

**STATEMENT TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL**

\*\*\*\*\*

**BY AMBASSADOR CHEIKH NIANG**

**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**

New York, 23 April 2020

First, I would like to congratulate the Dominican Republic for its professional handling of this month's Presidency of the Council and for finding creative solutions to procedural and technological challenges.

In these unprecedented times, when the world and the UN are fighting the Covid-19 pandemic, we must remind ourselves that the Palestinian People under occupation face even a bigger crisis. It is precisely in such challenging times that we must rally our support for and solidarity with them.

As the world's attention is turned to preventing loss of life and limiting the spread of the pandemic, the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, has continued to deteriorate and the occupation is still advancing, in grave breach of international law, including humanitarian and human rights law, and in violation of UN resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016), which call for an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967 and the fulfilment of the rights of the Palestinian people, including to self-determination and independence.

The State of Palestine has joined the rest of the world as victim of the outbreak with 437 confirmed cases (15 in Gaza) and 2 deaths, as of 19 April. The negative shock to the Palestinian economies will have profound implications for public welfare, employment, social cohesion, financial and institutional stability. Strong international donor support and targeted technical assistance will be crucial on the path to recovery.

While technical coordination between Israeli and Palestinian authorities is supporting the response to the virus on the ground, these measures cannot be mistaken for well-intentioned steps towards a peaceful solution. In fact, as the international community focuses attention on the fight against the pandemic, the occupying Power, Israel, has continued to entrench the occupation and openly discuss its intention to annex the Occupied Palestinian Territory, with measures being taken while this debate is held and the illegal Israeli blockade on Gaza continues.

Home demolitions, evictions, confiscation of Palestinian property, destruction of agricultural and livelihood structures, expansion of settlements construction, human rights abuse and settlers' violence as well as military incursions have continued. Destruction of water, sanitation and hygiene facilities

are putting thousands of Palestinians at an increased risk of contracting the virus and are jeopardizing their health and safety.

This is in breach of Israel's legal obligation to protect the right to health and life of Palestinians under the Fourth Geneva Convention. Children, especially the 194 currently in administrative detention in Israeli jails, are being affected by the virus. The Committee calls for the release of all Palestinian prisoners, whose health is at increased risk of virus contagion in detention facilities. Similarly, as reported by Special Coordinator Mladenov on 30 March, the provisions of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016) continue to be violated. Declarations of regret and concern have made no difference. The international community must ensure that the occupying Power meets its obligations in all these matters under International and International Humanitarian Law and that there is accountability for not doing so.

During the virtual event organized by the Committee on 14 April, UNRWA Director of Operations, Mr. Matthias Schmale, mentioned that in the Gaza Strip the main concerns are a dilapidated economy and inadequate health infrastructure aggravated by high population density, especially in refugee camps. As UNRWA's core funding for Gaza is expected to last until May or June 2020, the Committee urges the international community to continue to provide the Agency with adequate and reliable funding for continuity of its operations in all fields to ensure its vital assistance to the Palestine refugees. The Committee reiterates its call for the total lifting of the Gaza blockade and to refrain from imposing further restrictions which would be devastating for the economy of the Strip.

Statements reaffirming support for the two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders and opposing Israeli annexation have poured in from almost all countries, the Middle East Quartet, as well as representatives of the US Congress. As welcome as they are, statements are not enough and the time for action is long overdue. The expansion of Israel's control over the Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, is eroding, literally, the possibility of achieving the two-State solution. The goal of seeing Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security along the pre-1967 borders with East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian State remains unchanged, yet unattained and at great risk.

In the mist of this health scourge, we must not forget that, while everyone is affected by Covid-19, the pandemic's most devastating consequences are on women and girls: from health and the economy, to security and social protection. Palestinian women and girls are no exception. And yet, women are "not

“just victims” in the crisis; they also play a major role in the response and must be supported in their efforts.

The Secretary-General’s recent call for a Global Ceasefire was heeded by many warring parties. UN Middle East Envoys joined him in calling parties to de-escalate tensions and urged for greater humanitarian action to prevent the spread of the pandemic in the region. We also call on Israel, the occupying Power, to heed the long-standing call for a halt to illegal actions and practices, including all measures aimed at annexation of territory, and, in accordance with its international law obligation, ensure the protection of the Palestinian civilian population under its control by providing humanitarian access and assistance, so as to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

We in the United Nations have the tools to rein in violence and injustice, and seek peace, justice and security for all. We are committed to leaving no one behind. Not unlike the fight against the pandemic, we are in this together and each of us - individually, and collectively - must do our part, for only by caring for our neighbours, can we save ourselves.

Thank you