



International Conference on the Question of Jerusalem

“Annexation in Practice – Palestinian Youth in Jerusalem”, Part 2

Convened by the
UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP)
co-organized with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)

27 August 2020

CHAIR SUMMARY

The International Conference on the Question of Jerusalem **“Annexation in Practice – Palestinian Youth in Jerusalem”, Part 2** was convened virtually, on 27 August 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).

The event was moderated by Mr. Samir Bakr, Assistant Secretary-General for Palestine and Al-Quds Affairs of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). It consisted of an opening session with remarks by Ambassador Cheikh Niang, Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and Permanent Representative of Senegal to the United Nations and H.E. Mr. Fadi Hidmi, Minister of Jerusalem Affairs of the State of Palestine. The panel of speakers was comprised of Ms. Reem Natsheh, Field Researcher at the Women’s Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (Jerusalem), Mr. Micha Kurz, co-founder of Breaking the Silence and Grassroots Jerusalem (Jerusalem), and Ms. Rochelle Watson, National organizer and lead of campaigns for Friends of Sabeel North America (USA). Member States participated in the two-hour event on WebEx which was also livestreamed on UNTV and UN social media channels. A total of 10,828 viewers watched the conference on UN WebTV, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube where they had an opportunity to make comments and pose questions to the panellists.

At the opening, **Ambassador Niang** reiterated the Committee’s commitment to achieving the two-State solution based on international law and relevant UN resolutions, despite Israel’s successive unilateral actions aimed at altering the demographic and historical character of Occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and reaffirmed the Committee’s principled position that annexation of any part of the occupied territory is illegal and that any initiative aimed at a just solution to the question of Palestine must consider the legitimate rights and aspirations of the Palestinian people and engage the Palestinian leadership. The Chair called for the active engagement and empowerment of the post-Oslo generation as essential for bringing an end to the occupation. The Committee’s events should continue to serve

as platforms to bring together a diversity of voices from around the world to mobilize efforts for a just and lasting solution.

In his introductory remarks, **Mr. Bakr** reminded that the seventh annual Conference on the Question of Jerusalem, in collaboration with the OIC, represents an opportune occasion for highlighting the hardships, needs, concerns and aspirations of Palestinian youth under Israeli occupation in East Jerusalem and for devising ways to build their capacities and to enhance their role in their society. He expressed his appreciation for the principled position of all Member States who explicitly rejected Israel's annexation of Palestinian lands since 1967 – considered as a blatant violation of international law and UN resolutions. He recalled the strategic plan for the development of Jerusalem prepared by the State of Palestine and adopted by the OIC detailing the needs, priorities and possible interventions to confront the challenges posed by the occupying power. The OIC has implemented some interventions in this regard through contributing to the development of the education sector and building the capacity of organizations serving youth in East Jerusalem. The OIC Summit also adopted a resolution on the socio-economic empowerment for the Palestinian People with a view to promoting steady and sustainable growth of the youth sector and to creating work opportunities for East Jerusalemite youth. Mr. Bakr highlighted the importance of twinning between youth institutions in Jerusalem and their counterparts in OIC Member States as an efficient tool to strengthen the steadfastness of Palestinian youth in their homeland and enhance their resilience. Finally, he reiterated the unflinching support of the OIC to the Palestinian people in their struggle to regain their inalienable rights in accordance with the relevant UN resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

Minister Hidmi saluted the Palestinian youth, while describing them as the future of Palestine and protector of its history and civilization and reiterated his eagerness to see an end to Israeli occupation so that young Palestinians can live in dignity, safety in an independent homeland, with a just and peaceful future. The Minister commended the UN Secretary-General, the Chair of the Committee and its Member States, as well as the OIC for their constant support to the Palestinian cause and persistent efforts to support the realization of the Palestinian people's inalienable rights, ensure the achievement of a just and comprehensive solution for the Palestine question, and guarantee security and stability in the Arab region. The 2nd Conference was held amid the intensification of violations by the occupying power against the Palestinian people, with the attempt to establish a "colonialist" regime and plans to annex parts of the occupied Palestinian lands including Jerusalem, Jordan Valley, areas North of the Dead Sea. The Minister spoke of Israel's continuing escalation of measures in implementation of its agenda of Judaization of the Holy City through excavation works under Al-Aqsa mosque and within the walls of the Old City, demolitions, land confiscation policies, settlement construction and enforced displacement in order to change the demographics, nature and status of the City. The Minister also spoke of the raids by Israeli authorities against arts and cultural centres that play an important role in the life of Palestinian youth.

