

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, 21 July 2020

First, I would like to congratulate Germany for its professional handling of this month's Presidency of the Council in this new virtual setting. We thank Special Coordinator Mladenov and the briefers, Mr. Khalil Shikaki and Mr. Daniel Levy, for their timely and important presentations.

While the entire world is still fighting the relentless spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Palestinian people under occupation face not only the challenge of the virus but an even a bigger crisis: plans and measures by the Israeli Government to proceed with the *de jure* annexation of more parts of the West Bank.

Let there be no mistake: the creeping annexation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, has been ongoing for more than five decades and has become more and more entrenched over the years. The illegal Israeli settlement enterprise, with its network of separate roads as well as social and economic activities and permit regime, demolitions of homes and structures, evictions of entire Palestinian families, settlers' violence, and raids by Israeli security forces have marked the lives of entire generations of Palestinians. The Gaza Strip has remained severed from the rest of the Palestinian territory for 13 years - under an illegal Israeli blockade affecting the lives and livelihood of the 2 million Palestinians in the coastal enclave that must be lifted.

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 has never been at greater risk. As the Secretary-General stated at the Security Council meeting on 24 June, we are at a "watershed moment". The prohibition on acquisition of territory by force is absolute in the UN Charter and any annexation regardless of scope would constitute a grave breach of international law. As the Committee stated on 5 May, annexation represents a serious threat to the two-State solution and threatens global peace and security.

If it were to go ahead, *de jure* annexation would not only inflict a deadly blow to the realization of the two-State solution and the possibility of reaching a negotiated solution, but it would jeopardize the essence of the principles of international law and the whole legal framework the international community has built over decades. Respect for the Geneva Conventions and for United Nations

resolutions and ensuring accountability for breaches of international law such as annexation must be the utmost concern for the community of nations.

Opposition to annexation plans by Israel was expressed clearly by most Security Council Members at the meeting of the Council on 24 June, as well as by our Committee's partners among the AU, EU, LAS, OIC, UN Special Rapporteurs, renowned jurists, eminent personalities including The Elders, civil society and personalities from all walks of life. King Abdullah II of Jordan, among others, has warned that any unilateral Israeli measure to annex land in the West Bank would threaten regional stability. The Committee joins all those who have affirmed that annexation of occupied Palestinian territory will not be recognized as legitimate by the international community and will also result in consequences and irreparable damage to Israel's diplomatic standing.

While no open expression of repudiation for such plans has been heard from Israel since the passing of the annexation deadline of 1 July, it is our hope and appeal that the Israeli Government immediately abandon this unlawful plan.

The Palestinian Leadership's announcement that it is no longer bound by agreements and understandings with Israel and the United States, including the security cooperation, points to the fact that the situation might become untenable if annexation were to be implemented. The halting of all bilateral contacts will increasingly have a dramatic adverse impact on all aspects of Palestinian life with destabilizing results.

We call on the Quartet to assume its responsibilities, as mandated by the Security Council, to engage with the parties to revive the much-needed peace process in the context of an international framework within the well-known internationally-endorsed parameters, including the Arab Peace Initiative.

We reiterate our call on the implementation of all relevant UN resolutions, including SC Res. 2334 (2016) and particularly operative paragraph 5 calling on Member States to distinguish, in their dealings, between Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and with regards to Israeli settlement activities, which are illegal under international law. We urge the Palestinians to continue with their efforts for intra-Palestinian reconciliation and take note of encouraging signs exemplified by the recent call for unity between Fatah and Hamas.

We welcome the pledges of US\$130 million for UNRWA expressed by donors at the conference on 23 June. This is critical support for the Palestinian people, but still falls short of actual needs, thus compelling our renewed appeal for support to UNRWA. The international community must continue to make every effort to guarantee strong and predictable financing for the Agency at a time of instability, volatility and great vulnerability for Palestine refugees and for the Middle East.

The ongoing occupation and threat of further annexation are now compounded by the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, which has reached thousands of cases not only in the State of Palestine, posing serious challenges for the delivery of basic health and social services to the population, including to women and girls, but is also threatening the health and well-being of Israelis. The negative shock will have profound implications for the Palestinian economy, public welfare, employment, social cohesion, financial and institutional stability. We stress that strong international donor support and targeted technical assistance will be crucial on the path to recovery.

Halting annexation, however, cannot be the goal, only to go back to what is rapidly transforming into a one-State reality of occupation. Being satisfied of remaining on the brink while staring at the abyss cannot be enough. Let us be mindful of the eyes of the lost generations of Palestinians and Israelis and let us take decisive action for their sake, end the occupation and achieve the two-State solution as the cornerstone for just and lasting peace and security in the region.

Thank you.