State of Palestine Flag to Fly at United Nations Headquarters, Offices as General Assembly Adopts Resolution on Non-Member Observer States

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Sixty-ninth General Assembly,

102nd Meeting (PM)

Amidst heated debates about the political value of symbolic gestures, the General Assembly today adopted five resolutions on a wide range of topics, including the raising of flags by non-member observer States at the United Nations and debt restructuring.

The world body adopted the resolution on raising the flags of non-member observer States at the United Nations (document A/69/L.76) by a recorded vote of 119 in favour to 8 against (Australia, Canada, Israel, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, Tuvalu, United States), with 45 abstentions.  By the terms of that text, the General Assembly decided that the flags of non-member observer States maintaining permanent observer missions at Headquarters shall be raised at Headquarters and United Nations offices following the flags of the Members States of the Organization.

In a discussion that began before the adoption and continued afterwards, delegates considered various aspects of the resolution.  Calling it “a historic vote”, the observer of the State of Palestine said that the General Assembly had sent an important message to the Palestinian people at a critical time.  While raising the flag would not end the occupation, it would signify to Palestinian people everywhere that the international community supported them.

Israel’s representative called the resolution a photo opportunity, cautioning that as long as the Palestinians believed they could achieve their political goals without making concessions, they would continue to avoid taking the difficult decisions needed for peace.  Instead, he said, the photo truly worth taking was one of an Israeli Prime Minister and a Palestinian leader raising the flags of the two peoples living together in peace.

Many speakers stressed that the focus needed to be on a return to meaningful negotiations between Israel and Palestine.  Germany’s delegate cautioned against changing an established practice while the representative of Austria reminded the Assembly that many current Member States had had to wait till they ascended to full member status before their flag was raised at the United Nations.  Bolivia’s speaker said that although the vote was symbolic, symbols were important and the Palestinian flag would be a reminder of occupation and injustice.

The Assembly also adopted, by a recorded vote of 136 in favour to 6 against (Canada, Germany, Israel, Japan, United Kingdom, United States), with 41 abstentions, a resolution on basic principles on sovereign debt restructuring processes (document A/69/L.84).  By the terms of that text, the Assembly declared that sovereign debt restructuring processes should be guided by basic principles, as included in the report of the Ad Hoc Committee.

Other resolutions that were approved today without a recorded vote were texts on cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (document A/69/L.79), on cooperation between the United Nations and the Pacific Islands Forum (document A/69/L.90) and on commemoration of the seventieth anniversary of the United Nations (document A/69/L.74/Rev.1).

Also speaking were representatives of Nigeria (for African States), India, Kuwait (for the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation), Armenia, Papua New Guinea (for the Pacific Island Forum), Solomon Islands, South Africa (also for the Group of 77 developing countries and China), Luxembourg (for the European Union), Russian Federation, United States, Iceland, Australia, Argentina, Venezuela, Jamaica (for the Caribbean Community), Paraguay (for the Southern Common Market), Uruguay (for the Union of South American Nations), Maldives, Singapore, Nicaragua, Cuba, Chile, Brazil, Spain, Iraq, Poland, France, Guatemala, Sweden, Azerbaijan, Finland, Netherlands, Cyprus, Czech Republic, United Kingdom, Norway, Turkey, Iran and Lebanon, as well as the Holy See.

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Introducing the draft resolution on the “commemoration of the seventieth anniversary of the United Nations” (document A/69/L.74/Rev.1), the representative of Nigeria, speaking on behalf of African States, said that the seventieth anniversary of the signing of the United Nations Charter was an important opportunity to take stock of the Organization’s achievements and challenges.  The current text was a product of compromise and far-reaching consultations.  It was especially necessary to reflect on what the Organization had achieved in the maintenance of international peace and security, which was a matter of fundamental concern to Africa.  At the same time, it was also crucial to avoid a draft resolution that excluded financial implications, he said, asking all Member States to support the text.

The Assembly then adopted that resolution without a vote.

Speaking in explanation of vote, the representative of India said that it was on 16 April 2013 that his delegation had proposed commemorating the seventieth anniversary.  His delegation looked forward to participating in the deliberations concerning international peace.

Introducing the draft resolution on “cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)” (document A/69/L.79), the representative of Kuwait, on behalf of the OIC, said the text highlighted the desire of the two organizations to work more closely in the political, economic, social, humanitarian, cultural and scientific fields and in a common search for solutions to global problems.  The text would have the Assembly welcome the strong commitment of the OIC in the fight against violent extremism and terrorism; the shared goals of the two organizations in promoting and facilitating the Middle East peace process; and cooperation among them towards combating intolerance and the stigmatization of persons based on religion or belief.

