



DIVISION FOR
PALESTINIAN RIGHTS

Bulletin

on action by the United Nations system and
intergovernmental organizations
relevant to the question of Palestine

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I. EU REITERATES ITS POSITION IN RESPONSE TO SETTLEMENT ANNOUNCEMENTS

On 9 January, Mr. Peter Stano, the European Union Lead Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, issued the following [press release](#):

On January 5 and 6, the Israeli authorities approved the construction of almost two thousand housing units in illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank, including the retroactive approval of already existing constructions, some of which were built on private Palestinian land. This decision follows other settlement-related developments in recent months, including in particularly sensitive places such as East Jerusalem and Hebron.

The European Union reiterates its clear position that all settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory are illegal under international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace, as reaffirmed by UN Security Council Resolution 2334.

We call on the government of Israel to fully comply with international law, end all settlement activity on occupied territories and related actions. Violence by settlers on Palestinian civilians and their property has to be stopped and prevented. The European Union also reiterates that it will not recognise any changes to the pre-1967 borders, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by both sides.

The European Union will continue to support a resumption of a meaningful process towards the two-State solution, the only realistic and viable way to fulfil the legitimate aspirations of both peoples.

II. EU EXPRESSES ITS CONCERN OVER WORRYING DEVELOPMENTS AND VIOLENCE IN EAST JERUSALEM

On 14 January, the European Union issued the following [press release](#), following the visit of the EU Heads of Mission in Jerusalem and Ramallah to the Al-Issawiya neighbourhood of East Jerusalem:

In Al-Issawiya, the EU Heads of Mission met residents, community representatives and representatives of civil society organisations active in the community. Interlocutors presented an unprecedented increased presence of Israeli security forces since May 2019, with daily incursions – many of them taking place in the vicinity of schools. One person was killed on 27 June 2019, and there are estimates that more than 300 have been injured. Interlocutors expressed that the raids have resulted in several severe incidents of police brutality and excessive force, including assaults on residents and use of rubber bullets, tear gas, and stun grenades and night raids as well as arrests. They estimated that some 700 people have been arrested (with up to about 30 indictments filed). The EU Heads of Mission were also briefed on the educational situation and the challenges facing Palestinian students in Al-Issawiya.

“The European Union is concerned about the worrying developments and violence in Al-Issawiya. Responsible actors on the ground should show calm and restraint in order to prevent any

escalation,” said the Acting European Union Representative Tomas Niklasson. “The EU and its Member States support the right to education, and the EU identified the Rights of the Child as a priority area in its EU Human Rights and Democracy Strategy for 2016-2020. Israel has an obligation to protect, respect and fulfil the rights of the child, by ensuring that schools are inviolable safe spaces for children,” he added.

The EU position on Jerusalem remains unchanged: the legitimate aspirations of both parties must be fulfilled and a way must be found through negotiations to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of both states.

III. UN SPOKESPERSON REITERATES UN OPPOSITION TO ANY UNILATERAL MOVES

On 14 January, Mr. Stéphane Dujarric, Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, [responded](#) to a question from a journalist regarding the comment on annexation of Area C made by an Israeli Minister, as below:

Question: So, Israeli Defence Minister, Mr. [Naftali] Bennett, said last week on a conference that “our objective is that within a short amount of time, and we will work for it, we will apply Israeli sovereignty to all of Area C, not just the settlements, not just this bloc or another”. Your comment on that?

Spokesman: I haven’t seen the comments, so I trust you that they are correct. We’ve always stood against any unilateral moves that will move us even further away from a peace process.

IV. EU AND PALESTINIAN ELECTIONS COMMISSION SIGN AGREEMENT

On 16 January, Acting European Union Representative in Jerusalem Tomas Niklasson and the Central Elections Commission (CEC) of the State of Palestine signed a partnership agreement. Below is the [press release](#):

The partnership agreement was signed by the Chairman of the CEC, Dr Hanna Nasir and the Acting European Union Representative in Jerusalem Tomas Niklasson. Representatives from political parties and civil society organisations were also present.

The Chairman of the CEC, Dr Hanna Nasir, said during the ceremony that “this agreement reflects the close partnership between the Commission and the European Union. The EU is a key partner to the CEC since its establishment. We are hopeful that the activities under this agreement will contribute to empowering democratic practices in Palestine. The Commission is ready to run elections as soon as requested by the political level. Although all political parties have informed us of their consent to participate in elections, however, the obstacle remaining is the participation of Jerusalemites, as holding elections in Jerusalem requires for the Israeli side to implement the signed agreements. The Israeli side have not expressed yet any interest in implementing those agreements”.

For his part, the Acting European Union Representative Tomas Niklasson said: “Palestinians face growing and serious challenges. The Israeli occupation comes at the top; however the absence of Palestinian national unity strikes as a major obstacle against achieving Palestinian goals and aspirations. This unity can only be achieved through free, fair and transparent elections. We are aware of the difficulties in that respect, whether in the Gaza Strip or the West Bank, and particularly in East Jerusalem; nevertheless we must not allow any obstacle to deprive the Palestinians from this basic human right. There are international agreements that must be respected and a right that must be preserved. In this context, the European Union urges all relevant parties to take the necessary decisions and steps in order to hold elections in all of the occupied Palestinian territory.” The aims of the agreement are to maintain the readiness of the CEC for upcoming elections, to buttress its institutional capacity and to strengthen its civic engagement with election stakeholders. The agreement amounts to €2.1 million, of which the European Union is contributing €1.5 million. The activities to be implemented in the West Bank and Gaza, as part of the agreement include enhancing the institutional capacity of the CEC, increasing Palestinian's participation in electoral and democratic processes, upgrading of CEC's new Headquarters and district offices, enabling political and electoral participation of persons with disabilities, and providing electoral awareness funds in partnership with Palestinian Civil Society Organizations.

V. UN UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR POLITICAL AND PEACEBUILDING AFFAIRS BRIEFS THE SECURITY COUNCIL

On 21 January, the Security Council held an open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, briefed as below ([S/PV.8706](#)):

I brief the Security Council today amid heightened regional tensions that threaten to destabilize further an already volatile political and security environment. The Secretary-General has been clear in calling on all leaders to exercise maximum restraint and has emphasized that the world cannot afford another conflict.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not immune to the tensions in the region. At the same time, the effects of its persistence are felt far beyond Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. The United Nations has consistently stated that we cannot hope to bring sustainable peace to the Middle East without taking firm action to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and achieve a two-State solution based on international law, relevant United Nations resolutions and prior agreements.

