



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. ORGANIZATION OF ISLAMIC COOPERATION ADDRESSES LETTERS TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL AND THE QUARTET ON ISRAELI ANNEXATION PLAN

On 7 July, the office of Yousef A. Al-Othaimeen, Secretary-General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, issued the following [press release](#).

The Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Dr. Yousef A. Al-Othaimeen, sent letters to the ministers of foreign affairs of the Member States of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and members of the International Quartet to convey the OIC's position rejecting the Israeli occupation government's threats to annex parts of the Palestinian territory occupied in 1967. This initiative came pursuant to the relevant [resolution](#) adopted by the OIC Executive Committee convened at the level of foreign ministers on 10 June 2020.

In his letters, the Secretary General underscored the need for the international community to assume its responsibilities and called on the UNSC to take the measures necessary to prevent Israeli annexation plans and compel Israel, the occupying power, to halt all its illegal practices and honor its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention and relevant UN resolutions.

The Secretary General also conveyed to the members of the International Quartet the content of the said resolution, which requested holding an emergency meeting to save the chances of peace, pursue work to launch a multilateral internationally-sponsored political process to achieve the two-state solution and realize the sovereignty of the State of Palestine within the 1967 borders, with Al-Quds as its capital, in line with international terms of reference, including the UN resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

II. PALESTINIAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE DISCUSSES POTENTIAL INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE TO ANNEXATION, ASSISTANCE TO UNRWA

On 14 July, the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People held its virtual meeting. A [recording](#) and [summary](#) of the meeting is below.

[Video](#)

On 14 July 2020, the [Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People](#) held its 401st meeting as a virtual event.

The main points of discussion related to potential international response to threats of annexation of parts of the Occupied Palestinian Territory by Israel, the occupying Power, recent pledges by Member States to UNRWA, and support to the Palestinian people in the context of the COVID19 crisis. Calling for solidarity with the Palestinian people, Member States expressed concern that any unilateral attempts at annexation would risk the two-State solution and would be construed as threat to international peace and stability.

III. UNICEF AND OHCHR CALL FOR GREATER PROTECTION FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FOR CHILDREN IN PALESTINE

On 15 July, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) issued the following [press release](#).

“UNICEF and the UN Human Rights office were shocked to learn of an incident in the Gaza Strip last week in which a child was killed by a family member in a grave act of domestic violence. Other recent cases of domestic violence against Palestinian children have also involved extremely serious sexual assault. UNICEF and the UN Human Rights office condemn domestic violence against children in all its forms.

“Children have a right to a childhood free from violence, and the ultimate right to life. It is paramount that the Government of the State of Palestine and the de facto authorities in the Gaza Strip put in place strong protection mechanisms and effective safeguards for children. This starts with a zero-tolerance approach to violence against children in any shape or form, irrespective of whether that violence occurs inside the home or family-environment or outside the home, for example, in schools.

“Those who perpetrated this outrageous act last week must be held to account using formal mechanisms compliant with international standards. Informal mechanisms are not appropriate for dealing with such serious crimes”.

IV. UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR REPORTS ON COLLECTIVE PUNISHMENT IN OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

On 15 July, Michael Lynk, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967, submitted his report to the Human Rights Council ([A/HRC/44/60](#)). The conclusions and recommendations from the advance, unedited version of the report are replicated below.

Conclusions

Collective punishment is a tool of control and domination that is antithetical to the modern rule of law. It defies the foundational legal principle that only the guilty should incur penalties for their actions, after having been found responsible through a fair process. Prohibitions of collective punishment are found in virtually all legal systems across the globe. The deeds of a few cannot, under any circumstances, justify the punishment of the innocent, even in a conflict zone, even under occupation, even during times of popular discontent and security challenges. Like torture, there are no permissible exceptions to the use of collective punishment in law. And, like torture, the use of collective punishment flouts law and morality, dignity and justice, and stains all those who practice it.

An occupying power has a duty to maintain order and public safety, and it is entitled to punish individuals who breach enforceable laws. But these practices, these laws and these procedures must be consistent with the elevated standards of international human rights and humanitarian law. Accordingly, an occupation must be administered through a rights-based approach, subject only

to actual and genuine security requirements. And behind these rights-centred responsibilities is an indelible lesson from history: an occupying power that ignores its solemn obligations towards the protected population or disregards its binding duty to end the occupation as soon as reasonably possible only fertilizes popular resistance and rebellion. And the more that it employs unjust and illegal measures – such as collective punishment – to sustain its alien rule, the greater the defiance that it sows.

