

International Conference on the Question of Jerusalem  
Baku, 20-21 July 2017

## CHAIRMAN'S SUMMARY

The **International Conference on the Question of Jerusalem** was convened in Baku, Azerbaijan, on 20 and 21 July 2017 under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP) and with support by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The theme of the Conference was *“Jerusalem and the international community: providing political and economic support”*.

The Conference aims were two-fold: (1) to provide up-to-date information on the situation in the City, especially in light of the ongoing deteriorating situation following the incidents around the Al-Aqsa Mosque; and (2) to present ideas and proposals about how the international community, especially OIC Member States, can provide concrete support to the Palestinian population in Jerusalem, with a focus on education and training for fostering resilience, especially among youth, and on economic recovery and development, in particular in the tourism sector.

The Conference brought together international experts, including from Palestine and Israel, representatives of the diplomatic community and the public.

At the Opening Session, the representative of the host country, **Ambassador Shahin Abdullayev**, described the question of Jerusalem as “one of the most important, albeit complex” parts of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and stressed that its resolution should be at the centre of international efforts to establish a just and lasting peace in the region. In that regard, he called for the official establishment of East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine within the 1967 borders.

**United Nations Assistant Secretary-General Miroslav Jenča**, who attended the Conference as the representative of Secretary-General António Guterres, stated that while it was high time to create the conditions for a return to direct negotiations so as to resolve all final status issues, including the question of Jerusalem, international partners must help to address the socioeconomic challenges confronting those living in the Occupied Palestinian Territory within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its pledge to “leave no one behind”.

The **Chair of the Conference, Amb. Rafael Darío Ramírez Carreño (Venezuela)**, delivered a statement on behalf of the Chair of the Committee, Ambassador Fodé Seck (Senegal), calling on the international community to wrest the issue of the City from the hands of radicals and fanatics, and turn it “from a topic of confrontation into one of cooperation”. One way to accomplish that goal was to provide concrete support to the Palestinian inhabitants of East Jerusalem. Speaking in his national capacity, he highlighted the recent Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), and called upon the participants to send a further message against Israeli policies in East Jerusalem.

**Assistant Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Samir Bakr**, expressed concern that Israel's recent escalation of the conflict in Jerusalem would only exacerbate the situation and give it a religious dimension with dangerous repercussions. He urged the international community to hold Israel accountable, pointing out that, as the occupying Power, it continued its attempts to isolate Jerusalem's Palestinian population and to obliterate the City's Islamic character.

On behalf of the State of Palestine, **Ambassador Riyad Mansour** stated that because of Israel's recent activities Jerusalem faced a particularly dangerous moment, which carried the risk of extremists turning the conflict into a religious confrontation. He proposed that the Conference conclude with a communiqué rejecting the closure of holy sites and calling on Israel to guarantee that the historic status quo would be maintained.

Following the Opening Session, Member States and Organisations read out official statements, among them Indonesia, Malaysia, Morocco, Turkey and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean. (The documents will be available on the Committee website in due course.)

In the first plenary session on "*Life in East Jerusalem under occupation*", speakers warned that tensions between Israelis and Palestinians in Jerusalem had reached a breaking point. Israel's continued settlement enterprise in East Jerusalem went hand-in-hand with discriminatory practices against the Palestinian population in education, housing and social services among other areas. An Israeli expert highlighted that on both sides radical voices are "weaponising religion" at Al-Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, which on the Israeli side had become part of the mainstream. The only true solution for the question of Jerusalem was an end of the occupation, and a "divorce" of both communities in which each respects the attachment of the other to the land and its respective holy sites, safeguarding the latter for religious use. As a specific example of the situation in East Jerusalem the panel highlighted the institutionalised discrimination against Palestinian women by Israeli authorities, which is leading to increased vulnerability in their homes, places of work and public spaces. During the discussion, participants asked that the international community exert pressure on Israel to take measures to deescalate the current situation, and for international support to increase opportunities for Palestinians to seek education abroad. Within the context of the OIC being a co-organiser of the Conference, participants called for a strong show of Islamic solidarity with Palestinians in East Jerusalem.

The second plenary session on "*A new approach for East Jerusalem*" continued to explore the specific impacts of the Israeli occupation on the City's economy, development and social life as well as opportunities for support from both donors and investors. Israeli policy in East Jerusalem was described as consisting of three phases – de-development, integration and gentrification. One of the results was that over 80 per cent of the Palestinian population in the City lived below the poverty line, and that whereas all Christian holy sites are located in East Jerusalem, only 20 per cent of Christian pilgrims are staying there. Calls went out for a conference to mobilise investment to shore up the Palestinian infrastructure against a "judaization" of East Jerusalem and its change from a multi-cultural site with equal treatment of all religions to a homogenised one, where one national narrative reigns paramount. Speakers highlighted opportunities for outside support and investment and cited specific examples. In this

context, the media were asked for a more balanced portrayal of the situation, focusing not only on the dire political situation but also reporting on opportunities for Palestinians and their outside supporters. While Arab donors were reluctant to fund projects in Gaza or the West Bank to avoid the appearance of favouring a particular political faction, everybody could get behind Jerusalem. The recently-agreed United Nations Engagement Strategy in East Jerusalem was focusing on “soft interventions” to restore East Jerusalem as the centre of commercial, religious and cultural life for the Palestinian population and to help reconnect the City with the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, while allowing the population to realize their rights and access essential services. Participants called for strong support to the Palestinian education sector in East Jerusalem as the foundation for a better future and on outside religious authorities not to dissuade Christian and Muslim pilgrims from visiting the City while under occupation, as such bans primarily hurt Palestinian businesses.

During the final plenary session on “*International and regional support for East Jerusalem*”, speakers further discussed outside support for the Palestinian population in East Jerusalem. Member states of the OIC are implementing their Strategic Plan for the Development of Jerusalem, including capacity building programmes for Palestinians from East Jerusalem focusing on specific sectors – e.g. tourism and youth empowerment. Palestinians and their allies could also use international law to advance a solution of the Question of Palestine, including Jerusalem, through requesting the International Court of Justice to issue an advisory opinion on the continued legality of the occupation. A ruling that the occupation had become illegal would have a strong impact on the political arena. Participants reiterated a growing weariness among Palestinians and their supporters over the perceived inability of the international community to implement United Nations resolutions and enforce international law in regard to the Question of Palestine and the continued Israeli occupation.

The closing session saw statements by the host country and the State of Palestine. Ambassador Abdullayev compared the situation in Palestine with that between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh. Ambassador Mansour reiterated his Government’s determination to achieve a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Conference ended with the **issuance of a communiqué** on behalf of the organisers – the Committee and the OIC – strongly condemning the closure of Al-Aqsa Mosque and called upon the international community to reaffirm respect for the historic status quo and to compel Israel to rescind all measures violating it. Further, the organisers reaffirmed the longstanding international condemnation, enshrined in General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, of all measures aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and status of the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, and stressed that only an end of the Israeli occupation will pave the way for a just and lasting peace.

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*Note: This Summary attempts to provide an overall picture of the deliberations of the Conference. A detailed report, including specific questions that were addressed during the interactive discussions, will be published by the Division for Palestinian Rights in due course.*