It is, sadly, not a surprise that a recent survey of millennials by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) found that almost two thirds — 65 per cent — of Israeli millennials thought the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would never end, making them the least optimistic of people surveyed in countries affected by war. Palestinians were also pessimistic, although slightly less so, with 52 per cent believing that the conflict would never end. The international community bears a responsibility to help build a different future for those young Israelis and Palestinians, one that promises hope, reconciliation and peaceful coexistence rather than perpetual occupation and conflict.

During the past few weeks, the United Nations has continued its engagement with all Palestinian factions to stress the need for, and the prospect of, holding longoverdue legislative and

presidential elections. Political parties have confirmed they would include more women candidates than the law requires. Discussions also continue regarding potentially amending the electoral law and raising the quota of women candidates on a list from 20 to 30 per cent.

Despite broad internal political agreement and a series of compromises by all factions, to date President Abbas has not issued the decree needed to schedule elections. In the past month, he has stated that he would not set dates until Israel agrees that elections can take place in East Jerusalem. Plans to organize the vote are now grinding to a halt. The Secretary-General and the Special Coordinator remain hopeful that elections will be scheduled soon in line with previous practice.

With the political process deadlocked, negative developments continue to undermine the prospects for a two-State solution. The beginning of 2020 witnessed the continued expansion of settlement activity and the threat of annexation of parts of the West Bank. On 4 and 5 January, Israeli authorities advanced plans for some 1,900 residential units in settlements in Area C. The plans include the retroactive regularization under Israeli law of an outpost and the advancement of plans in two other locations that were regularized in 2019. In addition, tenders were announced for some 2,200 units in Area C and East Jerusalem.

On 5 January, an inter-ministerial committee tasked with discussing annexation plans for the Jordan Valley held its first meeting. On 9 January, the Office of the Minister of Defence announced the appointment of the director of a new task force to tackle so-called “illegal Palestinian construction” in Area C of the West Bank. Also in January, the Jerusalem District Planning Committee advanced a new 150-unit compound to be built in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Beit Hanina, on land owned jointly by Israelis and Palestinians. The construction rights are expected to be split between the Israeli and Palestinian owners of the land, although the Palestinian owners had previously submitted objections to that plan.

On 15 January, following a ruling by Israel’s High Court of Justice, Israeli authorities demolished two houses in the outpost of Kumi Ori, in Area B of the West Bank. Also on 15 January, Israel’s Defence Ministry announced it was advancing the declaration of seven new nature reserves in Area C and the expansion of 12 existing ones. If implemented, those declarations would be the first of their kind since the start of the Oslo process.

I reiterate that all settlements are illegal under international law and remain an obstacle to peace. The annexation of some or all of Area C, if implemented, would deal a devastating blow to the potential for reviving negotiations, advancing regional peace and the essence of the two-State solution.

Meanwhile, sporadic violence in the occupied West Bank, including Jerusalem, and Gaza continued throughout the reporting period. Two hundred and twenty Palestinians, including 80 children, were injured in various incidents, including during clashes, protests, search-and-arrest operations and settler related violence. Of those, 50 were injured by tear-gas inhalation. In addition, six Israelis, including one child, were injured during the reporting period.

Developments in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Al-Issawiya are a significant and growing concern. The area continues to be the focal point of ongoing clashes and numerous arrests, including of minors. The United Nations continues to monitor the situation closely.

While the situation remains extremely fragile, there has been a notable and welcome reduction in violence in and around Gaza, as the understandings brokered by the United Nations and Egypt continue to be broadly upheld. On 26 December, the organizers of the ongoing protests along the Gaza perimeter fence announced that the weekly demonstrations would be on hold until the end of March. Following the announcement, a relative calm has prevailed along the fence.

The limited demonstrations that took place prior to the announcement remained relatively peaceful, although some protesters engaged in violent activities, including approaching the fence and throwing Molotov cocktails and explosive devices towards Israeli forces. The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) responded with riot dispersal means and live fire, injuring some 140 Palestinians, including some 75 women and children. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, (OCHA), the number of injuries recorded during the Gaza protests during the reporting period was the lowest since the protests began, in March 2018. One Palestinian died of injuries sustained during a protest in May 2018.

It is concerning and regrettable, however, that there has been a resurgence in the past few days of incidents of incendiary balloons and kites being launched from Gaza towards Israel. Those actions are a risk to the civilian population. During the reporting period, Palestinian militants fired some 20 projectiles from the Gaza Strip towards Israeli communities, a significant decrease as compared to previous months. The rockets fell short, fell in open areas or were intercepted and did not cause any damage or injuries. In response to the rocket attacks, the IDF conducted several strikes against what it said were Hamas targets in Gaza. No injuries were reported. Assistant Secretary-General Mueller will elaborate in further detail on the humanitarian situation in the occupied territory.

Despite ongoing efforts, the socioeconomic situation in Gaza remains very difficult. Progress was made during the reporting period on the implementation of the package of urgent humanitarian and economic interventions for Gaza endorsed in September 2018 by the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC). I take this opportunity to thank those in the international community that have contributed to the implementation of the AHLC plan, and call on all to increase their support to United Nations programmes on the ground.

By the end of 2019, 37,000 temporary jobs had been created by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank. The cash-for-work programmes specifically target women and young people, as they are underrepresented in the labour force and require specialized assistance to gain access to employment opportunities. Several thousand more jobs are expected to be created this year. The increased funding would allow United Nations agencies the capacity to significantly scale up and improve those job opportunities, as well as implement other programmes to support the economy and address unemployment in the longer term. Qatari-funded fuel supplies for the Gaza power plant also continued, allowing for increased and more stable electricity supplies in Gaza.

Meanwhile, many AHLC projects remain unfunded or in deficit. Critical health interventions identified in the package are still in deficit of \$4 million. Donors are encouraged to continue their

support for those interventions to alleviate the suffering of the population and help avoid another deadly escalation.