Speaking before the vote, the representative of India said the text marked a significant departure from previous resolutions on the subject.  The current text sought to extend the role of OIC in seeking solutions to other conflicts, he said, stressing that the organization had no such standing.  While not seeking a vote on the text, India had sought to make its position on the matter clear.

Armenia’s delegate said his country enjoyed strong relations with the OIC and other regional organizations.  In the context of the current text, the OIC had no mandate to foster resolution of disputes beyond its membership.  Negotiations to achieve consensus on operative paragraph 4 were frozen, he recalled.  Although Armenia would not request a vote, it wished to make its position clear.

The Assembly then adopted the text without a vote.

Next, the Assembly turned to a text on “cooperation between the United Nations and the Pacific Islands Forum” (document A/69/L.90).

Introducing that text, the representative of Papua New Guinea (on behalf of the Pacific Island Forum) said that the Forum was an intergovernmental organization founded 44 years ago with the vision of ensuring peace, security and prosperity in the region.  The current text was a procedural and technical update that provided key recent developments in the relations between the Forum and the United Nations over the past two years, taking into account the recent major intergovernmental process and internationally agreed outcomes, including the Samoa Pathway, and their relevance to the respective work of the two organizations.

Speaking in explanation of position before adoption, the representative of the Solomon Islands stated that though a member of the Forum, his country could not sponsor this biannual resolution in its present form.  In a critical year during which the Samoa Pathway and the Addis Ababa Action Plan had been adopted, it was time for a new political partnership and a paradigm shift.  The relationship between the United Nations and the Forum was not progressive enough, he said, calling the resolution a missed opportunity for developing an action-oriented partnership.  The United Nations was putting out fires instead of preventing fires by shying away from investing in the Pacific region.  While the country would not stand in the way of the resolution, Solomon Islands hoped that future resolutions would take into account those reservations.

The Assembly then adopted the resolution without a vote.

Introducing a draft resolution on “Basic Principles on Sovereign Debt Restructuring Processes” (document A/69/L.84), the representative of South Africa, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 developing countries and China, said the text provided a good basis for future discussions.  The principles had been drafted in a way that brought a “win-win” situation for debtors and creditors.  The issue of debt sustainability was central to achieving national and internationally agreed development goals.  The international community needed to march with vigour to achieve the post-2015 development agenda and to ensure that no one was left behind.

The Assembly then adopted the text by a recorded vote of 136 in favour to 6 against (Canada, Germany, Israel, Japan, United Kingdom, United States) with 41 abstentions.

Speaking in explanation of vote, the representative of Luxembourg, speaking on behalf of the European Union, recalled her group’s reservations on the ways in which the original resolution 68/304 of 9 September 2014 and the subsequent modalities resolution 69/247 of 29 December 2014 were introduced.  She stated that such reservations had made it impossible for the European Union to participate in the process that had led to the tabling of the current resolution.  That text contained a number of statements that did not accurately reflect international law or treaties.  Further, the Union believed that the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was the appropriate institution to host global discussions on the subject.

The representative of the Russian Federation said the conflict between debtors and creditors was becoming a greater threat to global financial stability.  The Russian Federation had always supported improvement in the sovereign debt restructuring process within the United Nations.  The principles adopted today provided the basis for a fair, balanced and effective process for sovereign debt restructuring through a universal legal mechanism that could apply to all forms of external debt.  In that context, his delegation had voted in favour of the text.

The speaker from the United States said her country remained committed to the stability of the international financial system and believed in further refinement of sovereign debt restructuring.  However, the text was deficient on several counts, including the implication of a right to debt restructuring and the threat to contractual obligations.

Iceland’s delegate said that ad hoc arrangements had created incoherence and unpredictability.  Since negotiations over the past few months had produced a balanced text, he had voted in favour of the text.

The representative of Australia said his country did not support any unilateral right to debt restructuring, leading to his abstention.  However, Australia would continue working to achieve a solution.

The speaker from Argentina stated that the adopted resolution was a text in favour of stability.  Debt was responsible for inequality and took advantage of less developed countries.  As a democratic forum where all sovereign countries had a voice, the United Nations was the only body that had passed resolutions that changed the course of history.  Therefore it was wrong to say that the Assembly was not the right forum.  Countries had a right to restructure debt and it was crucial to put an end to the power of vulture funds that fed on the lack of global legislation to take advantage of many poor countries.