Recommendations

82. The Special Rapporteur recommends that the Government of Israel comply with international law and the international consensus by bringing a full and speedy end to its 53 year-old occupation of the Palestinian territory. The Special Rapporteur further recommends that the Government of Israel take the following immediate measures:

(a). Renounce the annexation of East Jerusalem and the plans to annex further parts of the West Bank;

(b). End the settlement enterprise in full compliance with United Nations resolutions and international law including Resolution 2334 (2016)

(c). Negotiate in good faith with the State of Palestine to realize Palestinian self-determination in accordance with international law;

(d). Ensure the protection of individuals seeking to exercise their rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association and to freedom of expression, including human rights defenders;

(e). Ensure full accountability among its military and security forces for all violations of human rights and humanitarian obligations.

(f). Ensure that the use of force by its military and security forces when encountering demonstrations and protests strictly observes the requirements of international law, including limiting the use of lethal weapons to circumstances involving an imminent threat of serious injury or death.

End all measures amounting to collective punishment, including an end to: the closure of Gaza, all restrictions on freedom of movement across the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the punitive demolitions of homes, the punitive residency revocations, the cutting of benefits, the punitive closures of towns and all delays in returning bodies for burial.

Adopt the recommendation of the former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights issued in June 2017, which asked the General Assembly to make use of its powers under Article 96 (a) of the Charter of the United Nations to seek an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice on the legal obligation of Israel to end the occupation and the international community's legal obligations and powers to ensure accountability and bring an end to impunity.

In line with the international legal obligations respecting state responsibility, the international community should take all measures, including countermeasures and sanctions, necessary to ensure the respect by Israel of its duty under international law to end the occupation.

V. ORGANIZATION OF ISLAMIC COOPERATION EXPRESSES DEEP CONCERN OVER PALESTINIAN DETAINEE IN ISRAELI PRISONS

On 20 July, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation General Secretariat issued the following [press release](#).

The General Secretariat of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) expressed deep concern over the conditions of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli occupation prisons, following reports that some of them are infected with coronavirus, bear the brunt of continuing Israeli arbitrary measures and are deprived of their basic rights, including the right to medical treatment. It affirms that the Israeli occupation Government is responsible for the lives of thousands of Palestinian prisoners.

The General Secretariat called on all concerned international parties, especially the United Nations and the International Red Cross to pressure the Israeli occupation government in order to release all sick prisoners, the elderly, children, women and administrative detainees, ensure human rights protection for all Palestinian prisoners and end the continuing violations against them.

VI. UN SPECIAL COORDINATOR WARNS SECURITY COUNCIL OF ESCALATING HEALTH, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CRISIS IN THE OPT

On 21 July, Nickolay Mladenov, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process made the following [remarks](#) to the Security Council.

I brief you today as Palestinians and Israelis are grappling with a complex and potentially destabilizing three-pronged crisis:

An escalating health crisis as both struggle to contain the rapid spike of COVID-19 cases.

A spiralling economic crisis as businesses close, unemployment soars, protests increase, and the economy suffers the financial impact of months of lockdowns and restrictions.

And finally, a mounting political confrontation, driven by the threat of Israeli annexation of parts of the occupied West Bank, and the steps taken in response by the Palestinian leadership.

These developments are not happening in a vacuum. The unfolding dynamics have shed a stark light on the daily reality of the conflict and the imperative to resolve it through negotiations between the parties. They have further exposed the unsustainability of the occupation and the need to update agreements that define the relationship between the two sides in the interest of peace.

In recent weeks, the region and the broader international community have continued to express their firm rejection of annexation. Among these, on 1 July, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom published an Op-Ed in a leading Israeli newspaper expressing his opposition to annexation and asserting that such a step would violate international law and run “contrary to Israel’s own long-term interests.” Two joint statements issued on 7 July – one by the Foreign Ministers of Egypt, France, Germany and Jordan, and the second by Foreign Ministers of nine Arab States and the Secretary-General of the Arab League – stressed their staunch opposition to the move and called for a return to negotiations based on UN resolutions and international law.