On annexation, Minister Hidmi informed that Israel has approved the construction of 17,700 settlement units in Jerusalem since the beginning of this year. He warned the international community to not "feel at ease" with Israel's announced intention to "freeze" its annexation plans of parts of the West Bank, as the Israeli measures taken on the ground run counter to such stated intentions. Israel is seeking to annex major settlement blocs to Occupied East Jerusalem,

including Ma'ale Adumim and Gush Etzion. The latter would eliminate any potential for a contiguous Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

As for East Jerusalemite youth, the Minister underlined how they are affected by Israeli oppression in all fields of life, including education, political and intellectual freedom and sustainable development, in addition to aggressions by settlers and Israeli occupation forces. This has resulted in a high level of hopelessness and frustration, aggravated by poor social services, economic stagnation and significant political and social tensions. High school dropouts and scarce employment opportunities in East Jerusalem have driven Palestinian youth to the Israeli labour market as a non-professional workforce. The Minister called on the international community to support Palestinian youth, who have proven to be agents of positive transformation, and to save the two-State solution, by shouldering its responsibilities to implement the relevant UN resolutions and to overcome the state of chronic impotence towards the Palestinian cause and Jerusalem. The Minister also called for the empowerment of young Palestinian women and girls for their engagement in the socio-economic and political sphere, which is vital for Palestine's social fabric and economic growth.

Following the opening, three panellists highlighted the lived reality of young Palestinians in East Jerusalem under Israeli occupation and discussed ways to support Palestinian youth-based civil society organizations while they grapple with Israeli occupation. Their core messages focused on the plight and hardship suffered by Palestinian youth in East Jerusalem under Israeli occupation and how they represent, along with solidarity movements, particularly in the US, important positive factors of change. Their actions and calls for solidarity as well as their struggles for peace and self-determination have contributed to make the question of Palestine a global one.

Ms. Natsheh spoke of her lived reality as a born and raised young Jerusalemite. She indicated that the prolonged Israeli occupation interferes in all aspects of her daily life. She described Israel's systematic discrimination against East Jerusalemite Palestinians in municipal services, residency rights, employment, health care and education, in addition to them being confronted with the daily provoking presence of Israeli forces and settlers all over the City. In particular, youth are at the forefront of the struggle against the occupation, in terms of arrests, detention, injuries and the denial of their basic human rights. Their life chances are remarkably limited by the lack of opportunities, poverty, and socio-economic hardship directly linked to the Israeli occupation and its associated policies. She insisted that the situation is exacerbated for Palestinian females in East Jerusalem with young women being affected by a double oppression from the occupation and a patriarchal culture.

Palestinian women and girls across the OPT find themselves living in the shadow of occupation as their life decisions are all constrained by the human rights crisis dominating their lives in the OPT. Indeed, occupation is disproportionately affecting Palestinian women, especially when Israeli violations such as house demolitions, extra judicial killing or arrest of the breadwinner in the family force them into poverty and maltreatment due to the financial pressure. Most importantly, Palestinian women are left to bear the constraints imposed by the Israeli discriminatory policies, leading to their low living standards and impoverishment aggravated by the restriction of movement imposed by the annexation wall, land zoning and

planning and the poor delivery of basic services. Furthermore, girls' right to education has been compromised by the Israeli policies and practices, with a high level of dropouts and early marriages. She also highlighted the plight of Palestinian youth civil society, which lack space and resources and are constantly hindered in their action by the occupation. All of these are the direct result of Israel's systematic lack of accountability and failure to meet its obligations as an occupying power under international law and its pursuance of a clear policy of pressuring East Jerusalemites to force them out their City or ultimately to emigrate.

Mr. Kurz, a former Israeli soldier and with the Israeli organization Breaking the Silence, representing a pro-Palestinian Israeli voice and focusing on Israeli practices in East Jerusalem, explained that the Oslo generation, also wrongly dubbed the "peace generation" for its high expectations of a new Middle East, witnessed the erection of military checkpoints and Jewish supremacist colonies in the midst of cities in the West Bank. He blamed the Israeli education system for preparing Israeli youth from an early age to consider Palestinians as "enemies". He stressed that his own experience with the Israeli military service was the actual eye-opener on the lived realities of Palestinian youth under Israeli occupation. He also criticized the Israeli government's censorship on topics such as the Nakba and annexation wall, which is instead called the Israeli "security barrier". He regretted that the latter has caused massive unemployment among Palestinian youth by heading the Palestinian workforce off from the central business district in Jerusalem.

