



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE QUESTION OF JERUSALEM

“Preserving the cultural and religious character of Jerusalem”

Geneva, 27 - 28 June 2019

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

OPENING SESSION

Message of

Mr. António Guterres
United Nations Secretary-General

Delivered by

Mr. Philippe Baudin on behalf of

Mr. Michael Møller
Director-General
United Nations Office at Geneva

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

**REMARKS AT OPENING OF THE
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE
QUESTION OF JERUSALEM
MADE BY**

**MR. MØLLER,
DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE
UNITED NATIONS OFFICE AT GENEVA**

Geneva, 27 June 2019

[Check Against Delivery]

Excellencies,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the International Conference on the Question of Jerusalem – titled “Preserving the cultural and religious character of Jerusalem” – organised here in Geneva by the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, with support from the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

The Question of Palestine has been on the United Nations agenda almost since the Organization’s inception. And yet, the international community and the United Nations remain unable to put an end to the conflict and realise a just and lasting solution. Indeed, the prospect of a solution has become increasingly distant.

Still, the issue has lost none of its urgency. The prolonged absence of a meaningful peace process has fed repeated cycles of escalation and de-escalation of violence. Meanwhile, tensions remain high even in periods of relative stability.

Intense flare-ups of violence, especially in Gaza, where the population remains under tight closures by Israel, make daily life for the Palestinian population exceptionally hard. Once more, and with due consideration of Israel’s security needs, I reiterate the United Nations call to end such closures, which amount to collective punishment in contravention of international humanitarian law.

With 2.5 million Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory in need of some form of humanitarian aid, and over 5 million registered Palestine refugees, the recent challenges posed to UNRWA give cause for great concern. I want to express my deep appreciation to the donors that have increased their commitments to the Agency during this challenging financial period and call on the international community to maintain its support for Palestine refugees in the future.

Settlement expansion and the demolition and seizure of Palestinian property in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, have continued at an increased pace. I reiterate that settlements are illegal under international law and a major obstacle to peace.

After 70 years of conflict, a resolution is long overdue. I urge both parties to implement their bilateral agreements and avoid taking unilateral action that undermines the two-State solution. It is only by realizing the vision of two States living side-by-side in peace, security and mutual recognition, with Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and Palestine, and all final status issues resolved permanently through negotiations, that the legitimate national aspirations of both peoples will be achieved.

Any idea falling short of the parameters set out in relevant United Nations resolutions and applicable international law and previous agreements will stand no chance of success. As the Secretary-General has repeated time and again: "There is no plan B."

Excellencies,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today's conference focusses on the question of Jerusalem. This City is part of world heritage and holy to followers of Christianity, Islam and Judaism. It is thus not only a fulcrum in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; it also affects relationships worldwide. It is therefore important to preserve the status of the Holy City of Jerusalem as the common patrimony of humanity, accessible to the followers of the three monotheistic religions and to all humankind.

Jerusalem is also a key final status issue. Without a solution to its status, no Israeli-Palestinian agreement is possible.

Measures aimed at changing East Jerusalem's demographic composition, character and status are a violation of international law and of UN resolutions. Ongoing administrative and other actions taken by the Israeli government make life harder and, in some cases, impossible for Palestinian Jerusalemites to continue living in their native city. In April alone, 63 Palestinian homes and other structures were demolished in East Jerusalem. I reiterate the call of the Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory for "an immediate halt to the Israeli authorities' destruction of Palestinian-owned property in East Jerusalem".

I also call on the Israeli authorities to refrain from passing legislation that redraws the municipal boundaries of East Jerusalem, thus changing its character. It is essential to fully

respect the status quo at the holy sites and observe relevant agreements. In addition, the United Nations is concerned over any unilateral moves that prejudice the outcome of negotiations and jeopardize peace and calls on all Member States to fully implement Security Council resolution 2334 (2016).

Finally, I want to reiterate that the United Nations will continue to support a peaceful resolution of the Question of Palestine. We will do that through the good offices of the Secretary-General as part of the Middle East Quartet; through the efforts of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process; and through the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs in New York, including its Division for Palestinian Rights, which serves as the secretariat of the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and implements its activities.

In this spirit I wish you fruitful discussions.

Thank you.

* * *