Similarly, Argentina’s Minister for the Economy stated that the current economic crisis had highlighted how foreign debt had become for many countries a heavy burden that endangered growth and employment.  It was necessary to change the international financial architecture so that no one would suffer from the exploitation of vulture funds.

The delegate from Venezuela said that “what has happened here is a moment of dignity”.  Vulture funds had caused great poverty in the world and today’s votes would enable their regulation.  Venezuela and other South American countries thanked all nations for reaffirming the principle of self-determination of peoples and the sovereign equality of all States.

The representative of Jamaica, speaking on behalf of Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and aligning with the statements delivered on behalf of the “Group of 77” and the Alliance of Small Island States, stated that the matter of a multilateral framework for sovereign debt restructuring was of great interest to his group’s member States because unsustainably high debt burdens remained a major challenge to the economic development of the region.  Debt servicing had far exceeded expenditure on social services, including health and education, which had adversely affected overall socioeconomic development.  Therefore countries must be given an opportunity to undertake orderly debt arrangements as a means of stabilizing their economies.

Paraguay’s delegate, speaking on behalf of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), said the set of basic principles had been established for a multilateral framework for sovereign debt restructuring.

Uruguay’s representative, speaking on behalf of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR), said an important step had been taken today at the United Nations, which had the legitimacy to deal with challenges that affected the international community as a whole.  The resolution provided a fair basis for debt restructuring in the interest of all parties concerned.  Debt crises were costly and had led to cuts in spending on health and education, undermining overall economic health.  The adoption of the text, following open and transparent negotiations, had provided a set of principles towards establishing a multilateral framework on sovereign debt restructuring.

The delegate from Maldives, speaking on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States, said debt sustainability posed a serious challenge to the group.  Small island States had suffered from a disproportionately high debt-to-gross domestic product (GDP) ratio and viewed the adoption of the resolution as timely.

Bolivia’s speaker, who headed the Ad Hoc Committee on processes relating to sovereign debt restructuring, said today’s adoption was the culmination of a process that had seen tireless efforts of several delegations and support of the Secretary-General as well as the President of the sixty-ninth General Assembly.  That collective endeavour had the potential for creating long-term positive economic outcomes for developing countries.

The representative of India said the issue of debt restructuring was not just a problem for developing countries.  Debt affected inclusive development and political stability.  By adopting the resolution, the Assembly was formalizing a set of basic principles for restructuring debt and thereby laying down powerful markers for dealing with sovereign debt.  The principles themselves were non-binding in nature and India called for voluntary adherence to them.

Singapore’s speaker said his delegation had voted in favour of the resolution because the non-binding principles on debt restructuring were a practical outcome of the Ad-Hoc Committee on that matter.  The contractual rights of all creditors must be taken into account.  Any further consideration of the issue must secure the active and inclusive participation of debtor and creditor countries, the IMF and other financial institutions.

Nicaragua’s delegate said it was important to put into practice mechanisms that could prevent and resolve economic crises.  The basic principles put forth in the resolution must be at the basis of a legal framework for any future agreement.  Nicaragua reaffirmed the role of the General Assembly as a universal and equitable forum on matters of economic nature.

Cuba’s representative said countries that had held back economically because of punitive debt repayment conditions could look forward to better days.  However, the resolution only represented the first step of a process to address external debt in all its manifestations.

Chile’s speaker, aligning with the “Group of 77” and MERCOSUR, said the matter of sovereign debt restructuring was a global challenge that was best suited on the agenda of the United Nations.  As long-term debt sustainability was central to sustainable development, the resolution would open the door for further discussions on all forms of external debt.

Brazil’s representative, aligning with the “Group of 77”, MERCOSUR and UNASUR, said the current international financial architecture was not conducive to the achievement of the sustainable development goals.  He expressed regret that not all international financial mechanisms had participated in the discussions.

Raising a point of order, the representative of Spain clarified that his delegation had abstained from the voting.

Next, the Assembly turned to a draft resolution on “raising the flags of non-member observer States at the United Nations” (document A/69/L.87/Rev.1).

Introducing that text, the representative of Iraq said that his country, as the President of the Arab Group for the month of September, was honoured to introduce a text that had been guided by the principles of the Charter while emphasizing the equality of all States, large and small.  Recalling that the State of Palestine had obtained the status of a non-member observer State in 2012, he urged Member States to lend their full support to the resolution because it was an important step towards supporting the Palestinian people, their right to self-determination and their need to take the place that was due to them.

