"Hello, I am the Rapporteur of the United Nations Committee on Palestine.

Our work is both rewarding and frustrating. Rewarding because any attempt to right injustice is worthy in itself, but frustrating because a solution of the problem remains as elusive today as it was years ago.

At least, the additional light shed on the question has awakened as never before, the world's concern on the Middle East. Numerous events have taken place in the area since 1975 but, despite initiatives, both within and outside the U.N., there was, last year, the massive Israeli armed penetration inside Lebanon, the departure of the PLO from Beirut, more terrorism, more crime and more innocent victims. To this day, the Palestinians remain a people denied access to their own country.

Five years ago a UN film showed the life of this people in exile. Here is a short excerpt.

There are an estimated 400,000 Palestinians here in Lebanon. They live crowded in urban ghettos which seem to get progressively worse as the years go by.

This is where the Houbishi family lives. Refugees from 1948, they had resettled on the West Bank. The '67 war brought them first to Jordan. Then in '70 they were forced to move..."
to Beirut. Children were born along the way. The older boys pride themselves on being "fighters" already. This is, unfortunately, the legacy of the conflict that rages in the region.

This now, was filmed in Beirut during the winter of 1982-83 - the winter which followed the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Israeli tanks and troops withdrew from the city but they still occupy the entire southern part of the country, to the very edge of the capital.

This Italian machine gun position is there to ensure that the status quo, with its semblance of peace, is maintained in the town. Together with the Italians, there are contingents from France and the United States. These foreign units entered the town as the guerrilla forces of the Palestine Liberation Organization left. They came to protect the unarmed civil population, particularly the Palestinians. The PLO had been fighting against the Israeli army, navy and air force for weeks on end. Finally, the Israeli superiority left the PLO with only two choices - either to fight to the death or to leave Beirut.
The Palestinians were on their own. Encouragement and sympathy had poured in from all directions while the battle raged, but nothing beyond that.

Israel's powerful war machine bombarded Beirut for several weeks, the world looked on and saw the horror on their television screens.

In West Beirut the Israelis shelled every nook and cranny which might possibly conceal a unit of the PLO. The suffering of Lebanon's civilian population was acute.

(Voice Over)

"It's just an ordinary house. There were no organizations there that had anything to do with the war at all, no army men or Palestinian guerrillas as the Israelis claimed. More civilians died than guerrillas."

"The real bombing started with them bombarding the sports stadium non-stop. The Palestinians had their artillery there and their anti-aircraft guns and batteries of rockets."

"Very few Palestinians had left, they didn't have anywhere to go."
NARRATOR

Lebanese Government leaders do not want any new force to emerge to replace the expelled Palestinian fighters. The new generation of Palestinian expatriates want more from life than acquiescence and the wretchedness of refugee camps. It appears that the Lebanese authorities will not permit the Palestinians to enjoy the kind of independent status that they enjoyed in the country before last summer.

Remember Leila Houbishi? In December 1982 a team from Finnish Television, filming in Lebanon, was successful in locating her in one of the refugee camps on the outskirts of West Beirut.

(Voice Over)

"We visited your home in 1978. What has happened in your life since that year?"

(Leila Houbishi On Camera in Arabic - English VO)

"A lot has happened between 1978 and the present day. First we were bombed. The Israelis came and bombed the stadium. We were at home when the bombing started. We fled to another house. We ran onto the street in terror and forced our way into the lavatories where we thought we might be safe. A lot of people in this camp were killed by shrapnel."
NARRATOR

Leila's story continues. For her, the events of recent years culminate in three days in the Sabra camp in September 1982.

(Leila Houbishi on Camera in Arabic - English VO)

"Those who have managed to stay alive so far are always getting sick. Take me, for example, I'm just a bundle of nerves. Most of the people suffer from some kind of illness. Four of my sons were fighting, two of them died. What really matters is the cause they were fighting for, the cause of the Palestinian people. I shed no tears, I have no words.

When we heard that the French peacekeeping force had arrived we came into this camp.

We were here when all of a sudden there was shooting all around us. The slaughter began on Thursday morning, then at six on Thursday evening they made their way into our street, our district. The massacre started. They were on the streets lying in wait for people. My daughter was on her way to the shop. She saw them crouching there and ran away, so they shot at her. She's only 14.

At 12 o'clock we could hear the noise of killings on the street and I shut the door. There we were with the door shut, besieged in our homes for three days, from Thursday to Saturday, with nothing to eat and nothing to drink. We didn't dare move. If they'd heard our voices they'd have come in and murdered us. Just behind our house 25 people were slaughtered in a massacre, children, women, old people and young men."
After that with all these people killed on the streets while I was here with my children behind closed doors. We heard the bulldozers coming and thought they were Israeli tanks. They smashed into the houses, bringing them down on top of the people. It didn't matter if there was a family living in the house. They started shouting at us through loudspeakers at six on Saturday morning. We were told that the Israeli defence force was ordering us to leave our homes and to go to the stadium or a Kuwaiti Embassy.

