



UNITED NATIONS FORUM ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

“70 YEARS AFTER 1948 – LESSONS TO ACHIEVE A SUSTAINABLE PEACE”

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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Statement by

H.E. Mr. Fodé Seck

Chairman

Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights
of the Palestinian People

Excellencies,
Distinguished Speakers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

One year ago, in June 2017, our Committee convened a Forum to mark fifty years of the Israeli occupation, here at the United Nations Headquarters. A salient feature of the debate was the consensus on the necessity to end the prolonged occupation that began in 1967 and implement the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 lines. However, this year's anniversary reminds us that the question of Palestine did not start in 1967. As noted by the General Assembly, with deep regret, seventy years have passed since the 1948 war and its aftermath without tangible progress towards a peaceful solution. In the collective memory of Palestinians and the wider Arab world that aftermath, *Al-Nakba* – which means “catastrophe” in Arabic – evokes memories from a national disaster involving loss, dispossession, destroyed villages and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Arab Palestinians from their homes and lands. This national catastrophe was followed by decades in exile which brought more war, dispossession, displacement and suffering.

Therefore, as we reflect on the events of 1948, it is hard to escape the conclusion that *Al-Nakba*, this catastrophe, lies at the very heart of the question of Palestine. If it is not adequately acknowledged and addressed, the search for peace in the Middle East will remain elusive. As recognized by the Security Council, a comprehensive approach to sustaining peace must address the root causes of conflicts and acknowledge the linkages between development, peace and security, and human rights. We will therefore continue to advocate for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian People, and for a just solution to their plight, based on General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948 on the right of return for the Palestine refugees to their homes, as indispensable for the solution of the question of Palestine and sustainable peace in the region.

The United Nations was engaged from the very beginning, providing critical assistance to Palestine refugees whose ranks have swelled over the years to some 5 million. However, UNRWA is facing a formidable challenge in fulfilling its humanitarian mandate; it is of the utmost importance that we, the Member States of the United Nations, provide adequate financial support to UNRWA so that it can continue its crucial work.

Distinguished colleagues, experts and guests,

We have seen it time and again in conflicts all over the world: a prerequisite for peace and inclusive future often requires revisiting a painful past and asking difficult questions to all parties. In this spirit, let me welcome you to this two-day Forum, which seeks to contribute to mobilizing collective diplomatic efforts to launch credible negotiations, leading to a just peace. Both today and tomorrow, we will have the privilege of hearing from a distinguished group of Palestinian, Israeli and international political figures and experts. I would like to acknowledge the number of speakers and other participants who have travelled long distances, from Palestine, from Israel, from Tanzania, from Guatemala and many other places. Your presence here is a testimony of your commitment to find a just and lasting solution for the Question of Palestine. It is also a testimony to the fact that while in some countries voices for peace are under grave threat to be silenced, they do persevere and we salute and support that courage.

I invite all of you – panellists and audience – to actively and respectfully participate in the debates. To those observing, I wish Ramadan Mubarak – may our reflections and lessons learned prompt action to achieve a sustainable peace for Palestinians, Israelis and all other people in the region.