Despite the welcome progress in advancing those projects, it is a fact that humanitarian and economic steps alone will not resolve Gaza's immense challenges. At their core, Gaza's problems are political, and they require political solutions. Palestinian leaders must take concrete steps to ensure that Gaza and the West Bank are reunited. At the same time, Israel must significantly improve movement and access for goods and people to and from Gaza, as a step towards the full lifting of the closures, in line with resolution 1860 (2009).

In other developments during the reporting period, on 20 December, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) released a statement announcing that the ICC's preliminary examination into the situation in Palestine had concluded with the determination that all the statutory criteria under the Rome Statute for the opening of an investigation had been met. In doing so, she expressed her view that, among other things, war crimes had been or were being committed in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. She also stated her position that the Court's jurisdiction applies to the occupied Palestinian territory.

In line with legislation passed in the Knesset in July 2018, on 29 December the Government decided to withhold \$43 million in clearance revenues that Israel collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority, in monthly instalments spread over the course of 2020. The amount was determined by Israeli authorities to be equal to what Palestinian authorities paid Palestinians injured in attacks against Israelis and families of those killed in such attacks. That deduction comes in addition to \$139 million already withheld by Israel against stipends paid in 2018 to prisoners convicted or accused of security offences against Israel. I am concerned that this development may strain the tenuous progress made in October 2019, when Israel and the Palestinian Authority reached a partial agreement on transferring clearance revenues. I reiterate my call on both sides to engage in a constructive manner to ensure compliance with the Paris Protocol on Economic Relations. The United Nations stands ready to assist in that process.

...

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize the continued urgency of resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements. In the absence of progress towards an agreement that will resolve all final-status issues, the United Nations continues to focus its efforts on establishing an environment conducive to a return to negotiations. Recent events in the region have once again brought to fore the crucial necessity of dialogue and diplomacy in the region. What is more, we need look no further to find living examples of dialogue and coexistence at the community level: despite the political deadlock and tensions, Palestinians and Israelis on the ground continue to work every day to build a more peaceful and secure future. From youth creating new platforms to increase cultural understanding across religious and national lines, to women demanding a greater role in their Governments' decision-making, these remarkable individuals continue to serve as an inspiration to all of us to redouble our efforts towards a negotiated solution. I assure the Council that the United Nations remains committed to supporting Palestinians and Israelis as they pursue a peaceful and just future.

VI. UN ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS BRIEFS THE SECURITY COUNCIL

On 21 January, the Security Council held an open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. Ms. Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, briefed as below ([S/PV.8706](#)):

I have just returned from a six-day mission to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, where I heard from Palestinian and Israeli people, as well as representatives of the international community and humanitarian partners. Those meetings conveyed hardships and challenges, and opportunities for positive change.

Today Palestinian families throughout the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in Gaza struggle to live in dignity across a fragmented territory. One in every two Palestinians — some 2.4 million people — need humanitarian aid in 2020, due to a protection crisis resulting from occupation, the blockade on Gaza, recurrent cycles of violence and over a decade of Hamas control, which has fuelled the internal Palestinian political divide. Widespread humanitarian access and civilian movement restrictions, increasing demolitions and destruction of property, the excessive use of force, restrictive planning regimes, forced displacement, and impediments to livelihood and economic opportunity, combine as drivers of chronic vulnerability and humanitarian need. Humanitarian partners work to meet those growing needs in the face of increasing constraints on operations and record low funding.

In Gaza, I met Salwa, a 53-year-old cancer survivor, who told me how she was overwhelmed with a sense of fear and devastation while battling her illness and trying to care for her family. She was allowed to leave Gaza to receive medical treatment in the West Bank, but her permit was subsequently denied without explanation, interrupting critical treatment, deepening her anxiety and creating a sense of hopelessness.

I also met Anas, a 24-year-old medical graduate, who spoke about the limited options for youth and how movement restrictions have severely curtailed opportunities for a productive life. He expressed concern that the energy and passion of Palestinians in Gaza is being lost, making young people more susceptible to extremism and driving too many to attempt suicide.

Those stories underscore the fragility in Gaza. But I also saw tremendous potential: for example, young women such as Bissan, who, at the age of 21, had already started a charity to help. Razan, another young woman, told me: “We have people here with high-level skills and abilities, with innovative ways of thinking, but we need opportunities.”

In 2019, violence during the Great March of Return demonstrations at the Gaza fence caused injury and claimed lives. Since March 2018, more than 210 Palestinians, including 46 children, had been killed and more than 8,000 had been shot with live ammunition. While there were fewer casualties in the latter part of 2019, we continue to have concerns about Israel’s excessive use of force during the demonstrations and the instrumentalization of Palestinian children by Hamas.

The large number of injuries from the demonstrations has overstretched Gaza’s already limited health services, which suffer from acute shortages in drugs, personnel, equipment and electricity. More than 1,200 people required limb reconstruction and some

150 underwent amputations, all of whom need long term rehabilitation. The World Health Organization also reported more than 200 incidents involving health workers in Gaza in 2019, resulting in 270 injured.

Since the start of 2019, there have been multiple escalations in hostilities between armed groups in Gaza and Israel, most of which were fortunately contained thanks to an intense joint United Nations and Egyptian mediation effort. Nevertheless, 29 Palestinian civilians, as well as 33 members of armed groups, were killed in Israeli air strikes and five Israeli civilians were killed by Palestinian indiscriminate rocket fire. I urge all parties to take all feasible precautions to avoid civilian harm in the course of hostilities.

Unemployment in Gaza is at 45 per cent, with youth unemployment at over 60 per cent. Some 46 per cent of the population live below the \$5.5 poverty line and an estimated 60 per cent of households are food insecure. The young people whom I met in Gaza, like anywhere else in the world, simply ask for peace and the opportunity for a productive life.

While the efforts of the Government of Israel to ease movement by increasing the number of permits for people to leave Gaza are acknowledged, the approval rate of permit applications for patients to leave Gaza through the Erez crossing for medical treatment was 65 per cent on average in 2019. According to UNICEF, more than a third of the children who left Gaza for medical treatment between October 2018 and July 2019 were unaccompanied by a parent due to not being allowed to exit.