On 2 July, leaders from Fatah and Hamas held a rare joint video press conference, in an effort to restate their opposition to annexation and to commit to a unified Palestinian front against it.

Palestinian and Israeli women are also making their voices heard. On 9 July, I engaged with some 100 Palestinian women in a high-level dialogue organized by UN Women, marking the 20th anniversary of the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1325. Participants shared their deep concern and uncertainty in the face of both COVID-19 and annexation threats. Ten Palestinian women leaders, supported by 180 women, issued a joint appeal against annexation, calling for the right to live in a democratic state of their own in freedom, dignity and equality.

A separate appeal issued by 22 Israeli women leaders, and later signed by over a hundred others, highlighted that annexation plans pose an irreversible danger to Israelis, Palestinians, and regional stability. Responding to both initiatives 45 global women leaders signed a joint call against annexation and for peace, highlighting the importance of heeding women's voices in situations of conflict.

The Secretary-General and the United Nations will continue efforts to resuscitate a dialogue among all stakeholders, with no preconditions, and in the interest of peace and a negotiated resolution to the conflict. For these efforts to stand a chance of success, there must be political will from all parties. Otherwise, the path to a negotiated solution risks quickly becoming unnavigable, moving instead towards a one-state reality of perpetual occupation and conflict.

Regrettably, the situation on the ground is rapidly being affected by the dramatic increase in COVID-19 cases in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel.

To contain the pandemic, the Palestinian Authority (PA) has re-imposed movement restrictions across the West Bank as well as some closures in the worst-hit governorates. Israel has also reimposed limitations on gatherings and certain non-essential businesses, as well as lockdowns in specific areas. Movement between Israel, the West Bank and Gaza remains heavily restricted, and the Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt has been closed in both directions since 15 May.

The challenge of confronting the rapid increase in cases in the West Bank and boosting prevention efforts in Gaza has been significantly compounded by the ending of coordination between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. The PA's refusal to accept any clearance revenues transferred by Israel has exacerbated an already concerning fiscal crisis and impacted service provision. It has effectively blocked the ability of patients to travel from Gaza for treatment outside of the Strip and has led to delays in delivering humanitarian assistance and materials intended for the COVID-19 response and other health support and services.

In response, the United Nations has engaged with all sides to ensure the continued and unimpeded provision of humanitarian assistance. The UN has reached agreements with the PA to make exceptions for coordinating humanitarian deliveries and with Israel to streamline its administrative procedures, considering the COVID-19 crisis. I want to thank the authorities for their openness and cooperation with the United Nations on these challenges. Having said this, I am also concerned that we are far below the level of coordination that existed in the beginning of the year, when the first wave of the virus hit. This situation could have serious repercussions on the ability to control its spread and its impact on people's lives.

Over the past weeks, because of the unprecedented circumstances, the UN has offered to increase its intermediary role between the parties. This includes COVID-19 response as well as a greater role in the facilitation of patient referrals from Gaza. Nevertheless, there are limitations to what the UN and other organizations can be expected to do. Any increased responsibilities in this context should be limited and time-bound and not designed to replace the roles and responsibilities of the Palestinian Authority or the Government of Israel.

While the COVID-19 pandemic and the breakdown in cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian authorities have raised new concerns and complicated the speedy transfer of patients outside of Gaza, it is important to recognize the long-standing, underlying fragility of Gaza's own healthcare system.

On the economic side, the Palestinian Ministry of Finance announced on 2 July that it would pay partial Government salaries for the month of May. The May salary payments were delayed due to an 80 per cent reduction in Palestinian revenues stemming from the economic impact of COVID19 and from the PA's refusal to accept the monthly transfers of its clearance revenues. It is unclear whether the Palestinian Government will have sufficient resources to make any future salary payments or, indeed, to continue to carry out its governing functions in the coming months.

The suspension of coordination between the PA and Israel has also impeded the ability of Palestinian Security Forces (PSF) to move through Areas B and C of the West Bank, undermining their capacity to enforce COVID-19-related restrictions.

During the reporting period, daily violence continued throughout the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Overall, one Palestinian was killed by Israeli Security Forces (ISF) and 65 Palestinians, including ten children, and two Israeli soldiers were injured in various incidents.

Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza organized protests against Israel's plan to annex parts of the West Bank. Overall, these protests remained peaceful. On some occasions Israeli Security Forces used rubber-coated bullets and tear gas, declared closed military areas and set up checkpoints near protests.

On 9 July, ISF shot and killed a 34-year-old Palestinian man and shot and wounded a 17-year-old Palestinian in the central West Bank village of Kifl Hares. ISF released a CCTV video allegedly showing the two throwing Molotov cocktails toward a military patrol and soldiers opening fire in response.

Meanwhile, settlers perpetrated some 13 attacks against Palestinians, resulting in nine injuries and damage to property, about half the number of such incidents recorded during the previous month.

There were some 25 incidents also in which Palestinians threw stones or Molotov cocktails at Israeli-owned vehicles, injuring seven Israeli civilians, including one child, and causing damage to property.

In Gaza, while the relative calm continued, Palestinian militants fired five rockets towards southern Israel. One fell short inside Gaza, one was intercepted by the Iron Dome system and the others hit in open areas in Israel, causing no injuries or damage. On all occasions, the IDF carried

out retaliatory strikes against Hamas targets, including underground infrastructure in the Strip, with no injuries reported. Over the month, militants also test fired an unusually high, 69, rockets and mortars towards the sea, with 44 projectiles launched on 1 and 3 July, alone.

Economic tensions brought out dozens of Palestinians on 5 July, who demonstrated in front of the Legislative Council in Gaza City against the deteriorating situation, poverty and unemployment.

In the past month, the Israeli authorities demolished 48 Palestinian-owned structures due to a lack of Israeli-issued building permits. Another five structures were self-demolished by their owners following the receipt of demolition orders. Of the buildings demolished, 39 were in Area C and 14 in East Jerusalem. Consequently, 34 people, including 17 children and ten women, were displaced and over 250 people were otherwise affected.

I note that the latest information available from Israeli authorities indicates that, as of 31 May, the number of Palestinian detainees, including minors, in Israeli prisons is at its lowest level in years. The number of Palestinian minors in Israeli prisons has declined by some 30 percent, from 201 in February to 142 in May. While still too high, I welcome this development, particularly in light of the recent calls to release detainees and reduce their numbers during the COVID-19 crisis.

Turning briefly to the region, in Lebanon, the economic situation continues to deteriorate, with inflation rising as the Lebanese lira falls against the U.S. dollar. As the health and education sectors come under increased stress, and with growing concerns over food insecurity, the Government and the International Monetary Fund remain engaged in talks over a potential assistance package. In parallel, Lebanon has witnessed a spike in daily COVID-19 infections, with 2,542 confirmed cases as of 15 July.

The situation in the UNIFIL area of operations remained mostly stable, notwithstanding several instances of weapons being pointed between Israel Defense Forces and Lebanese Armed Forces along the Blue Line. On 2 July, under COVID-19 restrictions, the UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander chaired a tripartite meeting attended by senior delegations of the Lebanese Armed Forces and the IDF to prevent tensions along the Blue Line.

On the Golan, while generally calm, the situation remained volatile, with the continued violations of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement. On 15 July, the Alpha side informed UNDOF that they had “eliminated” a position within the area of separation which they believed was a violation and a threat. UNDOF did not observe this activity but observed an explosion in the area of separation consistent with the report from the Alpha side.

In closing, I would like to emphasize that confronting the current crises requires unity of effort, strength of purpose, and a clear understanding of the multifaceted risks we are facing.

The ferocity of the COVID-19 virus and its devastating human and economic toll demand extraordinary measures – measures that must rise above politics-as-usual. Immediate efforts to curb the virus and to mitigate its impact must be prioritized.

Israeli and Palestinian leaders have a duty to protect the lives and livelihoods of their populations.

With unemployment in Israel surging to over 20 per cent, and with thousands of Israelis taking to the streets to demand greater financial support from their Government, many have highlighted the staggering financial and, potentially, human cost of moving forward with potential annexation plans.

I reiterate the Secretary-General's call on the Israeli Government to abandon plans to annex parts of the occupied West Bank.

With an 80 per cent reduction in its income, the Palestinian Authority faces the risk of a total collapse at a time when Palestinians throughout the occupied territory need the services and support of their Government more than ever.