There were bodies sprawled all over the streets. Under the window behind our house, streams of blood everywhere. A little baby, about two months old had been ripped in two and thrown on the ground. Another one, about one month old had been left lying there with its head torn off. They hadn't been murdered by bullets. These murderers were criminals."

NARRATOR

Where can the Palestinians find a land where they need not live in fear?

The war in Lebanon and particularly the massacre in the Sabra and Chatila camps gave new impetus to the wide-ranging political effort to solve the question of Palestine.
In proposals made through the years concerning the future of the Palestinians, mention is always made, one way or another, of the West Bank of the Jordan. The West Bank, the area between Israel itself and the river, is an integral part of old Palestine. Following the 1948 war, the West Bank was united with Jordan but, in the June war of 1967, it was invaded by Israel. Israel has occupied the West Bank ever since and now even calls it by its old Biblical names of Judea and Samaria. The West Bank and the Gaza Strip, on the Mediterranean shore, are the two places proposed by general consensus as the homeland for the Palestinians. Almost a million Palestinians live on the West Bank. There are conflicting ideas about how the new home of the Palestinians should be governed. The Reagan peace plan suggests a form of autonomy in association with the Kingdom of Jordan. The Israeli Government rejects, out of hand, both the Reagan plan and a proposal made by the Arab states, in which an independent State of Palestine is contemplated.

Israel claims that there is already one Palestinian state in the area, Jordan, and that Israel's security will be at risk if it gets a
hostile PLO state next door. The Jordanian monarch wants the inhabitants of the West Bank to be given the right to full self-determination. Jordan does not believe that anything less or any other type of self-rule would work. The United Nations itself firmly believes in the right of all people to self-determination, and the recommendations of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People are based on the recognition of this right.

(On Camera)

"If you look today at Israeli control of over 40% of the land and the resources and its intention in the next 36 months to annex the West Bank effectively by the expulsion of Arabs and the creation of a voting block of 100,000 settlers outside Jerusalem. Israel speaking of self-government is a direct contradiction in terms. There cannot be self-government under such circumstances of virtual colonization."

So for us, self-determination means the free expression of the Palestinian people as a result of the withdrawal of the force of occupation, and that transitional period, of course, of revitalizing of the occupied territories, economically, socially, culturally and politically, is extremely important. The Israelis say if the Palestinians have self-determination that they will become radical. For us, it is the Israeli occupation that is creating the radicalism that we fear will sweep the whole area if solutions are not found."

NARRATOR

If there is any likelihood of peace at all, then time is running short for it on the West Bank. The mushrooming Israeli settlements are not just
small groups of houses located at sites of military importance, where religious zealots tilled the land with machine guns on their backs. The geography of the West Bank is undergoing rapid change. Israel is now building complete towns in the area. International agreements on occupied territory forbid such activity but Israel rejects the application of such agreements to the West Bank and Gaza. Cypra Bloss a spokeswoman for the settlers in Judea, Samaria and Gaza, lives in Offra, the first Israeli settlement on the West Bank.

(On Camera)

"My personal motivation and that of the people who came with me was a religious national motivation which included two commandments, one of them was to rescue the land of Israel from desolation. As you can see around, it is desolate. And the other was to rescue the land of Israel from foreign domination." "That means?"

"That means in an area which Israel controls because of a repelling of a war, of aggression by Jordan, and in self-defence, we feel Israel should establish its presence here permanently."

NARRATOR

Gilo, a new suburb of Jerusalem is a real giant compared with Offra. People move here for practical reasons rather than out of religious conviction.
This is a modern suburb with a high standard of living, but rents are lower here than for the same apartments in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv. In all its newness Gilo is a glossy example of Israel's settlement programme. In total disregard of international objections Israel continues to build in the occupied territories and to perpetrate the occupation. Some explain that Israel is moving as many Jews as possible into the West Bank and Gaza in order to make sure that they cannot become parts of an autonomous Palestinian state. Another interpretation is that Israel is preparing to annex the West Bank, formally and finally. Should that happen, then Bethlehem and Nablus and all the other communities would become Israeli towns without their Palestinian Arab populations having had any say in the matter.

Israel is the outsider in 20th century Bethlehem. Its authority here, or anywhere on the West Bank, is based on weapons not on the will of the people. Israel could not hold meaningful elections on the West Bank, even though it can rely on its army to maintain the peace while people go to the polls. Instead of elections, Israel is dismissing a number of local Palestinian leaders from their posts. All that is needed is to be sympathetic
to the PLO. Dr. Hanna Nasser, the former rector of the Bir Zeit University is one of those who have been expelled. He is a member of the Executive Committee of the PLO.

