of Israel to prepare for the Pontiff's visit, as well as the unprecedented freedom of worship and unhindered access that all religious groups currently enjoy under Israel. The many thousands of Christian pilgrims that accompanied the Pope as he visited sites throughout the country similarly derived great benefit from the exhaustive efforts of the Israeli Government in this regard.

In light of the above and of certain statements made in the course of this debate, I would like to take this opportunity to recall before the members of the General Assembly the original purpose of the discussion of the subject of Bethlehem 2000, as described in document A/53/141.

Bethlehem 2000 was originally portrayed as an opportunity to celebrate the 2000th anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ, to upgrade basic social services

and to articulate a global vision of hope and peace for all peoples. The document concludes by saying:

“It is essential that the United Nations as a whole should display explicit interest in and support for this historical occasion, drawing the attention of the peoples of the world to its importance and assisting in making the event a moment for hope, peace, coexistence and prosperity for all humankind.”(A/53/141, p. 4)

In conclusion, I wish to join with my Palestinian colleague, who, in his concluding remarks, referred to the need to restore peace to the land of peace. I am confident that, despite the current crisis in the Holy Land, the spirit of cooperation between peoples and religions, reflected in our joint plans for the year 2000, will in the end prevail. It is our hope that we can join together at this auspicious moment in history to fulfil the noble goals of the Bethlehem 2000 celebration and of the millennial festivities as a whole.

Let us endeavour to do our utmost, even in these deliberations, to protect the uplifting spirit of Bethlehem 2000 and not permit this moment to be tarnished by political accusations and spiteful and accusatory language. These events are a chance to bring people together in a spirit of peace and reconciliation. Before us stands an opportunity which comes along once in 1,000 years, and Israel has therefore joined the consensus on this draft resolution, despite its reservations.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with resolution 48/265 of 24 August 1994, I now call on the observer for the Sovereign Military Order of Malta.

Mr. Linati-Bosch (Sovereign Military Order of Malta): It is an honour for me to address the General Assembly on behalf of the Sovereign Order of Malta on a subject of international law connected with the historical development of the Holy Land. So as not to dwell on the past, I will just say that the activities of the Order today are accredited by its presence in Tantur since the end of the nineteenth century, in virtue of a bilateral agreement between the Order and the Ottoman empire, and especially its work with the Holy Family Hospital in Bethlehem, where the roots of so many cultures are involved. Our hospital in Bethlehem is a maternity institution with 3,000 deliveries per year, serving the greater Bethlehem area, including Hebron, and carrying out 40,000 visits annually. The Holy

Family Hospital in Bethlehem also operates as an outreach clinic for pregnant women in their own villages. Its capacity will be expanded with the inauguration of a new fourth wing, which will serve to increase the possibility of outpatient consultation and treatment of women in the West Bank. Those activities in the Holy Land are conducted through the Holy Land Foundation of the Order of Malta.

I have already referred in other circumstances to the consideration of human rights by the Order of Malta. The work of our Hospital of the Holy Family in Bethlehem is strongly tied to the most precious of human rights, the right to life, in accordance with the spirit of article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

After this introduction to our strong connection with the Holy Land, and especially with the area of Bethlehem, I must say to the General Assembly that we cannot hide our concern over the recent violent disorders that have besieged that part of the world — concern that I must extend to include the problem of the security of our personnel working for general humanitarian relief as a consequence of the problems that afflict Palestine.

There is a consensus that the Palestinian problem must have a satisfactory solution for all those involved in it. At the same time, we are conscious that it is not easy to arrive at a happy ending. During the Millennium Summit and the general debate, we appreciated the goodwill expressed by speakers, not only when they referred to Palestine, but also when they presented their solutions for other conflicts in different parts of the world and expressed their concern for problems, such as poverty, debt, peacekeeping operations and globalization. As the most prominent and important international organization, the United Nations must find a way to get from projects to reality. To succeed, the international community must cooperate and embrace a coordinated operation devoted to the benefit of humankind. The United Nations must play an explicit role in making Bethlehem 2000 not only an isolated event, but also a milestone of hope, peace, coexistence and prosperity. In legal doctrine, historical application and the current rules of international law, we can find formulas to guarantee the legal status and subsequent peaceful development of the peoples involved in the problems of Palestine within the framework of self-determination, national sovereignty and independence.

A definitive solution of the Palestinian problem must include financial, legal, and technical measures if we are to obtain, through Israeli-Palestinian cooperation, a universal message for the human family to live in harmony and peace. Allow me to underline the fact that Bethlehem 2000 can become not only a date or a goodwill project but also a point of departure for a permanent solution to a long and violent conflict.

In conclusion, the Sovereign Military Order of Malta would like to reaffirm its commitment, through its preventive diplomacy and hospitallary presence, to a just settlement in the Holy Land. Therefore, we will continue to offer our economic and humanitarian assistance in the Holy Land.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): In accordance with the decision taken earlier, I give the floor to the observer of the Holy See.