I call on both sides to work with the United Nations in ensuring that those forms of civil and security coordination that are vital to preventing the continuing spread of the corona virus are reinstated immediately. This should be done without prejudice to the political position of either party. It is necessary to do that in order to protect lives in the face of rapidly growing infection rates.

We will continue to work with all sides to ensure that humanitarian and health needs are met.

For the United Nations, protecting lives will always remain our highest priority.

The complexities of the pandemic also require us to examine how we arrived at this pivotal, and destructive, point in the history of the conflict and what it will take to reverse the current course.

Last week, I spoke with representatives of Palestinian and Israeli civil society organizations engaged in peacebuilding efforts. Their resilience, creativity and commitment to a peaceful solution are deeply inspiring, and we, in the international community, would do well to follow their lead.

Today, however, it is not enough to restate our opposition to annexation. Today we should discuss what can and must be done to improve the situation on the ground, preserve the prospect for a two state solution, increase the chances of meaningful negotiations for a peaceful resolution of the conflict, and protect these efforts from spoilers, radicals and extremists.

To this effect I reiterate today the Secretary-General's call to the members of the Middle East Quartet, the Arab countries, the Israeli and Palestinian leadership to urgently re-engage.

We need to restart diplomacy!

Over these past years, these types of discussions have been dormant for too long, allowing both parties to move further apart along diverging paths. Unilateral action and the threat of unilateral action have made the goal appear ever more distant. Only by engaging together, based on shared principles and aspirations, can we identify realistic steps to avoid increasing polarisation and advance the goal of two states, living side-by-side in peace, security, mutual recognition, integrated into the region.

We must use the opportunity presented by the current crises to move forward, to and to regain the path towards a negotiated two-state solution, built on a just and sustainable resolution to the conflict in line with relevant UN resolutions, bilateral agreements and international law.

VII. CHAIR OF THE PALESTINIAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE SUBMITS STATEMENT FOR SECURITY COUNCIL OPEN DEBATE

Cheikh Niang, Chair of the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, submitted a [statement](#) for the Security Council [open debate](#) on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question of 21 July.

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 them - 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.

VIII. FORMER AND CURRENT EUROPEAN LEADER REITERATE CALL TO SUPPORT UNRWA

Thirty-one former and current senior European politicians and diplomats penned a letter in support of the United National Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). An UNRWA [press release](#) on the subject, issued on 21 July is replicated below.

Thirty-one senior European politicians came in support of the United National Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) yesterday through a [letter](#) that reiterated the essential role that the Agency plays in a highly volatile region.

As UNRWA continues to face financial and political challenges, its health, education, social and other services offer 5.6 million Palestine refugees in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, predictability in an otherwise very unstable environment.

“In a region rife with conflicts, and now battling the health and socioeconomic impacts of Covid-19, UNRWA stands as a vital source of regional stability,” says the letter. The Agency managed to quickly shift the way it works in the initial weeks of the pandemic to help prevent a much-dreaded outbreak and outspread of the virus in densely populated Palestine refugees camps. By switching to distance-learning, telemedicine and food delivery, among other measures, the virus remained largely contained.

But UNRWA, whose mandate was renewed for another three years last December by an overwhelming majority at the United Nations General Assembly, is struggling to raise the funding it needs to continue running all its programmes. In a recent meeting with donors and host governments at the Advisory Commission, an advisory body to UNRWA, the Agency’s Commissioner-General, Philippe Lazzarini, appealed for support to what he described as “a source of stability in a highly unstable region.”

To date, UNRWA has received funding and pledges that can cover less than 50 per cent of its main budget and 60 per cent for its planned COVID-19 response. It has received even less for its emergency budgets to respond to the acute humanitarian needs in Syria and Gaza, where Palestine refugees often live in abject poverty.

IX. PALESTINIAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE HOLDS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON “ANNEXATION IN PRACTICE – PALESTINIAN LIVES IN JERUSALEM”

On 28 July, the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People held a virtual international conference on the question of Jerusalem co--organized with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation on “Annexation in Practice – Palestinian Lives in Jerusalem”. The [Chair’s Summary](#) is reproduced below.

