

**Statement to the Security Council by H.E. Mr. Wilfried I. Emvula,
Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian
People, on the situation in the
Middle East, including the Palestinian question**
(United Nations Headquarters, New York, 12 July 2016)

Mr. President,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People welcomes recent efforts to break the political stalemate. These are the first rays of hope since bilateral negotiations came to a halt in spring of last year. The Government of France brought key international stakeholders to Paris in June, who agreed on a multilateral effort to help advance the prospects for peace, including by providing meaningful incentives to the parties to make peace.

Two weeks ago, the Middle East Quartet published its long-awaited report in which it highlighted major threats to the two-state solution and provided recommendations on how to create the conditions for meaningful peace negotiations. The Committee underscores the need for strong and determined steps to reverse the negative trends immediately.

In all of these efforts, the international community is unanimous in its view that the only way to achieve an enduring peace will be on the basis of relevant resolutions, including by the Security Council, and a negotiated two-state outcome that meets Palestinian aspirations for statehood and sovereignty and Israeli security needs, ends the occupation that began in 1967, and resolves all permanent status issues.

The Committee fully and expressly supports peace efforts. Indeed, on 29 and 30 June we organised an International Conference in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace in Geneva. Under the title of “Peace is possible – frameworks for a way forward”, it assembled experienced peace negotiators and international experts, including from the State of Palestine and Israel, to discuss lessons learned from past initiatives and discuss new ideas. To facilitate a similar exchange of ideas, in early May, the Committee also organized a Conference on “Jerusalem at the heart of the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine”.

I have described these recent international efforts as the first rays of hope. Too often we have seen such rays vanish because we, the international community, the United Nations and this Council, did not do enough to support and bolster previous efforts or because the international community prioritised other, seemingly more urgent, issues. However, in doing so we overlooked one key issue: the long-standing inability to find a durable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the reasons for radicalisation, in the Middle East and beyond.

In the same vein, visions of security for Israel without a just and sustainable peace with Palestine are delusionary. Collective punishments, like the blockade of Gaza or the demolitions of the houses of suspected terrorists or the denial of working permits, do not produce acquiescence. They produce resentment and resistance. Likewise, preventing Palestinian development in Area C of the occupied West Bank, building illegal settlements, and taking of land for exclusive Israeli use, only increase a sense of frustration and hopelessness and call into question Israel's commitment to the two-state solution. A recent

example is the decision by the Government of Israel on new settlement construction in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, just two days after the Quartet report was published.

Unilateral security measures alone can never be enough to resolve the underlying and root causes for violence. What is needed is leadership providing a political horizon and immediate changes on the ground, so that Palestinians can start regaining hope. What is needed is a fundamental return to the agreed negotiating principles and parameters, reiterated in the Arab Peace Initiative, the Paris Ministerial and various Quartet Reports.

In this, the State of Palestine is a partner for peace. However, its capacities and ability to deliver are severely hampered by the continuing occupation and by the destruction of its infrastructure – physical as well as social.

In May of this year, our Committee held a Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, in Stockholm at which experts reviewed the challenges and constraints of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals for the State of Palestine under the Israeli occupation, and looked at ways of building resilient and sustainable economic growth while addressing humanitarian needs. A main focus of the Seminar was the long-term investment in youth and women as key to building a peaceful and inclusive society. It was encouraging to hear the voices of Palestinian youth as well as the testimony of Ms. Hanan al-Hroub from the West Bank, the recipient of the 2016 Global Teacher Prize, who is teaching Palestinian children, traumatised by the constant violence around them, that “No to violence!” is the right path towards a good future.

The de facto political division of Gaza and the West Bank continues to affect Palestinian society and efforts towards a peaceful solution of the conflict. The Committee welcomes recent reconciliation talks, and expresses its hope that they will soon come to fruition. However, this division cannot be an excuse for international inaction, or a delay in donor support for Gaza reconstruction. The people of Gaza deserve better.

The Committee also welcomes the call for local council elections in October of this year, and hopes that they will be held throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in Gaza. Good governance and transparent political structures are essential for Palestine and Palestinians to develop their state and its institutions and take their rightful place among the nations of the world.

For these efforts, the continued and increased support by the international community is needed. The notion that development must wait until the humanitarian crisis is over or a political solution is reached is short-sighted, as is the one that the beginning of development projects indicate that there is no longer any need for humanitarian aid. There is no law that prevents programmes on education, health care, and creation of livelihoods to start even while the rubble is being cleared away.

Mr. President,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Today I have deliberately focused on the rays of hope. Against the backdrop of all the violence and despair, in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the region, and reaching beyond, it is very tempting to adopt a bleak and morose view. We must fight this temptation. As said at the Committee’s Conference last month in Geneva, “peace is possible”. But it takes everyone’s efforts. And it takes leadership. Both people, Palestinians and Israelis, expect it and they depend on it – from their own leaders and from us. Let us not disappoint them again.