Speaking in explanation of vote before the vote, Germany’s delegate said that the adoption of the resolution would change an uncontested practice in the United Nations.  Germany was unaware of any compelling reason to justify changing an established practice and would abstain on voting on the text.  Further, his country firmly believed in a negotiated two-State solution and had actively worked towards that end for years, he said, calling on both sides to engage in serious negotiations without further delay.

The speaker from Austria said the display of flags was always associated with a full membership in the United Nations and reminded the Assembly that the decision taken today would also apply to future observer States.  Many current Member States had had to wait until they ascended to full member status before their flag was raised at the United Nations.  While Austria would abstain from voting on the resolution, that did not affect its support for Palestine’s State-building efforts.  The focus needed to be on a return to meaningful negotiations.

The delegate from the United States stated that her country had long been committed to achieving the peace that Palestinians and Israelis deserved.  A sustainable and just resolution to the conflict would be reached only through compromise negotiated by the parties.  Raising the flag was not an alternative and would not bring the parties closer to peace.  Therefore the United States would vote against the resolution, but that was not a vote for the status quo.

The Assembly then adopted that text by a recorded vote of 119 in favour to 8 against (Australia, Canada, Israel, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, Tuvalu, United States), with 45 abstentions.

Speaking after the vote, Israel’s representative said the goal of the resolution was a photo opportunity, pursued in contravention of all the established rules and procedures of the United Nations.  No vote could turn an empty symbolic gesture into a State, he said.  As long as the Palestinians believed they could achieve their political goals without making concessions, they would continue to avoid taking the difficult decisions needed for peace.  The vote today may serve the interests of Palestinian leaders, but would not help the Palestinian people.  The photo of an Israeli Prime Minister and a Palestinian leader raising the flags of the two peoples living together in peace would be one truly worth taking.

The delegate from Poland said his country had voted in favour of the resolution, considering it a technical issue relating to the flag.  The vote had no bearing on his country’s position on the Middle East peace process.  Poland firmly believed that the only way to solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was through direct negotiations.

Also speaking in explanation of vote after vote, the France’s delegate said his delegation had voted in favour of the resolution because it was a vote for the two-State solution.  France had always supported the enhancement of Palestinian status and had voted for Palestine’s membership in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and in favour of giving Palestine non-member observer State status.  Raising the flag was a new stage on that path, he said, reiterating his country’s support in Israel’s right to live in peace.  “This vote is symbolic but symbols are important in politics,” he said, calling the flag an emblem of hope.  The only solution to the conflict was the establishment of an independent and viable Palestinian State living side by side with Israel.

The representative of Spain said his country’s vote in favour of the text should not be interpreted as recognizing Palestine as a State.  That must happen within the framework of a peace process in the Middle East, which guaranteed the security of all parties.

The speaker from Guatemala reiterated support for Palestine as a free and sovereign State.  Preferring that the resolution had been discussed by the entire membership, Guatemala had abstained from voting based on procedural reasons.

Sweden’s delegate stated that his country’s favourable vote for the text recognized that it was a natural step in Palestinian State-building efforts.  Sweden had also recognized Palestine as a State.  The situation on the ground had worsened and Sweden hoped that by adopting this resolution, the General Assembly would send forth a tiny ripple of hope to the young people in the region, Israeli and Palestinian, that peace was possible.

The representative of Azerbaijan said his delegation voted in favour of the resolution because the initiative was a reflection of the legitimate will of the State of Palestine to become a full-fledged member of the United Nations.  Azerbaijan remained committed to a two-State solution that would bring peace and stability to the Middle East.

Finland’s speaker said his delegation had abstained from voting on the resolution in its belief in the prevailing international practice of only full members of any organization enjoying the right to fly their flag there.

The representative of the Netherlands said his country was not convinced of the arguments in favour of changing the flag code in the United Nations.  The Netherlands remained in favour of a two-State solution and was committed to a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, including through a new format for negotiations including the European Union and Arab States.

The delegate from Cyprus said his country’s abstention had stemmed from the situation prevailing in the country as well as its conviction that only full members of the United Nations should fly their flags on the Organization’s premises.

The speaker from the Czech Republic said his country firmly believed that only full members of were entitled to fly their flags at the United Nations, a practice espoused by all international organizations.  For that reason, his country had abstained from voting.

Iceland’s speaker said that in 2011, his country had recognized Palestine as an independent State.  Iceland would like to see Palestine become a Member State of the United Nations as soon as possible.  Flying a flag was not a substitute for membership, but it would underline the role of Palestine in the United Nations.