Ms. Watson introduced Sabeel as a Christian theological liberation centre in Jerusalem, which led to the establishment of Friends of Sabeel North America (FOSNA), in recognition that there is a standing morale obligation for US citizens to stand alongside the Palestinians facing oppression necessitated, to a large extent, by US complicity through its massive annual military aid to Israel. The release of the 2009 Kairos document from Palestinian Christians to Christians around the World contributed to strengthen the resolve of many US Christians to follow the call to take economic measures to help end the Israeli occupation. She explained the place of this conflict in the US society as the same actions defining Palestinian rights are the ones necessary to uphold democracy, personal safety, personal wellbeing in the United States and around the world. She further spoke of the similarities between the experiences of the lived realities of Palestinian youth in Jerusalem and those of minorities in the US, sighting as an example the calls of The Black Lives Matter movement. Grassroot networks dedicated to the work for justice in Palestine have emerged in dozens of Christian denominations in the United States and taken critical actions in response to Palestinian calls for solidarity. She mentioned the example of the Presbyterian Church USA, which in 2014, managed to vote to divest 21 million dollars from three corporations profiting off the Israeli occupation after three years of advocacy and education with their church body. Denominations have also strongly advocated for the rights of children and youth from the inhumane treatment and abuse of the Israeli military. As another example sighted by Ms. Watson was the Congress resolution conditioning military aid to Israel introduced last month and for which Christian groups have joined to sensitize on the need for Israel accountability. She nonetheless warned against the use of Christian ideology on the question of Palestine and the status of Jerusalem, to propagate hate speech and messages.

Ambassador Riyad Mansour, the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations, reiterated the need for the international community to continue defending the

global consensus on the two-State solution, with the end of occupation as the core requirement and based on international law, Security Council resolutions and Arab Peace Initiative. He referred to the postponement of Israel's annexation plans as a result of the steadfastness of the Palestinian people and the firmness of its leadership, and the global rejection of Israeli illegal annexation of parts of the OPT. Mr. Mansour restated the key messages about rejection of the annexation from the Security Council debate on the Middle East of 25 August 2020. On the issue of Israeli accountability, Mr Mansour noted that the observer status acquired by the State of Palestine is considered as an important step in joining the International Criminal Court (ICC), which announced a war crimes probe regarding the situation of Palestine and alleged crimes committed in the OPT. Mr Mansour further noted that the legislation of Security Council resolution 2334 and its operative paragraph 5 and the publication of the UN database of businesses in Israeli illegal settlements would allow for further practical steps to hold Israel accountable for its violations of international law. He called on the civil society partners to support advocacy efforts to bring accountability for these violations.

During the **Question and Answer** session, representatives of Egypt, Indonesia, Senegal, South Africa reiterated their countries' commitment to supporting a solution of the question of Palestine based on international law and relevant UN resolutions. The Committee Chair highlighted the continuing validity of the global consensus renewed every year by the members of the United Nations and the international community, despite repeated attempts by others to deflate the Palestinian cause. Also, the Chair reminded about the commitments of UN bodies to the question of Palestine, including the efforts of the Human Rights Council on human rights investigations and the International Criminal Court which is deciding on the launch of an investigation into the situation in the OPT.

The ensuing discussion focused on the likely impact of annexation on the lives of Palestinian youth and how it would further exacerbate the already dire human rights situation and socio-economic situation in the OPT. In response to a query on the validity of the two-State model and the role of youth in its realization, a representative of UNFPA stressed that the international community should also focus on the implementation of the rights of the Palestinian youth as a people, to focus on the challenges of meeting their daily needs and ensure their inclusion and participation in political dialogue and discussions around the two-State vs. the one-State solution. A speaker added that Palestinian self-determination should foremost continue to be defended.

In the face of all these difficulties stemming from the Israeli occupation, Minister Hidmi, in his closing remarks, indicated that the Palestinian government has laid down national strategies that include support for young Jerusalemites in various sectors of its society. He reminded the participants that despite of the gloomy picture drawn throughout the 2nd Jerusalem Conference discussion, the Palestinian people continue to inject new ideas and to think "outside the box" to overcome the limitations posed by occupation and the threats of annexation. Some speakers called on the Member States to support, among other ideas, the Boycott, Disinvest and Sanction (BDS) movement as part of their efforts to achieve Israel's accountability for its violations in the OPT as it was done in confronting Apartheid in South Africa.

Assistant Secretary-General Bakr closed the event.

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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.*