Mr Yasser Arafat (President of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organisation) (Translation).—Mr President,

On this occasion I would like to express to you my pleasure at meeting you and at the opportunity you are giving me to speak and to address this august body.

Allow me from this rostrum to convey to you the greetings of our Palestinian people and to express to you in their name, in the name of my brother members of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organisation and of the Palestinian National Authority, our deepest thanks and appreciation for the continued support and solidarity given by this august Council to our people's just struggle to achieve just, comprehensive and lasting peace in our area and in Palestine—the land of peace, love and tolerance.

Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, we are meeting you on a day—13 April 1994—on which the first results of the Declaration of Principles should have been realised, namely the withdrawal of the Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area as stipulated in the Declaration of Principles, which has received your support and that of the whole international community and all freedom, justice and peace-loving forces in the world. Eight months have passed since the signing of this agreement at the White House, between us and the Government of Israel, which was supposed to have been carried out and the Israeli withdrawal concluded.

I was supposed to have come to you today from Jericho. I think this was on your mind when you extended the invitation to me to address your esteemed Council. Unfortunately, however, the hopes which we all had since signing the Declaration of Principles in Washington on 13 September 1993 did not materialise as has been agreed upon because of the Israeli reticence and hesitation in their commitments and implementation. Indeed, because of this delay, our people suffered from two major massacres, in Hebron and in Gaza, during which more than 90 martyrs and more than 800 injured fell. You, had it not been for our interest in and commitment to peace, to were enough to destroy the whole peace process, because the delay in House on 13 September 1993, has allowed all the extremists to make Atalia, which was perpetrated by Palestinian extremists. These operations, regrettably, are targeted at the Palestinian and Israeli innocent peoples and at jeopardising the peace process. When I arrived today, I was surprised to learn that another operation had been carried out against innocent Israelis. I do not yet know who carried it out.

From our part, we have, since the start of the peace process in Madrid in October 1991, facilitated and pushed forward the peace process and shown the necessary flexibility, the patience and the commitment to the peace process, out of our belief in and desire for just peace, a peace which should end the long decades of war and bloody conflicts in our area and which should provide security, stability and peace to the peoples and states of the region. In conformity with the new spirit of peace, and the steps resulting therefrom, and in order to support the confidence-building measures and modes of co-operation, we have, since signing the declaration, established a number of national institutions in order to play their role in building the Palestinian civic and democratic liberal society and consolidate the foundations of real peace and co-
Allow me, Mr. President, to point out here, that we expected, and indeed, we hoped, that the government of Israel which came as a result of its declared election programme to realise peace, will adopt the necessary and required steps to rebuild confidence between the Palestinian and Israeli peoples and close the chapter of military occupation with all that it entails in terms of violations to human achievements, international conventions and agreements and the resolutions of the United Nations. We have hopes as well, Mr. President, that the Government of Israel will work to make peace and not only adopt measures which will guarantee living in peace because no one can live in peace if this peace is not achieved on all levels and in all fields.

The experience of the past eight months since signing the Declaration of Principles in Washington was frustrating and discouraging because the Government of Israel continued its policy of mass killings, detention, imposing curfews and isolating towns, especially the city of Jerusalem, confiscating land, and continued the economic siege, supporting and encouraging the fanatic settlers to continue practising the most horrible acts of killing and aggression against the lives, freedoms and properties of the Palestinian people. Those acts made it possible for the Israeli armed settlers with whom certain units of the Israeli army connived, to perpetrate the heinous massacre in the town of Hebron in Its most sacred mosque and safest shrine where the righteous victims fell. This is similar to the situation faced by our brothers in Algeria from the secret organisations in the French army (OAS) in collaboration with the French settlers. This massacre was followed by the bloody events by which the Government of Israel punished the innocent Palestinian people with killing, detention, curfews and economic and commercial siege. In addition, there were regrettable reactions, which we reject, from Palestinian extremists against Israeli citizens as has happened in Afula.

What happened in Hebron, and before that in the Holy Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, and in Bethlehem, Gaza, Nablus and in other places, is a result of deliberate negligence and abominable connivance between certain units of the Israeli army and the extremist, fanatic and racist settlers whose coming from their original countries was facilitated by the Government of Israel which contributed to their training, army, and financing and encouraged them to settle on the Palestinian land and in the midst of Palestinian towns so much so that they have become a second army of occupation and armed gangs that do not abide by law or rules and are protected by the guns of the soldiers of occupation. This has become very clear from the results of the investigation made by the Israeli judicial authorities.

Mr President, the Israeli Government had taken steps to impose collective economic punishment on the Palestinian people. As the result of a decision taken two days ago, 150,000 Palestinian workers would be denied jobs for the next six months and their families would thus have no chance of a decent life. This decision was taken at the very same time that negotiations were going on over greater co-operation in the economic field.

The Israeli settlements have always been, as the international community has come totally to recognise, a major obstacle on the road of peace. Today, and I say it with regret, they have become an alternative to peace. Peace cannot be achieved, despite our