The International Conference on the Question of Jerusalem “**Annexation in Practice – Palestinian Lives in Jerusalem**” was convened virtually, on 28 July 2020, under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP) and co-organized with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

Member States participated in the two-hour event on WebEx. It was livestreamed on UNTV and UN social media channels, with a total of 11,000 viewers watching it on [UN WebTV](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#). They could comment and pose questions.

The event was moderated by Ambassador Ana Silvia Rodríguez, Vice-Chair of the Committee and *Chargé d'affaires* of Cuba to the United Nations. It consisted of an opening session with remarks by Mr. Khaled Khiari, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Middle East, Asia and the Pacific in the Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations; Ambassador Ali Goutali, OIC Director of the Department of Palestine and Al-Quds Affairs; and Ambassador Riyadh Mansour, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations.

Following the opening, three expert speakers highlighted Israeli measures and policies making life difficult for Palestinians in Jerusalem. Ms. Maha Abdallah, Legal Researcher at the Cairo Institute of Human Rights Studies (Jerusalem), Ms. Hagit Ofran, Director of the Settlement Watch Project at Peace Now (Jerusalem), and Mr. Osamah Khalil, Associate Professor of History at Syracuse University (USA), agreed that Israel intimidated Palestinians in Jerusalem on a daily basis by creating a coercive environment through the use of myriad illegal policies and practices affecting all aspects of the lives of the Palestinian inhabitants of the occupied City.

The Conference drew attention to the various critical dimensions of the situation in the City after over 50 years of Israeli occupation and its associated policies and measures. Expert speakers and other participants also discussed how Israel’s entrenchment of its annexation plans in the rest of the occupied West Bank would jeopardize the centrality of Jerusalem as a final status issue in the Israel-Palestine conflict that must be justly resolved on the basis of international law and relevant UN resolutions.

Speakers stressed that decades-long impunity for annexation measures and settlement activities had led to the current situation, with Israel able to exploit international inaction and the paralysis of the UN Security Council in particular. They asked the international community to follow statements of condemnation of Israeli policies and measures, illegal under international law and breaching General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, by tangible actions, including sanctions against Israel, the occupying Power. It was also argued that Israel had instituted an “apartheid” regime in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) and that the United Nations and

its Member States should apply to the Palestinian case the lessons from the South African experience.

Participants reiterated that Jerusalem was a final-status issue, whose fate could only be decided through negotiations between the parties. Changes in Jerusalem's demographic composition, character and status were a violation of international law and UN resolutions.

Israel's implemented a *de facto* annexation of East Jerusalem since 1967, under the guise of administrative measures during occupation; Israel's *de jure* annexation since 1980 was a preview of its plans for the rest of the occupied West Bank. The policies in Jerusalem, as in the West Bank, aimed to make life for Palestinians unbearable so they would leave, thus solidifying Israeli presence and control. The Israeli settlement project in East Jerusalem aimed to cutting off Palestinians from the West Bank and from each other thus undermining contiguity and forestalling Jerusalem becoming the capital of a Palestinian state.

At the opening, **Ambassador Rodríguez** shared a brief history of the Committee and its mandate and stressed that the event on the question of Jerusalem was a continuation of the Committee's action to rally support and solidarity for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination and independence, in line with its General Assembly mandate.

In his remarks, **Mr. Khiari** expressed deep concern over the evolving situation in Israel and Palestine. He underlined that annexation of Palestinian territory in the West Bank would violate international law as the annexation of East Jerusalem did, and as stated in UN Security Council resolutions 476 and 478 (1980). Annexation would also have dangerous implications for the two-State solution, as it would undercut the possibility of new negotiations. Mr. Khiari urged the international community to continue its support and assistance to the Palestinian people and asked the Israeli and Palestinian leaders to commit to restarting meaningful dialogue. He called on the Israeli government to abandon its annexation plans and welcomed the stated willingness of the Palestinian leadership to return to the negotiating table. Fellow members of the Middle East Quartet were called upon to find an agreeable framework for the parties to re-engage with each other and with regional States. Mr. Khiari reiterated the UN's continued support for a peaceful resolution of the question of Palestine, including the question of Jerusalem, based on UN resolutions, international law and previous agreements.