It is also acknowledged that efforts have been made by the Israeli authorities to ease the import and export of goods and to reduce the number of restricted items on the dual-use list. However, significant limits that undermine the economy and impede the ability to improve essential services and infrastructure remain. That is exacerbated by the long-standing political and administrative Palestinian divide, which has reduced the capacity of service providers in Gaza to provide basic services. Nearly half of essential medicines and approximately 30 per cent of essential supplies stand at less than one month's supply. According to the World Health Organization, Israel's restrictions on imports have impacted access to medical supplies and the maintenance of medical equipment.

Amid a decline in external aid, high unemployment and economic recession, vulnerable people in Gaza are trapped in a cycle of deepening poverty and insecurity, with few opportunities to become self-reliant. They resort to harmful coping mechanisms that impact children the most. UNICEF reports rising rates of school dropout, child labour and child marriage and an estimated 270,000 children suffer from some form of mental disorder. Similarly, I have seen how the lives and well-being of residents in Israeli communities around Gaza are disrupted by rocket fire from Palestinian armed groups, with mental health impacts, particularly among children.

Within that larger picture, however, there is room for cautious optimism. The number of people permitted by the Israeli authorities to leave Gaza increased by 46 per cent in 2019, as compared to 2018, and reached the highest level since 2007. The volume of goods exiting Gaza increased by 20 per cent, as compared to 2018. December 2019 witnessed the largest number of goods exiting in any month, also since 2007.

The number of people leaving Gaza through the Egyptian-controlled Rafah crossing increased by nearly 40 per cent in 2019, as compared to 2018. Israel expanded the permissible fishing area along the southern and central parts of Gaza's coast to 15 nautical miles offshore, allowing access to deeper waters. Funding provided by the Government of Qatar enabled the electricity supply to increase in 2019 to an average of 12 hours a day. And, as Under-Secretary-General DiCarlo said, by the end of 2019, 37,000 jobs had been created by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank.

Such improvements give me hope for Gaza if we build on that momentum. It will be key for Israel to further relax restrictions on movement, alongside adopting measures that stimulate the economy, in line with resolution 1860 (2009). The Palestinian Authority must refrain from impeding the allocation of resources to people in Gaza as a way of exerting pressure on Hamas, which must prioritize people's needs in Gaza. All parties must uphold their international legal obligations.

In the West Bank, I visited a Palestinian Bedouin community in the Jordan Valley. I met Jamil and Manar, a young couple, who described the pressures that their community faces, including home demolitions, the constant threat of further demolition of their property and restrictions on movement. Manar, a 24-year-old mother, described her personal fears and challenges, shared by her family and neighbours. She spoke of the anxiety over simple activities, such as transport to school without the threat of harassment from Israeli settlers, entry by the Israeli military into the community and her fear that she cannot protect her children. Families there are not connected to the water or electricity networks. Although they have lived in the area since the 1970s, the Israeli authorities consider their presence illegal.

Jamil and Manar's experience mirrors that of many Palestinians in the West Bank, where families face difficulty in securing adequate shelter, accessing basic services and protecting their children and the elderly. Economic development is undermined by Israeli administrative and physical constraints that fragment the territory, limiting Palestinian access to land and natural resources. That is most extreme in Area C, comprising 60 per cent of the West Bank, where the planning regime makes it virtually impossible for Palestinians to develop adequate housing and infrastructure. Most public land is allocated to Israeli settlements or to military use and most private land is zoned as agricultural or "green" areas.

Homes, clinics, schools, water cisterns and animal shelters without permits face the risk of demolition or confiscation. In 2019, 620 structures were demolished across the West Bank — mainly in Area C and East Jerusalem — displacing over 900 Palestinians and affecting access to services and livelihoods for tens of thousands of people. That represents an increase of 35 per cent in demolitions and nearly double the number of displaced persons as compared to 2018. The number of structures demolished in East Jerusalem is the highest in two decades. Over 12,500 demolition orders are pending today against Palestinian properties in Area C, and nearly one third of the homes in East Jerusalem face a risk of demolition because they lack building permits.

Such measures increase the vulnerability of communities, generating the need for humanitarian support; but the aid provided to those Palestinians is also impacted. A total of 126 structures demolished or confiscated in 2019 had been provided as humanitarian assistance. An estimated

162,000 Palestinians across Area C have limited access to primary health-care services, relying only on mobile clinics. Earlier this month, on 2 January, the Israeli authorities, citing a lack of prior coordination, seized a vehicle that was used to transport medical staff and equipment to a mobile health clinic in Masafer Yatta, south of Hebron, impeding residents' access to health care. Through a range of legal and administrative measures, Israel has enabled the establishment and expansion of Israeli settlements in the heart of Palestinian neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem and Hebron city, at times resulting in the forced eviction of Palestinian families.

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs recorded 340 attacks in 2019 carried out by Israelis, including settlers, resulting in two fatalities, 135 injuries and property damage, including to more than 6,200 fruit-bearing trees, representing a 100 per cent increase as compared to 2017. Such attacks undermine the physical security and livelihoods of Palestinians. Despite the Israeli authorities' efforts to prevent and address such violence, concerns remain about serious gaps in accountability that may contribute to the prevalence of settler attacks.

There were 112 Palestinian attacks against Israeli civilians in 2019, including settlers, in the West Bank and Israel, resulting in three deaths and 26 injuries, along with damage to Israeli property. In addition, 26 Palestinians were killed and 3,455 were injured by Israeli forces in the West Bank in search-and-arrest operations, demonstrations and clashes. There are concerns about excessive use of force by Israel in the context of law enforcement operations during protests and other clashes. The combined impact of many of those challenges places pressure on families to leave their communities, contributing to a coercive environment that places them at risk of forcible transfer.

Operating space for humanitarian actors is constrained by both the Israeli and the Palestinian authorities. Efforts to delegitimize humanitarian action in the occupied Palestinian territory continue to undermine our ability to provide protection and assistance to people in need. We are also facing record low funding levels. The humanitarian response plan for 2020 is highly prioritized and requests \$348 million to provide basic food, protection, health care, shelter and water and sanitation to 1.5 million of the most vulnerable Palestinians. Over 75 per cent of the requested funds are for Gaza.

I urge Member States to increase their support to humanitarian operations in the occupied Palestinian territory to both the humanitarian response plan and the United Nations Occupied Palestinian Territory Humanitarian Fund. The Humanitarian Fund allocated \$27.4 million in 2019, benefiting 1.1 million people.

