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PALESTINIAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN, PRESENTING FILM ON YASSER ARAFAT, SAYS

FORMER LEADER'S CAUSE 'MORE RELEVANT THAN EVER'

Presenting the first ever documentary on Yasser Arafat at the United Nations today, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People paid homage to the late leader, whom members said fought unceasingly for the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.

“This film we are about to see is a reminder of why we are here,” said Abdou Salam Diallo of Senegal, Chairman of the Committee. Introducing the 90-minute film titled *Arafat*, he described the former statesman as an “iconic and almost mythical figure”, a tenacious fighter, astute strategist, and visionary leader. More so, said Mr. Diallo, he was a man of peace who elevated the Palestinians from a half-forgotten refugee population to the top of the United Nations agenda.

Mr. Diallo said that the documentary offered a candid and unique portrait of Mr. Arafat through exclusive testimonies from his old brothers-in-arms and rare archival footage of the man’s evolution from freedom fighter to Nobel peace prize winner. The film was also an account of the complicated Arab and international political dynamics of the time; the statesman’s cause — “more relevant than ever”.

The Permanent Observer for the State of Palestine to the United Nations, Riyad Mansour, called the screening an auspicious event, as Palestinians would be celebrating the special occasion of Yom al-Ard — the day of the land, which heralded the defending of the motherland and the

strengthening of the root of his people. He said that the documentary joined two other remarkable films on the Palestinian struggle, namely, *Five Broken Cameras* and *The Gatekeepers*.

Sahar Baassiri, a Lebanese journalist, who wrote and co-produced *Arafat* with Gisele Khoury, in collaboration with the Yasser Arafat Foundation in Ramallah, said that the documentary, directed by Jad Abi Khalil, was not only Arafat's story but the story of the Palestinian people. Originally broadcast as a four-hour, two-part television series on six Arab stations, including Cairo's On TV station, the film was being shown in the United States for the first time in an English-subtitled 90-minute version. She thanked all who had participated in and supported the endeavour. Welcoming today's audience, she stressed that it was impossible to separate Arafat's life from the cause of the Palestinian people, just as it was impossible to separate their cause from his life.