



Virtual Event on the Question of Palestine

“The COVID-19 pandemic under occupation – national resilience and international support”

The Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in conversation with the Palestinian civil society

21 April 2020

CHAIR SUMMARY

The Event on **“The COVID-19 pandemic under occupation – national resilience and international support”** was convened virtually, on 21 April 2020, under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP).

The Event consisted of a conversation between the Bureau of the Committee and three Palestinian civil society representatives: Mr. Ali Ghaith, Palestinian journalist and activist in East Jerusalem; Ms. Randa Siniora, General Director of the Women’s Center for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC) in Ramallah; and Mr. Issam Younis, the Director-General of the Al Mezan Center for Human Rights in Gaza.

The 90-minute event elaborated on how the Palestinian population in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza is coping with the COVID-19 pandemic under the ongoing occupation and political uncertainty in Israel and threats of annexation. The speakers elaborated on their challenges and restrictions in their respective locations, and on whether Israel, the occupying Power, upheld its responsibilities under international law vis-à-vis the occupied Palestinian population. The Event also elaborated on suggestions for Member States and global civil society to continue supporting the Palestinian people. All Member States and Observers, United Nations organizations, intergovernmental and civil society organizations were invited to attend, and the Event was streamed live on the Committee’s [official Facebook page](#).

At the opening, the **Chair of the Committee, Ambassador Cheikh Niang (Senegal)**, shared a brief history of the Committee and its mandate and highlighted how, in these new and challenging times, the Committee would use innovative ways to ensure it continued to support the Palestinian people.

Mr. Ghaith contextualized his remarks against the ongoing Israeli policies of land confiscations, movement restrictions, and isolating Jerusalem from the West Bank by erecting the separation wall. He highlighted Israel’s biased policies by flagging discrepancies in the

Israeli authority's funds disbursement process, which resulted in neglecting the provision of social services that include health, education, and infrastructure. In the current Coronavirus pandemic, Israeli authorities in East Jerusalem were not sharing accurate information about infections, let alone in Arabic, shut down civil society initiatives, and established containment measures aimed at only preventing the spread of the virus from Palestinian to Jewish neighborhoods but not inside the Palestinian community. The occupying Power also shut down Palestinian initiatives to provide health and disinfection services and food distribution. Palestinians in East Jerusalem had to rely on social media platforms for news, which only created conditions for rumour spreading. What was needed, he added, was increasing preventative measures, awareness campaigns, random and arranged examinations, emergency medical services, and economic support for affected families under the principle of social solidarity.

Ms. Siniora expressed that this global pandemic had unique features for Palestinians living under occupation. Contrary to the initiative of Secretary-General Guterres for a global ceasefire, the Israeli authorities – responsible as occupying Power for the wellbeing of the Palestinians under its control – were continuing “business as usual” as evidenced by OCHA reports on systematic violations of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory. She also highlighted how women were disproportionately affected by the pandemic due to deeply rooted inequalities and the persistence of traditional roles in Palestinian society, which only increased women's responsibilities as caregivers during the times of lockdown. This was compounded through night raids by Israeli forces without proper personal protective equipment (PPE). Restrictions on family reunifications, movement, and access to medical permits were further exacerbating the situation.

Mr. Younis, speaking on the situation in Gaza and Gazans' coping mechanisms with the new challenges paired with the ongoing difficulties, underlined that population density, the 14-year blockade, movement restrictions, and the requirement of having permits to attain outside medical treatment only indicated that the worst was yet to come. For example, only 3-4,000 COVID-19 tests had been allowed into the enclave, whose population stood at over 2 million. He stated that COVID-19 was a political crisis and the political context should be taken into consideration when dealing with the pandemic in Gaza. Without addressing the main cause of the problem – Israel's blockade and occupation and the lack of accountability for its actions – humanitarian aid would not be sufficient to combat the virus.

Ms. Siniora, replying to Ambassador **Feda Abdelhady-Nasser (Palestine)**, explained that her organization was currently supporting women subjected to gender-based violence, including domestic violence. Her center was also joining efforts with other civil society organizations through voluntary efforts and initiatives throughout the occupied Palestinian territory. As a part of these activities, they addressed the issue of illegal violations and exerted efforts to bring to the situation in the OPT to the attention of the International Criminal Court, as serious investigations in the occupied Palestinian territory were now needed more than ever.

Answering a question from **Ambassador Dian Triansyah Djani (Indonesia)** on Israel's actions to carry out its obligations as the occupying Power and the crisis in the global supply chain and food prices, speakers highlighted that the occupation mixed with the pandemic was very serious combination limiting Palestinians' access to basic goods and needs. Yet there was

no need to reinvent the wheel: Israel just had to follow through with what was accepted practice under international law. Gaza had already been suffering from acute food, health, and security shortages long before COVID-19 so it stood no chance in combatting a virus that well-developed countries, with adequate financial means, were finding difficult to fight.

The speakers agreed that political will in the international arena was needed to end the conflict and to enforce Israel's compliance with UN Security Council resolutions. The body of international law and agreements existed; it was up to the United Nations Member States on the side of the Palestinian people and its fundamental rights, including the Committee, to push for more action to end the occupation. Resolutions were not sufficient without concomitant action.

Ambassador Neville Gertze (Namibia) stressed the that now was the time for the people throughout the world to demonstrate their shared values, with humanity being the main one, and support the Palestinian people who, while already dispossessed, were now also denied access to health, which had led to a terrible situation becoming even worse.

Ambassador Riyad Mansour (Palestine) thanked the speakers for what he referred to as their testimonies on the crimes of Israel during the COVID-19 pandemic noting that the disease could only be fought with the collaboration and coordination of all nations under the umbrella of the United Nations.

In their concluding remarks, the speakers emphasized that even in such a bleak situation, Palestinian resilience remained strong, for example through "The Palestinian Gathering to Combat Coronavirus", that it was time for the United Nations to act in support of and coordination with Palestine, and to emphasize the rule of law and universal principles.

The virtual Event was closed by the Chair.

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****Note: This Summary attempts to provide an overall picture of the deliberations of the virtual Event. A video of the Event can be found on the webpage of the CEIRPP, www.un.unispal.org as well as in its official Facebook page and YouTube account.*

****Note: The views and opinions expressed in this summary are those of the speakers and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.*