Providing funding to UNRWA, the largest humanitarian actor in the occupied Palestinian territory, is also critical in order to prevent deterioration, especially in Gaza. Member States are also encouraged to support interventions that strengthen humanitarian development collaboration and reduce Palestinians' reliance on humanitarian aid. Such strategic assistance is critical where deterioration risks further destabilization in an already volatile region. Aside from funding, strong support by Member States is required to ensure that humanitarian partners are able to operate according to humanitarian principles and counter the impact of unsubstantiated allegations against operational partners.

In order to decrease vulnerabilities in the longer term, it is vital that all parties work towards the policy shifts required to reduce humanitarian need and uphold obligations under international

law. We saw improvements in Gaza in 2019 that, if developed and expanded to the West Bank, have the potential to generate positive change in 2020. We must galvanize our efforts as the international community to ensure that Palestinian families are increasingly able to live in dignity.

I continue to urge all parties — Israeli and Palestinian — to uphold their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. The basic needs of Palestinians in Gaza and in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, must be met, including by allowing the entry of essential supplies and humanitarian relief. Lethal force in law enforcement operations must be used only when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life.

Ultimately, the solution for the occupied Palestinian territory is neither humanitarian nor development action, but lies in political discourse and agreement. In conclusion, I reiterate Special Coordinator Mladenov's call to this organ, urging leaders on all sides to summon the necessary political will to take concrete steps in support of ending the occupation and realizing a lasting peace, resulting in two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace.

VII. VICE-CHAIR OF THE PALESTINIAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE BRIEFS THE SECURITY COUNCIL

On 22 January, the Security Council continued its open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. Below is the statement delivered by Ms. Adela Raz, Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of Palestinian People ([S/PV.8706 Resumption 1](#)):

At the outset, on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I would like to congratulate the delegation of Viet Nam on its able conduct of the presidency of the Security Council this month. I also wish to thank Viet Nam, as a brotherly observer State of the Committee, for its long-standing support of the just Palestinian cause. The Committee would also like to congratulate Estonia, the Niger, Saint Vincent and Grenadines and Tunisia on taking up their seats on the Council and to wish them every success in upholding their important responsibilities.

We thank Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo for her briefing on the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Let me also thank Ms. Ursula Mueller, Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, for her comprehensive briefing on the humanitarian situation.

As we gather in the Council in this new year and decade to consider the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, the heightened geopolitical tensions and turmoil in the region remind all of us that peace must never be taken for granted and that it must be preserved and nourished. We must uphold and fulfil the values enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, which remain our shared framework for preventing and resolving conflict and injustice.

Recent developments underscore the need, now more than ever, for today's debate on the Palestinian question lest it be sidelined or forgotten in the face of the current turmoil. May I remind representatives that, in the context of the stalled peace process and the evolving dangerous realities

on the ground, leaving this question unresolved constitutes a serious negligence of our collective duties under the Charter and a threat to the peace and security of the region and beyond.

In particular, in the current volatile environment, the ongoing illegal occupation of the Palestinian territory and the worsening situation on the ground cannot be ignored as “business as usual”. The year 2019 saw a 45 per cent increase in demolitions and confiscations of Palestinian homes in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, as compared to 2018, according to figures released by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Moreover, at the beginning of this month, Israel approved the construction of an additional 1,936 new settler units in illegal settlements across the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

Allow me to reiterate in the strongest terms that Israeli settlements in occupied areas are illegal under international law, as affirmed, *inter alia*, in resolution 2334 (2016). Claims that settlements are not illegal and may even advance Israeli-Palestinian peace are totally unfounded and offensive. Israel must halt settlement construction and expansion immediately and completely. The reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) should include reports by Member States on how they comply with operative paragraph 5, which calls on Member States to distinguish, in their dealings, between Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, as well as with regard to settlement activities.

Similarly, tensions triggered by attacks by the Israeli occupying forces on worshippers inside the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound threaten further destabilization, which must be averted. The Islamic Jerusalem Waqf is the sole institution responsible for administering the affairs of the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, including the maintenance of its interior and exterior walls. The Committee urges Israel, the occupying Power, to abide by all its obligations under international law and avoid actions that undermine an already fragile status quo.

In a positive development, on 13 December 2019, the General Assembly voted to extend the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) until 2023 (General Assembly resolution 74/85). The overwhelming vote in favour of the extension is an indication of the unwavering support of the international community for the Agency’s mandate and necessary work in support of 5.5 million Palestine refugees. The Committee reiterates its call to all Member States to provide UNRWA with the reliable and sustainable funding necessary to deliver critical humanitarian services to the Palestine refugees, thereby contributing to the stability of the region.

Moreover, in December, the General Assembly adopted with an overwhelming majority all the resolutions on the question of Palestine, including those on this Committee’s mandate (General Assembly resolution 74/10) and on the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, including the right to their independent State (General Assembly resolution 74/11), which gained the support of almost 90 per cent of the United Nations membership. That is once again a testament that such resolutions are firmly rooted in the United Nations Charter, international law and human rights law and confirm the support of most of the world. That international consensus must be upheld and serve as the focal point for all of our collective efforts to promote a just, lasting and peaceful solution.

On 20 December 2019, the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, based on a referral from the State of Palestine and following a thorough, independent and objective

assessment of all reliable information available to her Office, decided to proceed with the investigation into alleged war crimes committed in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. The Committee welcomes the announcement by the Chief Prosecutor and trusts that such an investigation will serve the interests of justice and peace.

The humanitarian and economic situation of the 2 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip continues to deteriorate and has reached the critical juncture of which the United Nations country team warned in its report “Gaza 2020: A liveable place?”, necessitating urgent humanitarian and political action. We reiterate our strongest calls for the lifting of the 12-year Israeli blockade of Gaza.

Allow me also to reiterate the support of the Committee for the reconciliation process led by Egypt and others, which are sparing no efforts in that regard. The Committee also expresses its full support for the holding of general elections in the State of Palestine, including East Jerusalem, with a view to reuniting the Palestinian people under a single, legitimate and democratic Palestinian national Government.

In these uncertain times, when the Middle East faces unprecedented levels of tension, we call on the Council, as the guarantor of international peace and security, to take up its responsibilities, to implement its relevant resolutions and to take overdue action on the Palestinian question for the sake of generations of Palestinians and Israelis who seek to live side by side in peace and security, along the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of the independent Palestinian State.