Ambassador Goutali conveyed the greetings of the Secretary General of the OIC and expressed his organisation's deep appreciation for the fruitful partnership with the United Nations and the Committee. Noting that the Conference was taking place at an extremely critical juncture, he underlined that annexation ran against the historical, legal, and political rights of the Palestinian people and represented a blatant violation of international law, the UN Charter, and relevant UN resolutions. The ongoing Israeli violations seriously challenged the will of the international community and represented a test for the credibility, responsibility, and determination of key international actors. Meeting at the level of Foreign Ministers in June, the OIC had (virtually) adopted a resolution rejecting the illegal Israeli annexation plans and calling upon the UN Security Council to live up to its responsibilities and to take the necessary measures to compel Israel to stop its illegal actions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.

Ambassador Goutali urged all parties to refrain from recognizing any measures aimed at changing the demographic, political, legal, and historical status of Jerusalem and to continue providing financial support for Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem. He further called for legal mechanisms ensuring Israel's accountability, international protection for the Palestinian people, and for the Middle East Quartet to launch a credible, time-bound and multilaterally-sponsored political process in the pursuit of a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine.

Ambassador Mansour shared a timeline of Israeli violations pertaining to Jerusalem since the 1940s. He highlighted that today Israel was violating Palestinians rights in Jerusalem through a number of policies and measures, *inter alia* the construction of settlements, the expropriation of Palestinian land and property, the demolition of Palestinian homes, the displacement of Palestinian residents and the revocation of residency permits and IDs.

He noted that lack of accountability had allowed Israel to violate international law without consequences for the last 70 years. He regretted that most Security Council resolutions adopted under Chapter VII were related to Middle East conflicts, except for the Israeli-Palestinian one. This impunity had been exacerbated by the current US administration's support to Israel, which had recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and relocated the US embassy there. To reverse annexation, legal measures should be considered to end the occupation. Ambassador Mansour welcomed the condemnation of Israel's annexation plans by the international community – including by the African Union, the European Union, the League of Arab States, the Non-Aligned Movement, the OIC and the United Nations – but additional steps were needed to preserve the two-State solution on the pre-1967 borders, to end the Israeli occupation, and to realize the national aspirations of the Palestinian people and their inalienable right to self-determination.

Ms. Abdallah situated ongoing Israeli practices within a colonialist framework that seeks to fragment and segregate Palestinians and eradicate their identity, history, language, and culture while repressing their political, economic, and social life. With the goal to establish and maintain a ratio of 70 per cent Jewish to 30 per cent Palestinian inhabitants in Jerusalem, Israel had deepened its control over the City through a plethora of unlawful policies and measures. It had increased the number of Jewish Israeli settlers with full citizenship while imposing a fragile “permanent residency” status on the majority of Palestinians in Jerusalem, thus effectively rendering them stateless.

Ms. Abdallah contended that Israel had implemented a system of intimidation and collective punishment against Palestinians in Jerusalem, who experienced Israeli forces' persistent incursions on homes and neighbourhoods, house demolitions, evictions and revocation of residency permits. Israeli forces routinely used excessive force to arrest and kill Palestinians and had established a constant state of surveillance by installing cameras, sensors, and microphones all over the City. Through military checkpoints, Israel had isolated Jerusalem from the West Bank and Gaza, as well as its own Palestinian neighbourhoods from each other. Israel was propagating a one-sided narrative for the benefit of Jewish Israelis. In contrast, Palestinian cultural centres were attacked, and religious practices were often restricted. The concomitant isolation of the Palestinian economy had resulted in high rates of poverty and unemployment. Ms. Abdallah underlined that the inaction of the international community had emboldened Israel's attempts to “ethnically cleanse” Palestinians to achieve “full colonization and a unified Jerusalem” as its capital. The international

community needed to take concrete action to deter further annexation in the West Bank and reverse the ongoing one in Jerusalem.

Ms. Ofran, focusing on Israeli practices in East Jerusalem, explained that further annexation in the OPT could be done by a simple Israeli Cabinet decision applying Israeli laws to the annexed areas. She shared maps of Jerusalem's demographic make-up from before and after 1967, showcasing Israel's implementation of a plan to isolate Palestinian neighbourhoods in the City from the West Bank through *inter alia* land expropriation, building settlements inside Palestinian areas to create mixed neighbourhoods thus weakening the two-State solution, through building touristic parks around the Old City to strengthen Israeli citizens' links to these particular areas, and bringing the public domain under Israeli control.