Archbishop Martino (Holy See): In the discussion of agenda item 36, "Bethlehem 2000", this General Assembly once again recognizes the significance of the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem. This commemoration is the very foundation of the world's celebration of the new millennium and the Great Jubilee of the Catholic Church.

The message of the angels that proclaimed tidings of great joy, the birth of the Messiah and Lord, has been re-echoed through the ages, touching history and reminding us of the love of God. We know that human history is a story of our families and who we are and where we have been, but I wonder how long it has been since the people living in and around Bethlehem these days have heard tidings of great joy and peace, and how long it will be before they do so again.

On 25 December, Christians throughout the world will once again turn their attention to that story of shepherds, angels, a star, a young man, his wife and a newborn infant. This year's celebration will be significant, however, as it will be the 2000th anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ, whom we Christians believe to be the true Son of God.

The United Nations began this current fifty-fifth session with the Millennium Summit and the adoption of its important Declaration. Representatives of 190 Governments gathered here in New York at the Headquarters of this Organization and in this very Hall and spoke again and again of the necessity for the

nations of the world to come to a better understanding of the needs of each and every person.

In a way, in the adoption of that Millennium Declaration, those representatives called for a renewal of that good news proclaimed to the shepherds and to those on whom God's favour rests. The celebration of the millennium and, for Christians, of the Great Jubilee is essentially the essence of our discussion of Bethlehem 2000. And this discussion continues to remind us that Bethlehem is a city for all peoples and for all ages. It is a city of great tradition and memory, of sorrow and joy and of a global vision of hope for all people.

But most of all, it is a city that reminds us of peace. Who cannot help but visualize, upon hearing the word that Bethlehem is the city of Rachel, of Ruth, of David and, especially for us, the city of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Speaking from his heart during his visit to Manger Square earlier this year, His Holiness John Paul II summed up all that we seek for the city and its people:

“Where then is the dominion of the ‘Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God and Prince of Peace’ (*The Holy Bible, Isaiah 9:6*) of which the Prophet Isaiah speaks? What is the power to which Jesus himself refers when he says: ‘All power has been given to me in heaven and on earth’ (*ibid., Matthew 28:18*)? Christ’s kingdom is ‘not of this world’ (*ibid., John 18:36*). His kingdom is not the play of force and wealth and conquest which appears to shape our human history. It is rather the power to vanquish the Evil One, the ultimate victory over sin and death. It is the power to heal the wounds which disfigure the image of the Creator in his creatures. Christ’s is the power to transform our weak nature and make us capable, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, of peace with one another and communion with God himself. ‘To all who have received him, who believe in his name, he has given power to become children of God’ (*ibid., John 1:12*). This is the message of Bethlehem today and forever. This is the extraordinary gift which the Prince of Peace brought into the world 2,000 years ago.”

Let us continue to hope for the progress of the peace process in the Middle East, for the guarantee of freedom of movement and unhindered access to the holy places in Bethlehem and throughout the region for

the faithful of all religions and all nations, and that the settlement of disputes might truly symbolize an atmosphere of peace and reconciliation for all peoples, especially those who look forward to a third millennium in which everyone can live in harmony with one another, guided by the light, not of a star but, of hope for people of good will.

On 2 October 2000, responding to the violence that erupted in Jerusalem and its environs at the end of September, Pope John Paul II stated to pilgrims visiting the Vatican that:

“The Holy Land must be the land of peace and fraternity, God wills it!”

His Holiness again conveyed his sentiments to pilgrims visiting the Vatican on 11 October:

“With great anguish, we are following the grievous tensions in the Middle East, shaken once again by events that have caused numerous victims and that have not even spared the holy sites. Faced by this dramatic situation, I cannot but call on everyone to put an immediate end to this spiral of violence. At the same time, I invite all believers to pray to God that the people and leaders of that region may return to the path of dialogue and rediscover the joy of feeling themselves to be children of God, their common Father.”

And again, on 29 October, the Pope stated:

“Once again I wish to call on all the parties involved in the peace process not to spare any efforts for the re-establishment of the climate of dialogue that existed until a few weeks ago. Mutual trust, rejection of arms and respect for international law are the only means capable of reviving the peace process. Therefore, we pray that there may be a return to the negotiating table and, through dialogue, arrive at the desired goal of a just and lasting peace, which guarantees to all the inalienable right to liberty and security.”

Jesus Christ came as the “Prince of Peace” for all peoples, for all time. The Holy See will continue to seek and work for the peace that he brings.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

Before moving on to consider draft resolution A/55/L.3, I would like to point out that since the

beginning of our discussions, the following countries have added their names as co-sponsors of draft resolution A/55/L.3: Burkina Faso, Grenada and Guinea.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/55/L.3. May I take it that the General Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/55/L.3?

Draft resolution A/55/L.3 was adopted (resolution 55/18).

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): May I take it then that the General Assembly wishes to

conclude its consideration of agenda item 36?

It was so decided.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): This brings us to the close of today's meeting and to the end of our agenda for this afternoon.

The meeting rose at 5.25 p.m.