VIII. UN SECRETARY-GENERAL REACTS TO US PLAN FOR MIDDLE EAST

On 28 January, the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General issued a [note](#) to correspondents, replicated below:

The Secretary-General has seen the [announcement](#) of the United States plan for the Middle East. The position of the United Nations on the two-State solution has been defined, throughout the years, by relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions by which the Secretariat is bound.

The United Nations remains committed to supporting Palestinians and Israelis to resolve the conflict on the basis of United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements and realizing the vision of two States – Israel and Palestine – living side by side in peace and security within recognized borders, on the basis of the pre-1967 lines.

IX. EU WILL STUDY US PROPOSAL

On 28 January, Mr. Josep Borrell, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission, made a declaration on behalf of the EU on the Middle East Peace Process. His [statement](#) is replicated as below:

Today's [initiative](#) by the United States provides an occasion to re-launch the urgently needed efforts towards a negotiated and viable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The European Union will study and assess the proposals put forward. This will be done on the basis of the EU's established position and its firm and united commitment to a negotiated and viable two-state solution that takes into account the legitimate aspirations of both the Palestinians and the Israelis, respecting all relevant UN resolutions and internationally agreed parameters.

The EU reaffirms its readiness to work towards the resumption of meaningful negotiations to resolve all permanent status issues and to achieve a just and lasting peace.

It urges both sides to demonstrate, through policies and actions, a genuine commitment to the two-state solution as the only realistic way to end the conflict.

X. ICC PRE-TRIAL CHAMBER INVITES PALESTINE, ISRAEL, INTERESTED STATES AND OTHERS TO SUBMIT OBSERVATIONS

On 28 January, Pre-Trial Chamber I of the International Criminal Court issued an order setting the procedure and the schedule for the submission of observations on the Prosecutor's request, related to the scope of the Court's territorial jurisdiction in the situation in the State of Palestine. The relevant [press statement](#) follows:

Today, 28 January 2020, Pre-Trial Chamber I of the International Criminal Court ("ICC" or "Court") issued an order setting the procedure and the schedule for the submission of observations on the [Prosecutor's request](#), resubmitted on 22 January 2020, under article 19(3) of the Rome Statute related to the scope of the Court's territorial jurisdiction in the [Situation in the State of Palestine](#).

The Chamber, composed of Presiding Judge Péter Kovács, Judge Marc Perrin de Brichambaut and Judge Reine Alapini-Gansou invites Palestine, Israel, and victims in the Situation in the State of Palestine, to submit written observations on the Prosecutor's Request by no later than 16 March 2020. In addition, other States, organisations and/or persons may submit applications for leave to file written observations by no later than 14 February 2020 and, if authorised, to file their observations no later than 16 March 2020. Any observations shall be limited to the question of jurisdiction set forth in the Prosecutor's Request. The ICC Prosecutor is instructed to file a consolidated response in writing to any observations submitted by no later than 30 March 2020.

The Chamber also considers it appropriate to appoint counsel from the Office of the Public Counsel for Victims to represent victims in the Situation in the State of Palestine who do not have legal representation for the sole purpose of submitting observations in accordance with today's order.

XI. OIC SECRETARY-GENERAL RESPONDS TO US PLAN

On 29 January, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) issued the below [press release](#) in response to the US Plan for the Middle East:

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has followed the US Administration's announcement of its [plan for peace](#) in the Middle East, and has declared that the fundamental building block towards a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be firmly anchored in international law, the relevant UN resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

The OIC Secretary General, Dr. Yousef Al Othaimeen, reaffirmed the OIC's principled commitment and sustained support to international efforts for the achievement of peace based on the vision of the Two-State solution in accordance with agreed international references such as to enable the Palestinian people to exercise their legitimate national rights and lead to a just and comprehensive peace.

The OIC Secretary General laid stress on the fact that the Holy City of Al Quds/Jerusalem remains, conformably to UN resolutions and international legitimacy, an integral part of the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, and any alteration to the existing historical, legal or political status of the City of Al Quds Al Sharif/Jerusalem constitutes a violation of international law and conventions.

XII. LETTER FROM UKRAINE TO PRESIDENT OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY REGARDING MEMBERSHIP IN THE PALESTINIAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE

On 30 January, Mr. Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, the President of the General Assembly, informed Mr. Cheikh Niang, the Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, of the decision of the Government of Ukraine to cease its membership to the Committee, as below ([A/74/671](#)):

Upon the instructions of the Government of Ukraine, I have the honour to inform you that Ukraine ceases its membership in the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, effective 1 January 2020.

XIII. UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ALARMED BY “LOPSIDED TRUMP PLAN”

On 31 January, Mr. Michael Lynk, Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the occupied Palestine, issued the following [press release](#):

The Trump [plan](#) on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a lopsided proposal entirely in favour of one side to the conflict, said Michael Lynk, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967.

“What the Trump plan offers is a one and a half state solution,” Lynk said. “This Potemkin state – lacking most of the commonly understood attributes of sovereignty beyond the right to fly its flag and issue stamps – would become an entirely new entity in the annals of modern political science.

“This is not a recipe for a just and durable peace but rather endorses the creation of a 21st century Bantustan in the Middle East. The Palestinian statelet envisioned by the American plan would be scattered archipelagos of non-contiguous territory completely surrounded by Israel, with no external borders, no control over its airspace, no right to a military to defend its security, no geographic basis for a viable economy, no freedom of movement and with no ability to complain to international judicial forums against Israel or the United States.”

The Special Rapporteur expressed alarm that the plan announced this week by the United States would discard virtually every major principle of international law governing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. “This plan would turn the rules-based international order on its head and would permanently entrench the tragic subjugation of the Palestinians that is already existing on the ground,” he said. “The abandonment of these legal principles threatens to unravel the long-standing international consensus on the conflict, favouring realpolitik over rights, power over justice and conflict management over conflict resolution.”

A central aspect of the Trump plan would allow Israel to annex around 30 percent of the West Bank. “The annexation of territory is strictly prohibited by international law, beginning with the 1945 Charter of the United Nations,” Lynk said. “Since 1967, the UN Security Council has proclaimed this fundamental principle on eight occasions respecting the Israeli occupation, most recently in December 2016, when it reaffirmed: ‘the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force.’”

