



# UNITED NATIONS FORUM TO MARK FIFTY YEARS OF OCCUPATION

*Ending the Occupation:  
The Path to Independence, Justice and Peace for Palestine  
29 June 2017*

*Creating the Space for Human Rights, Development, and a Just Peace  
30 June 2017*

United Nations Headquarters, New York

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## CHAIRMAN'S SUMMARY

The **United Nations Forum to Mark Fifty Years of Occupation** was convened at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on 29 and 30 June 2017, under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP). A day-long event entitled "*Ending the Occupation: The Path to Independence, Justice, and Peace for Palestine*" was held on 29 June, followed by a civil society forum entitled "*Ending the Occupation: Creating the Space for Human Rights, Development, and a Just Peace*" on 30 June.

The Forum brought together international experts, representatives of the diplomatic community, civil society, including Palestinians and Israelis, as well as academics and students of diverse backgrounds and views to discuss the ongoing occupation. A series of moderated interactive panels underscored the importance of ending the occupation as an antecedent step towards a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Forum provided experts and civil society organizations (CSOs) with a valuable advocacy platform to inform policy and diplomatic action on the question of Palestine at UN Headquarters.

At the inaugural session, the message of **Secretary-General António Guterres**, delivered by Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed, noted that ending the occupation is the only way to lay the foundations for an enduring peace that meets both the Israeli security needs and Palestinian aspirations for statehood and sovereignty. Recalling that five decades of occupation have fuelled recurring cycles of violence and retribution, its ending would remove a driver of violent extremism and terrorism in the region. The Secretary-General called for a return to direct negotiations and reiterated his offer to work with all relevant stakeholders to support a genuine peace process. In her own opening remarks, **Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed** emphasized that the two-state solution is the only path to ensure that Palestinians and Israelis can realize their national and historic aspirations and live in peace, security, and dignity. All unilateral actions that undermine the two-state solution, particularly the continued

expansion of Israeli settlements which constitute a violation of international law, should end. She highlighted the occupation's humanitarian costs noting that the most vulnerable are paying the highest price for political failure on the part of various stakeholders, including the international community. **The Chair of the Committee, Ambassador Fodé Seck (Senegal)**, highlighted the responsibility of the international community to redouble its efforts to reach a viable two-state solution on the basis of international law and all relevant UN resolutions. He stressed that ending the occupation is the only way to achieve the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. On behalf of the State of Palestine, the Secretary-General of the **Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), Saeb Erakat**, described the ongoing occupation as an opportune environment for extremism in the Middle East. He called for accountability on the part of the Israeli Government, including with respect to its 'apartheid' policies and discriminatory laws. He called for all of the international community to recognize the State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital and underscored that Gaza is an integral part of a Palestinian state and called on Hamas to end its 'coup d'état'. Finally, he expressed hope that the engagement of the US administration would lead to peace.

Following the Opening Session, Regional Organisations and Committee Members read out official statements. The statements of other States were published on the Committee website.

The first panel on "*The Costs and Consequences of Fifty Years of Occupation*", recalled that Israel had taken control of East Jerusalem, West Bank, Gaza, the Golan Highs and the Sinai peninsula following the June 1967 war. While Sinai was eventually returned to Egypt, the other territories remained in a patchwork of different arrangements, including Israeli occupation. Other speakers described the ongoing Israeli occupation as an affront to the international legal order. An Israeli speaker argued that for his country, 1967 had brought military grandeur but moral collapse, pointing out that the rise of the Israeli right could not be separated from the 1967 war. He added that Israel has never had the kind of global outreach it enjoys today, and the "Boycott, Divestment Sanctions" (BDS) campaign has had only a marginal, if any, impact on conditions inside the country. While Israelis do not want a one-state solution, many question why the country should make any effort towards two states now, when its economy was booming, international relations had never been better, and there was a friendly US Administration in place. Another speaker noted the pervasive oppressive situation in the Gaza Strip particularly for young people, where they represented more than 60 per cent of the population. Palestinians, particularly in Gaza, first and foremost want their human dignity preserved. Speakers recalled that the question of Palestine was the longest-running issue on the United Nations agenda and asserted that Israel was getting away with 'apartheid' without serious accountability. Israel had to transform from the occupier of the Palestinian people to their neighbour.