The United Kingdom’s delegate stated that his delegation had abstained because there were no compelling reasons to change the established practice of flying only the flags of Member States at the United Nations.  The worsening situation on the ground in the Occupied Palestinian Territory was a matter of concern.  A negotiated two-State solution was the only way to peace.

The representative of South Africa said that his country’s long and principled support for the Palestinian people was informed by its own struggle for human rights and self-determination.  The resilience of the Palestinian people had brought them closer to their cherished goals.

The speaker from Norway said that the resolution constituted a precedent that contributed to erasing the difference between members and non-members and hence Norway had abstained.  But that was not a change in Norway’s position of support to Palestine as a non-member observer State.  A comprehensive and lasting peace would only be achieved on the basis of a negotiated solution between both parties.

Making a statement after the adoption, Venezuela’s delegate said that “this was an afternoon of justice” with the adoption of the resolutions on debt restructuring and on raising the Palestinian flag.  The Assembly had not just voted in favour of raising the flag, it had also voted for the right of the Palestinian people to return to their territory and the right not to be slaughtered.  Venezuela was sending a “warm hug” to the people of Palestine and wished for true peace for them.

The representative of Argentina said the only people who could decide on the existence of a Palestinian State were the Palestinian people themselves.  Argentina would have preferred to be voting today to include Palestine as a full-fledged Member State of the United Nations, but the Organization still needed reforms before that could happen.  Therefore his country was happy to vote to include the Palestinian flag in front of this building.  Since the Holy See would also be included in the flags, he added, he wished to quote Pope Francis, who called on the international community to “destroy all walls and build bridges”.

The speaker from Iraq, speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, thanked delegations that voted for the historic resolution and congratulated the Palestinian people and Government.  Although symbolic, the resolution took Palestinian statehood a significant step closer to reality.  The resolution, based on strong legal ground, sent a message to Israel that the international community was opposed to its occupation and siege of Palestine.

Turkey’s delegate said the Assembly had taken a historic decision against the injustice that had been perpetrated on the Palestinian people.  It also had taken Palestine closer to statehood.  Turkey looked forward to the day when the flag of Palestine would fly at the United Nations as a full member.

The representative of Iran said the large number of co-sponsors of the resolution and the large number of votes it had received underscored the support the cause of Palestine enjoyed in the international community.  He expressed hope that the Palestinians’ aspirations for full independence would soon be realized.

Lebanon’s speaker said that while the vote today represented a great achievement, it also placed an obligation on the international community to redouble efforts to ensure that Palestine became a full member of the Organization.

The delegate from Bolivia said that although the vote was symbolic, symbols nevertheless had great importance.  The Palestinian flag reminded the world of occupation, deaths, injuries, suffering, deprivation and injustice.  It also was a reminder that the international community had failed to fully discharge its obligation of providing statehood to the Palestinian people.

The observer of the Holy See said that his delegation had always respected the 70-year tradition of flying only the flags of United Nations Member States.  The Holy See was not opposed to the introduction of the resolution in accordance with the rules of the General Assembly and respected what the General Assembly had just decided.  Finally, the Holy See wished to reiterate its position on the issue and called on the international community to work towards Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace.

The observer of the State of Palestine thanked all Member States who had participated in favour of “this historic vote”, which confirmed the long-standing principled position of the international community in support of a just and peaceful solution to the plight of the people of Palestine.  The General Assembly had sent an important message to the Palestinian people at a critical time.  After half a century of occupation, with 5 million Palestinian refugees in camps, hopelessness was rising.  Therefore, his delegation was grateful that the General Assembly had listened to the appeal of the Palestinian people to fly their flag at the United Nations.

The General Assembly’s adoption of the resolution, he added, would restore hope as the people of Palestine continued on the peaceful, non-violent and legal path they had chosen to secure Palestine’s rightful place among the community of nations.  Today’s vote was also a contribution to international efforts to salvage the two-State solution, which had been gravely damaged by the occupying Power.  The Security Council must not remain paralysed anymore and should uphold its obligations.  Raising the flag would not end the occupation or solve the conflict immediately.  But it would signify to Palestinian people everywhere who were watching tonight that the international community supported them.  Speaking directly to the people watching, he expressed the hope that on the day the Palestinian flag would be raised in the United Nations, the flag would also be raised in “your homes, schools, shops, universities, farms” and everywhere appropriate.

Voting Results on Draft Resolution A/69/L.87: "Raising the flags of non-member observer States at the United Nations"

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<http://webtv.un.org/watch/raising-the-flags-of-non-member-observer-states-at-the-un-general-assembly-102nd-plenary-meeting-69th-session-voting/4476432300001>