The Special Rapporteur urged the international community to clearly condemn the plan’s green light to allow Israel to annex Palestinian territory. “This unilateral act undermines the Palestinians’ right to self-determination, and it threatens to drag the world back to darker times, when conquest was acceptable, borders could be redrawn and territorial integrity was regularly undermined,” he said.

As well, the Special Rapporteur deplored the Trump plan’s proposal to legalize the 240 Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. “International law has expressly forbidden the transfer of the civilian population of an occupying power. The United Nations Security Council has condemned the Israeli settlements as a flagrant violation under international law, and the 1998 Rome Statute has deemed them to be purported war crimes.”

The Trump plan’s proposals for Jerusalem and the Palestinian refugees are equally distressing, said Lynk. “The United States now recognizes the conquest and illegal annexation of East Jerusalem, which remains occupied territory under international law, as embedded in scores of United Nations resolutions.”

Equally, the Trump plan’s proposal to unilaterally abrogate the long-recognized right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes in Israel if they choose, and to annul any obligation by Israel to compensate these refugees for their material and moral losses, is an evasion of well-established international principles going back to 1948.

“Nothing in the Trump plan alters the continuing prevalence of the laws of occupation, the human rights of the Palestinians under occupation, and the absolute obligation on the international community to redouble its efforts to achieve a just, equitable and durable solution on the basis of

equal rights for Palestinians and Israelis alike,” said the Special Rapporteur. “International law remains the Northern Star, the only guide to a sustainable peace.”

XIV. UNRWA LAUNCHES APPEAL FOR \$1.4 BILLION IN 2020

On 31 January, UNRWA launched its 2020 Budget Appeal, including core funding as well as the [2020 occupied Palestinian territory Emergency Appeal](#) and [2020 Syria Regional Crisis Emergency Appeal](#). The [Statement](#) by Mr. Christian Saunders, UNRWA Acting Commissioner-General, is below:

...

UNRWA is the UN agency mandated by the UN General Assembly to provide protection and assistance to some 5.6 million Palestine refugees in Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank including East Jerusalem.

This is opportune timing for UNRWA to be in Geneva, at the start of the year, to call on our partners, donors and supporters to help us continue to provide protection, critical basic services and emergency assistance to Palestine refugees in 2020.

We are here, as we are every year, to present to representatives of the international community and representatives of the humanitarian world UNRWA’s plan to respond to the protection and assistance needs of Palestine refugees and the budget that such a plan will require for 2020. Behind this plan and numbers, we must never forget that UNRWA’s work is driven by the need to protect the rights of the millions of Palestine refugees we are mandated to serve.

I am sure that given the developments of the last two days, with the announcement by the US administration of the US “Peace Plan”, there will also be questions from you on what this might mean for Palestine refugees and for UNRWA.

I want to begin by reiterating that UNRWA is a humanitarian organization. Our role is to provide assistance and protection to Palestine refugees, including education, healthcare, relief and social services and emergency assistance in times of crisis and conflict, until such time as there is a just and lasting solution for Palestine refugees.

As you will be aware, UNRWA is not mandated to participate in Middle East peace negotiations or discussions on solutions to the refugee issue. Nonetheless, as the UN Agency responsible for Palestine refugees, we do have a crucial humanitarian mandate to protect and defend the rights of these refugees under international law. As the main UN presence in our five areas of operation, Palestine refugees also look to us for reassurance at such times when their rights and safety come under threat.

Given the status of UNRWA as both the humanitarian organization responsible for Palestine refugees and as a UN Agency, we therefore see part of our role is to uphold the position of the UN and of international law for the human rights of Palestine refugees, wherever they are located in our areas of operation, including East Jerusalem, and the mandate of UNRWA.

The position of the UN, and therefore of UNRWA, was firmly reiterated by the UNSG in his statement of Tuesday (and I quote): The position of the United Nations on the two-State solution has been defined, throughout the years, by relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions by which the Secretariat is bound. Moreover, the UNSG has repeatedly expressed his unequivocal support to UNRWA.

I also believe that UNRWA has a responsibility to reassure the Palestine refugee community, who already live in such precarious and uncertain conditions, that their human rights and status under international law have not changed, and consequently that the role of UNRWA to uphold those rights has not changed. We also have a responsibility to continue to draw attention to the 5.6 million Palestine refugees affected by any proposed solutions to the conflict and the refugee issue. A just and lasting solution cannot be reached unilaterally and without their voices being taken into account.

UNRWA's mandate has just been renewed at the UN General Assembly with overwhelming support and votes by UN member-states. The UN General Assembly bestowed upon UNRWA a mandate in 1949, and the General Assembly is where any action related to UNRWA's role and work with Palestine refugees is discussed and decided.

UNRWA's mandate remains untouched. That is the desire of the international community, and we thank Member States for their continued trust in UNRWA to fulfil that mandate.

We are confident that the international community will also continue to stand behind its commitment to Palestine refugees until such time as there is a just and lasting solution for them that is in line with the relevant UN Security Council and General Assembly resolutions and international law. That commitment to Palestine refugees, and the fulfilling of the corresponding mandate of UNRWA with the support of the international community, is what I want to focus on here today.

As you are aware, UNRWA works across five fields of operations or five areas (the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria) and provides critical services, at times lifesaving, that impact the lives of millions of people. These millions of people, the 5.6 million Palestine refugees, their rights and their future, are what is at stake without sustainable support for UNRWA. For them, UNRWA means

Education, it means health care, housing, social services, financial assistance, protection, and emergency assistance during times of conflict.

We provide quality education in our schools for half a million girls and boys. UNRWA has had gender parity in its schools since the mid 1960's. Some of the highest achievers in the region are UNRWA school graduates, despite the often very difficult circumstances under which they live. This is a huge achievement for human development and stability in the region, of which UNRWA is proud.

Our comprehensive primary health care is offered through 144 UNRWA health centres. In 2019, a total of 3.5 million refugees received health services through 8.5 million patient visits that contributed to significant health gains, particularly in the areas of family health, maternal and child health and the control of non-communicable diseases.

Our relief and social services support the most vulnerable Palestine refugees in their community and contribute, as much as we can with limited resources and in the face of overwhelming needs, to their improved wellbeing. We would love to be able to do more, particularly for those who are most in need.