The second panel "*Beyond Occupation: The Path Ahead to Palestinian Independence and a Just Peace*", noted that while there was a possibility of renewed US-led peace talks, it would be overly optimistic to expect that these would yield a lasting peaceful solution. Speakers cautioned against regionalizing peace talks as this would risk reinforcing ongoing regional instability, and called for a bigger role for the European Union. Similarly, partial measures were viewed as perpetuating the occupation and support was expressed for the Arab Initiative that spelled the endgame. It was also pointed out that direct negotiations were unhelpful when the balance of power was so unequal. An Israeli scholar highlighted the PLO's 1988 decision to

recognize Israel and the recent Security Council resolution 2334 (2016) designed to stop Israel's creeping annexation of Palestinian land. She stressed that civil society and opposition parties, with help of the international community, play an important role in advocating for change and the realization of two sovereign and independent states. Others reminded that the international community had a responsibility to guarantee that occupation was not profitable, but costly, for Israel. The efforts of anti-occupation civil society, particularly in the United States and among the Jewish community, were mentioned as being important.

In his welcome remarks on the second day, the Chair of the CEIRPP Working Group and Deputy Representative of Malta to the United Nations, **David Mansfield**, recalled GA resolution 71/20 which requested the Committee "to support the achievement without delay of an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967". In the implementation of its mandate, the Committee considered cooperation with Palestinian, Israeli and other CSOs of paramount importance.

In her keynote address "*The role of civil society in achieving an end to the occupation, conflict transformation and a just peace*" Nobel Peace Prize laureate Jody Williams recalled the Campaign to Ban Landmines as a model of civil society action that could be replicated in different contexts, stressing the importance of coordinated action and systematic documentation in efforts to bring about change. Governments change policy when civil society pushes them to move and power never concedes power without pressure, she stated.

The first panel "*The Gaza Strip: An Integral Part of the State of Palestine*" called for sustained international engagement on Gaza and a shift from a humanitarian to a human rights framework, which would take into account the legal obligations of the occupying power and other duty-bearers. Speakers emphasized the indispensability of the Gaza Strip to the broader question of Palestine; and how Gaza should be dealt with as a political issue rather than as a national security and military challenge. Also highlighted was the connection between the West Bank and Gaza, pointing out that Israel's policy documents showed that many of the policies on Gaza were not in fact grounded in security concerns. Providing examples of living conditions in Gaza, speakers reported that continued electricity cuts were resulting in an environmental disaster and emphasized the need to put accountability at the centre of the debate.

The second panel "*Enforcement of International Law and Accountability: How to Make a Difference?*" discussed how the travel ban imposed on Gaza was undermining efforts to document abuse as required to hold all parties accountable for violations of international law. Lack of accountability also affected Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, while labelling human rights organizations and the Human Rights Council as 'anti-Semitic' or 'anti-Israeli' in order to silence criticism risked undermining the international human rights system. Noting lack of progress in the implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), a speaker focused on the need to operationalize its call on all States to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967. Stressing that civil society action had been more successful in changing corporate behaviour than government policy, another speaker highlighted the relevance of soft law, such as the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and called on OHCHR to publish the database of businesses operating in settlements as mandated by the Human Rights Council.

The third panel “*Beyond Occupation: In Search of a Just and Lasting Peace*” emphasized the need to change the balance of power through popular Palestinian resistance; engaging in BDS, restoring internal unity, and reintegrating all Palestinian people in one common strategy. An Israeli speaker stressed the importance of acknowledging the Nakba, the right of return and gender perspectives, and encouraged the use of the language of apology as a crucial form of pre-transitional justice. Highlighting that a growing segment of the Jewish community in the United States supports Palestinian rights, a panellist asserted that grassroots movements must step in when States are unwilling or unable to act, which can create conditions to realize an end to the occupation, the right of return and equal rights for Palestinians in Israel. One speaker noted how churches had shifted their focus to ‘what groups and individuals can do themselves’ to challenge the occupation, such as purchasing Palestinian goods rather than just boycotting Israeli goods. BDS could be a form of non-violent resistance that in the past had proven effective. Diaspora representatives argued that they had a role in raising awareness on the question of Palestine as well as contributing to policy inside the Palestinian structures.

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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.*