

Salil Shetty - Speaking notes (please check against delivery)

International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

Special Meeting of the UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, 29 November 2017

Mr President, Your Excellencies, friends:

I am grateful to have this opportunity to speak on behalf of Amnesty International, a global movement of more than seven million people across the world, and as voice reflecting the views of ordinary people and civil society.

Nobody in this room needs convincing about the urgency of this discussion. The neglect of the serious human rights abuses against the Palestinian people is a scar on the world's conscience.

But as if we needed a reminder of the unique and grave situation facing Palestinians, it came in the convergence of three significant anniversaries this year.

The first: **100 years** since the Balfour Declaration. This has become a symbol of the international failure to ensure the human rights of Palestinians, including millions of refugees.

The second: **50 years** since Israel's occupation of the Palestinian Territories and Golan Heights – with no end in sight.

I hardly need remind you of the brutal everyday consequences in the Occupied Territories.

There is the destruction of their homes and properties on a vast scale – 50,000 since 1967. The plundering of their land and natural resources for the benefit of 600,000 Israeli settlers.

Israel's policy of constructing and expanding settlements on stolen Palestinian land is illegal, discriminatory and unjust. It is a key driver of the mass human rights violations resulting from the occupation.

Even as we stand here today, tens of Palestinian villages in the West Bank are at risk of destruction, to make way for settlement expansion.

And there are the daily abuses that Palestinians suffer. The hundreds of checkpoints and closures that restrict movement for nearly five million people. The detention of tens of thousands of women, men and children for months, sometimes years, without charge or trial. The beatings. The torture. The 10,200 killings, often unlawful, since 1987. And virtually no accountability.

And the third anniversary: **10 years** since the inhumane and illegal blockade on Gaza began.

A decade of collective punishment and complete air, sea and land closure of Gaza devastated the economy and cut off Palestinians from each other and the world.

During that time, three separate wars have killed thousands of civilians, including children, and destroyed essential civilian infrastructure.

The manmade humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza has made life barely tolerable. 96% of the water is contaminated and unfit for consumption. 80% of people rely on humanitarian food aid. This is

compounding massive inequalities between Israelis and Palestinians. It simply can't be accepted.

I could easily use the whole of my time to detail the devastating realities of life for the Palestinian people.

And of course it is necessary to acknowledge it is not only Palestinians who have suffered. Since 1987 over 1,400 Israelis have been killed by Palestinians – hundreds of them civilians killed by armed groups.

But we must deal with the bald truth which confronts us: 50 years since the occupation began, solidarity alone is not enough. Merely to condemn 50 years of settlements, 50 years of war crimes, is not enough.

And we must confront the double standards of the international community, particularly the United States, in turning a blind eye. The USA has repeatedly and cynically abused its veto power as a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

In addition, the US and EU Member States have been transferring arms and munitions to Israel, which pose a significant risk of being used for serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

Yet, despair is not an option. Amnesty International is based on the belief that when people come together, change is possible. And we believe there *is* a way forward. We *can* end mass violations against Palestinians while ensuring the rights of both Palestinians and Israelis to live in dignity.

I want to propose three ways forward.

First, UN Member States took an important step with Security Council Resolution 2334 of 2016.

Its strong language reaffirming the illegality of Israeli settlements was welcome. But strong language has not translated into action. Since the resolution was passed, the settlement project has increased rapidly. Israel introduced laws which approved grabs of private Palestinian land retroactively, and thousands of new settlement units in future.

Implementing Resolution 2334 is imperative for ending mass violations. Amnesty International urges States to ensure its implementation, and to mandate progress reports to this end.

Crucially, States must distinguish between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967. We urge States to take action to ensure they do not recognize or assist settlements and their expansion.

This leads me to my **second point**. Hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of goods produced in settlements are exported each year. It is time for States to back up condemnation with real action.

Over 50 years, Israel has deprived Palestinians of the use of their own natural resources – fertile land, water, quarries and minerals. Meanwhile it has unlawfully seized control of these resources and diverted them to benefit settlement industries. These produce goods that are often exported.

Amnesty International is calling on States to ban settlement goods from entering their markets. States should also prevent corporations domiciled in their territory from operating in settlements, or trading in settlement products.

Our call is based on States' existing obligations not to recognize or assist in the illegal situation created by Israel's settlements. It is fully in the power of States to do this.

Thirdly, many Palestinian and Israeli human rights defenders are standing up for those who are oppressed. They are calling for justice and an end to the occupation.

And they are suffering toxic consequences: smear campaigns against them and their families, surveillance, threats to their lives and livelihoods. Palestinian defenders are facing charges, judicial attack, and detention. Those in Israel are labelled as foreign agents and traitors.

Human rights defenders from abroad are being denied entry into the country.

Our solidarity with the Palestinian people means solidarity with these human rights defenders also. We can perpetuate their plight with silence and inertia. Or we can choose to support them and call for justice.

Today, Amnesty launches our fifteenth global letter writing campaign, Write for Rights. People across the world will write millions of messages for those whose rights are under attack.

Among the brave people featured in this campaign are Palestinians Issa Amro and Farid al-Atrash. They are facing baseless charges before an Israeli military court for organizing a protest against settlements. We stand in solidarity with Issa and Farid and demand that Israel drops charges against them and stops silencing people who are defending their rights.

We have been speaking about mass violations of Palestinians' rights for 50 years. In a world where the demonization of whole groups of people based on their identity is becoming more mainstream every day, it's time for a fresh resolve.

In the face of these injustices, we are not helpless. Let us stand together to make a real difference in the lives of millions of Palestinians who have endured decades of injustice, indignity and discrimination.

Thank you.