

**Statement to the Security Council by H.E. Mr. Wilfried I. Emvula,
Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People,
on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question**

(United Nations Headquarters, New York, 18 April 2016)

Mr. President,
Ladies and gentlemen,

As we meet again for this periodic debate on the Palestinian question, while there are rays of hope for the victims of other conflicts in the region, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict shows no such sign. Indeed, were it not for the date stamp on the news reports, they would read like the ones from months and years ago.

Data published by the Israel Central Bureau for Statistics show that in 2015 settlement construction increased vis-à-vis the preceding year. In early 2016, demolitions of Palestinian homes, confiscation of Palestinian land and its re-designation as so-called “Israeli state land”, as well as displacement of Palestinians have already exceeded those of all of 2015. So have mass arrests of Palestinians and their long-term incarceration without a charge or trial under the label of “administrative detention”, a practice illegal under international law. These unilateral measures, taken at the expense of Palestinian rights and freedoms, mark a new and fairly disturbing phase in terms of the confrontation between international humanitarian law and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank. Furthermore, despite repeated assertions that the situation could not remain the same following the 2014 war, Gaza remains under Israeli blockade and the pace of reconstruction stays inadequate for the needs of the Strip, while donors continue to disburse painfully slowly funds pledged for the Strip’s reconstruction. Unfortunately, the few voices in Israel objecting to these policies and calling for constructive negotiations with the goal of reaching a just peace are facing increasing measures to silence them completely, for example through proposed legislation on non-governmental groups and on suspension of members from the Israeli Parliament, which targets Arab Members of the Knesset.

In 2015, the Security Council held 13 meetings to consider the Palestinian question but failed to initiate any action. It is hoped that the Council will act and support the draft resolution currently being circulated by the Arab Group that reiterates the Council’s demand that Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The non-permanent members of this Council, including the five members that also serve on the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, have actively engaged the Council on this issue, most recently through exploring options for a mechanism to protect the civilian population in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, on the basis of existing Council resolutions. We hope such efforts will soon bear fruit. The Committee welcomes recent efforts, most notably by the Government of France and the Middle East Quartet, to explore ways to overcome the obstacles, which brought the bilateral negotiations to a stall, and continues to offer its full support to those endeavours.

Without the combined efforts of the international community and the parties on the ground, the current situation – bleak as it already appears – may only get worse. In order to stop and reverse the spiral of violence, the Palestinian people have to regain the hope for a better future, for a free and sovereign State of their own that offers a perspective for a dignified future, so that they and their children will feel that theirs is a movement forward, not a slide backwards into the abyss. We also hope that Palestinian reconciliation efforts succeed.

For all this to happen, the generic vilification of Palestinians, which at the moment is all too common in Israel, has to end. Such demagoguery leads to a dehumanization of Palestinians in the eyes of Israeli public and, ultimately, to such incidents like the apparent extrajudicial execution of an injured and incapacitated Palestinian in Hebron by an Israeli soldier just a few weeks ago. The Committee welcomes subsequent statements by Israeli officials that such actions are unlawful and illegitimate, and that their perpetrators will be prosecuted, and hopes that actions will follow those words. The Committee also welcomes the clear and repeated rejection of violence by the Government of the State of Palestine, most recently again by President Abbas, including on Israeli television just over two weeks ago. And I would like to reiterate here in this Council that the Committee condemns all forms of terrorism and regrets all losses of civilian life.

More needs to be done. In order for a peace to be agreed upon, and then sustained, a modicum of trust has to be re-established. The Committee will do its utmost to contribute to this endeavour, for instance by providing a forum for exchanges between Palestinians and Israelis at its international meetings, and continuing to encourage dialogue and synergies between civil society organizations of both sides. One such example was a panel discussion on the “Women’s role in the search for Israeli-Palestinian peace”, organised by the Working Group of the Committee during the recent 60th meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women.

Additionally, in March the Committee organised a Roundtable on Legal Aspects of the Question of Palestine, in Amman, Jordan, to enhance the capacity of the State of Palestine to fulfil its obligations in light of its recent accession to a host of international treaties and conventions. In two weeks, the Committee will hold the International Conference on the Question of Jerusalem in Dakar, Senegal, organised jointly with the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. In line with the mandate of the Committee, in the coming months a United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People will be held in Stockholm, Sweden, focusing on how Palestine can work towards the Sustainable Development Goals under the occupation; and a United Nations International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, in Paris, France, which will examine how the international community can reinvigorate the peace process. The Committee welcomes active participation by all Member States and civil society in these events.

Mr. President,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am fully conscious that the warnings of impending doom have been given so often and for so long in the case of Israel and Palestine, that many have become inured to them. The situation in the region should serve as a stark reminder of how quickly a catastrophe can break out. It is because the price of failure is too terrifying to contemplate that the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People will continue its strong efforts towards a peaceful and just solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which can only be achieved by ending the occupation, through the two-State solution on the basis of pre-1967 borders and the just resolution of all final status issues. Our efforts do not support the rights of one group at the expense of another – finding and sustaining a just peace is the only way in which Palestinian and Israeli societies can endure and prosper. Failure to achieve a peaceful solution would ultimately destroy both.

The Committee will continue to advocate and work towards the goal, enshrined in the UN Charter, that the Palestinian people, like all other peoples of the world, realise the right to self-determination. For this we will cooperate with our partners and all those who share our common values, those of the United Nations.