(On Camera)

"At present the Israelis have tried to crack down on the universities. They think that the universities are the cornerstone of nationalistic feeling. Now, it is very possible that they are very important in terms of the spirit of the people in the country but what they are trying to do, the Israelis now, they are trying to blackmail the faculty members in the universities. They are trying to make them sign on documents, which are political documents and has nothing to do really with the normal life in the occupied territories, that is the normal laws or the civil laws in the country. And the faculty members say we will never sign a political statement because we are basically academicians. The response of the Israelis has been, if you don't sign that particular statement, then you have to leave the country. And as a result, now, more than 30 faculty members of various universities have been kicked out and presumed that at least 30 more will be kicked out within the near future."

NARRATOR

The population of the West Bank lives in the midst of conflicting pressures. The area is still governed under Jordanian law but this code can be overruled by the Israeli military administration. Individuals are denied their basic rights and, from time to time, their opposition erupts in strikes, demonstrations and violence, which receive instant punishment from the Israelis. There is no way of gauging
the influence of the PLO in the area, but it is fair to assume that the Israeli occupation is, in fact, working against its own ends. For from dwindling, local sympathy for the PLO is growing.

(On Camera)

"The commitment to peace means a commitment by Israel to co-existing with its neighbours, to becoming a Mediterranean littoral state. Israel, however, wishes to balkanize the area into ethnic and sectarian break up and to benefit from this break up to safeguard, as it sees it, the Jewish community in the coastal plain. This is the thinking clearly expressed by Mr. Sharon, the Defence Minister in the address to the Israeli Institute of Strategic Studies last year, when he spoke of a mandate for himself and for the State of Israel in security terms, stretching from Karachi in Pakistan to Morocco. Such concepts, of course, do not make peace, and if peace is to be made it has to be on the basis of politics being exercised where all people of the area matter and not where resources only matter and certainly not where Israel poses as the self-styled policeman of the area in attempting to represent the interests of this or that Super Power."

NARRATOR

The withdrawal of Israel from the areas conquered in the 1967 war, that is, the entire West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights, is regarded by the majority of the international community as a sine qua non for a settlement of the problem.

Israel and the Palestinians are realities ... neither can be denied ... both remain at the core of the problem.
Many, the world over, advise negotiations as the only way to alter the status quo -- short of yet another war.

However, major impediments remain.

(On Camera)

"Can you imagine the conditions when Israeli leaders and Palestinian leaders are sitting at the same negotiating table?"

"With the Palestinians, yes of course. With some of their leaders and some of their notables, no doubt we can discuss, we can negotiate and actually will live together with them, we do speak to them and meet with them. Not with the PLO, not with an organization who has set as its only goal and target the destruction State of Israel."

NARRATOR

The peace movement in Israel, an opposition organization that cuts across party boundaries talks in a different tone of voice. One of the best known representatives of the movement is the founder of the pirate radio station, "The Voice of Peace", Abe Nathan.

(On Camera)

"What is the message you want to deliver?"

"What we try and what we believe is the only way to solve any problem is if people are willing to talk to each other. If people are willing to talk to each other they understand each other, then maybe they solve the problems. All the wars here have only caused devastation, lives and property throughout this region, a lot of hate,
a lot of suspicion, a lot of frustration. And the only time we succeeded with Egypt when someone stretched out his hand, like President Sadat and said "Let's talk", we have a southern border at peace. If we are able to talk to each other it can be the only solution for peace in this region, and this is what we are trying to promote.”

NARRATOR

This is Baq'a, a refugee camp covering a few square kilometres in Jordan and the home of some 60,000 refugees.

(On Camera)

"The life is very very difficult. Like in winter the mud is full in the place. Freezing and everything and the houses are very, very small because 10 persons are living in the house. 10 persons, that is, at least. We haven't any heating."

"Do you have enough jobs here?"

"Enough work! - in this camp, no."

"How many health centres do you have here?"

"... only one ..... only one."

"Is it enough for you?"

"No...no, it is not enough."

NARRATOR

These people have fled here from the West Bank out of the clutches of the 1967 war. They, along with others who fled in 1967, as well as even earlier in 1948, are still refugees.

What they wish to do is to return to their homeland.
This is also a major concern of the United Nations.

(On Camera in French - English VO)

"The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is conscious of the urgency of achieving a just, and lasting solution to a problem which, for too long, has remained without an answer.

Each delay enables Israel to tighten its grip on the illegally occupied territories and to carry on its policy of annexation.

The confiscation of private Arab lands, the establishment of settlements, the denial to the Arab inhabitants of the fundamental human rights and Israel's violation of international law all constitute obstacles to peace.

The International Conference on the Question of Palestine, called for by the United Nations reflects the world's desire to see peace prevail in the Middle East."