In doing so, Ms. Ofra said, Israel had misused the Absentees' Property Law, administrative laws and the legal system, in violation of international law. The Absentee's Property Law was implemented in East Jerusalem after 1967 to declare Palestinians as "absentees" and hand their properties to Israeli settlers. If the present Israeli government were to proceed with annexation, there was a risk that the same would apply to other vast tracts of land in the occupied West Bank. Another tool used by Israel was the Legal and Administrative Matters Law, enacted after 1980, which stipulated that properties in East Jerusalem that used to belong to Jewish owners before 1948 could be reclaimed from their current Palestinian inhabitants. This legislation was behind most eviction cases in Batan al-Hawa, Silwan and Sheikh Jarrah.

Mr. Khalil noted that, since 1967, the Israeli Government had referred to the Palestinian territory in Gaza and the West Bank as "disputed" rather than "occupied" and had been consistent in its insistence that Jerusalem would remain Israel's undivided capital, and without a return to the pre-1967 borders. In the immediate aftermath of the 1967 war, Israel began implementing policies designed to secure "the maximum amount of land with minimal Palestinian population". Over the decades, Israel had been able to do so unencumbered because the United States had shielded it from international criticism, including at the United Nations.

In the case of East Jerusalem, Mr. Khalil asserted that Israel had initially claimed that the extension of the applicability of its laws, immediately after the war, was a purely administrative measure. In reality, this had been the precursor for the later *de jure* annexation, serving as a template for Israel's plans for the rest of the occupied West Bank: Israel created and enforced a legal and administrative system that actively discriminated against Palestinians to encourage their emigration. Palestinian "self-transfer" had become a key aspect of Israel's overt and creeping annexation of East Jerusalem and other parts of the occupied West Bank. Israel had succeeded in creating facts on the ground and retaining US support. Most recently, this had culminated in President Trump recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital, a decision that the presidential candidate of the Democratic Party had stated he would not reverse if elected in November 2020.

During the **Question and Answer** session, representatives of Egypt, Indonesia, Lebanon, Senegal, South Africa and Tunisia reiterated their countries' commitment to supporting a solution of the question of Palestine based on international law and relevant UN resolutions as well as their strong opposition to unilateral measures, in particular annexation. Some also referenced the Arab Peace Initiative.

The ensuing discussion focused on options for Member States, international organisations and civil society to reverse existing trends, prevent future Israeli annexation of occupied Palestinian territory and to find ways out of the current situation towards a peaceful and just solution of the question of Palestine.

It was claimed that civil society groups and their activities continued to be under sustained attack from Israeli authorities and faced severe restrictions aimed at diminishing their presence, particularly in East Jerusalem. This was exemplified by Israel's countermeasures even against Palestinians in the City trying to organise civic support during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, in the absence of adequate health measures from the occupation authorities.

Speakers stressed that, while a clear formula on what could be done was not known, a clear and firm international stance vis-à-vis Israel had to be part of it. Speaking up against illegal Israeli practices and annexation was not equivalent to anti-Semitism. A (Jewish) Israeli human rights organisation (Yesh Din) had analysed Israeli policies in the OPT since 1967 and concluded that they fit the definition of "apartheid". It was now needed for the United Nations and its Members to have the same courage as in the case of South Africa, and to declare the situation in Israel and Palestine to be one of "apartheid" and apply the available template of sanctions.

The lack of accountability for Israel had allowed a culture of impunity that resulted in the current situation, allowing the occupation to be entrenched and for the Palestinian people to continue to be deprived of their rights. To move forward, one should not resort to old methods that had not worked. For example, the Middle East Quartet had become yet another forum to demand Palestinian concessions while allowing Israel to continue creating facts on the ground.

Other comments stressed that Member States who prided themselves on upholding human rights and international norms should apply international law and international human rights law, including through the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC), and protect the integrity of these international institutions in the case of Palestine. In addition to the ICC, Member States could also seek accountability via universal jurisdiction mechanisms. The key term in ensuring accountability was "consequences" – without them, Israel would continue to perpetrate its violations.

The Vice-Chair closed the event.

****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, <https://www.un.org/unispal/> 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.*