Our microfinance loans allow Palestine refugees, primarily young people and especially women, to start a business that enables them to become financially self-sufficient.

Our vital emergency assistance for Palestine refugees affected by the ongoing conflict in Syria, blockade in Gaza, and occupation in the West Bank and East Jerusalem continues, all be it at a much lower level due to funding constraints

Underpinning all our work is the role that the world has bestowed on UNRWA as the entity that seeks to safeguard and advance the rights of Palestine refugees under international law. And that, by itself, is a ray of light that millions of Palestine refugees still hold on to: that there is an international entity, a UN agency, that was created to protect and defend their rights until there is a negotiated solution to the conflict that includes a just and durable solution to their plight. To undermine these principles is to undermine the hope of 5.6 million refugee men, women, boys and girls and it is particularly important at this time that the international community demonstrates it has not forgotten them. The fundamental human rights of the Palestine refugees must be upheld.

UNRWA continues to deliver on its commitment because the international community has given us the mandate to do so and because we are bound to honour that commitment. And we do this well, despite the recurrent challenges that we face, from the crises and conflicts in the region, to financial shortages and the constant political pressure and the increasing undermining of our work by partisan groups seeking to persuade political decision makers in our donor countries to remove our funding.

In 2018, UNRWA's largest donor at that time, the United States, stopped funding us, cutting nearly one third of our budget. The repercussions on our finances and plans were huge, but the support we received from our member states and partners was phenomenal, and a true testament to the continued international commitment to Palestine refugees. This incredible support allowed us to continue to provide vital services and protection to Palestine refugees, despite the potential implications of this loss of funding. Such a reaction by donors and partners reflected the trust that they place in UNRWA and their firm belief that Palestine refugees must continue receiving our protection and assistance until there is a solution. However unfortunately in 2019 this initial support started to wane and as a result we have been forced to carry over considerable liabilities into 2020.

A few months ago UNRWA faced a different type of challenge, with allegations of misconduct that led to the departure of its top management. I want to reassure the international community that since then we have put the place in order and are in the process of putting in place a series of management initiatives that aim to make UNRWA a stronger, more transparent and yet more effective organization. We owe it to the Palestine refugees, our beneficiaries to be the most effective organization we can possibly be and UNRWA is committed to do whatever is necessary to demonstrate to our donors and supporters that we are a dependable provider of high quality and cost-effective services. In sum that we provide extremely good value for money!

Some will say “UNRWA is always in financial trouble”, and in a way this is true! Every year, we wonder whether we will be able to raise the funds necessary to deliver the basic and lifesaving services we are mandated to provide for Palestine refugees. Every year we try to reconcile the undeniable needs of Palestine refugees with a realistic plan on the basis of how much support we expect to get from donors and partners. Every year, we wish our financing could be more predictable and stable and we wish we could know, at the beginning of the year that our programmes that contribute to saving lives, fulfilling the rights of Palestine refugees, and maintaining progress on human development are fully funded. Most importantly, every year Palestine refugees themselves face this uncertainty about their future. We must work together to change this!

On the one hand, we have a group of steadfast and predictable donors whose trust and support I wish to acknowledge and to take the opportunity to express my heartfelt appreciation. But we also have a significant portion of our funding from a continuously changing donor-base. This is positive in the sense that UNRWA has new sources of funding and support, but it also contributes to the significant uncertainty as this funding is by no means consistent from year to year.

UNRWA is often asked why we do not reduce services given the funding situation facing us. The fact is that the rights of Palestine refugees have not changed, but the needs of Palestine refugees are changing and the needs are increasing. Over the last five years UNRWA has achieved over US\$ 500 million in efficiencies and is already operating at maximum capacity. However some of these cuts were made in order for the agency to survive and in some areas they have gone too far and the quality and breadth of our services have suffered as a result in recent years. We have not been able to maintain much of our infrastructure and it is in a state of serious disrepair with much of our capital equipment being many many years past its normal life cycle. This past school year we taught more students with fewer teachers, resulting in even larger class sizes. Our ability to do this is testament to the commitment and dedication of UNRWA teachers and education programme. However, this trend is not sustainable in the long term whilst maintaining the quality of education that Palestine refugee children have a right to and deserve.

UNRWA is very cost effective as a direct service provider: all our schools, 709 schools, employ staff, teachers, principals and others from the refugee community at salaries that are comparable to local salaries and much below normal UN local staff salaries. The same applies to our 144 health centers and the staff we employ in them.

We are stretched to our limits under our shrinking budgets and the growing needs of Palestine refugees who are impacted by the same volatility and unpredictability that people face in the Middle East every day. In 2020, Palestine refugees in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria will continue to face a range of daunting human development and protection challenges. Central to these pressures is the ongoing occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the blockade of Gaza, the continuing conflict in Syria, the political crisis in Lebanon and the growing economic needs in Jordan, all of which continue to dramatically impact the lives of Palestine refugees.

Since 1949, UNRWA has been mandated by the United Nations General Assembly member states to provide protection and essential services to Palestine refugees until there is a just and lasting solution to their plight. The United Nations, and UNRWA as the UN agency with

responsibility for Palestine refugees, have always advocated for a negotiated just solution that is based on international law and relevant UN resolutions.

Until then, UNRWA will continue to rely on the political and financial support of you, its donors and partners to provide essential services that contribute to the protection, dignity and human development of Palestine refugees. This is why we are here in Geneva: we need to hear from our donors and supporters that their commitment to Palestine refugees remains as strong as ever.

Until today, the international community has shown, year after year, its commitment to upholding multilateralism by continuing to invest in UNRWA until there is a just and lasting solution of the plight of Palestine refugees, one which is based on international law. We are truly grateful for that, and hope that 2020 will be a year where we continue to deliver on the pledge that we, as an international community, have taken so as to protect the rights of 5.6 million Palestine refugees in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

The plan that was released this week is extremely unsettling for the Palestine refugees living under occupation, under blockade and through conflict after conflict and crisis after crisis, hoping for justice and human rights, and with the constant fear that the international community will one day abandon them. Today, more than ever there is a need for stability and today the international community must send a clear message to Palestine refugees and to the world at large that the international community stands firmly behind them.
