



**Division for
Palestinian Rights**

International Conference on the Question of Palestine

**Convened by the
Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in
collaboration with the Government of Malaysia and the Perdana Global Peace Foundation**

Southeast Asian Support for the Rights of the Palestinian People

Kuala Lumpur, 28 and 29 February 2020

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I. Introduction

1. The International Conference on the Question of Palestine, on the theme “Southeast Asian Support for the Rights of the Palestinian People” was held at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre in Kuala Lumpur on 28 and 29 February 2020 under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. The Conference was organized in collaboration with the Government of Malaysia and the Perdana Global Peace Foundation and in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 74/10 and 74/12.
2. The Committee delegation to the Conference included the Chair of the Committee and Permanent Representative of Senegal to the United Nations, Cheikh Niang; two Committee members, the Permanent Representative of Malaysia, Mohamad Hasrin Aidid, and the Deputy Permanent Representative of Indonesia, Mohammad K. Koba; and the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations, Riyad Mansour.
3. The Conference comprised an opening session, three plenary sessions and a closing session. The opening session consisted of statements delivered by the Chair of the Committee and representatives of the State of Palestine and the United Nations, as well as a keynote address by the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mahathir bin Mohamad. The opening session was preceded by a courtesy meeting of the Committee delegation with Mr. Mohamad. The themes of the plenary sessions were “Situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory”, “Civil society action” and “Regional support for Palestinian rights”.
4. The more than 300 participants at the Conference included representatives of Member States, non-member observer States, intergovernmental organizations and civil society organizations, as well as accredited media representatives covering the event (see annex I).
5. The Summary of the Chair, statements and other conference materials are available on the [website](#) of the Committee.

Day 1

II. Opening session

6. The Chair of the Committee and Permanent Representative of Senegal to the United Nations, Cheikh Niang, chaired the opening session.

7. In his opening statement, Mr. Niang commended Malaysia for its long-standing role supporting the Palestinian cause, including as a member of the Committee, and for its work towards the realization of the rights of the Palestinian people. He affirmed that a just solution allowing both Israeli and Palestinian people to live in their own, sovereign States, side by side in peace and prosperity, was at the heart of the question of Palestine and that the only path to achieving that goal was the two-State solution. He warned that the ongoing occupation by Israel prevented the achievement of such a solution to the question of Palestine. He cautioned in particular against international pro-occupation lobbies, including in Australia, Europe and North America, that had tried to change the essence of the conflict from that of one State, Israel, occupying and illegally settling Palestinian land to a narrative of a conflict over disputed territory to which both sides had equal claims.

8. Mr. Niang called for those States members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) that had already recognized the State of Palestine to convince other members who had not yet done so to recognize it as well and to use their good relationships with Australia and Europe to convince them to engage more actively in establishing a multilateral mechanism for negotiations between Israel and Palestine. He pointed out that the Israel-Palestine conflict was between those who were on the side of truth and justice and those who were benefiting from false narratives and oppression.

9. The United Nations Resident Coordinator for Malaysia and Representative of the Secretary-General to the Conference, Stefan Priesner, commended the Committee for its unwavering commitment to the fulfilment of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements. He stated that the United Nations remained committed to supporting the parties in their efforts to overcome the current impasse and return to meaningful negotiations to end the occupation and bring a just, lasting and comprehensive resolution to the Israel-Palestine conflict.

10. Mr. Priesner commended the Committee's efforts to convene the Conference in times of tension in the Middle East, stating that a political solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict was needed more than ever. In reference to the United States vision for peace between Israelis and Palestinians, he said that the position of the United Nations remained that Israeli annexation of Palestinian territory in the occupied West Bank, if implemented, would be illegal under international law and would close the door to negotiations regarding a viable two-State solution. He reaffirmed that Jerusalem remained a final status issue and that unilateral steps aimed at changing the status and character of the city were contrary to international law and United Nations resolutions. He encouraged the international community, on the occasion of the Organization's seventy-fifth anniversary, to use the year as an opportunity to uphold the values

of the Charter of the United Nations to advance both the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

11. The Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine, Riyad Mansour, highlighted the historically strong relationship between Palestine and Malaysia and recalled that Malaysia had played a key role in the adoption of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016) as one of many examples of its unwavering support for the Palestinian cause.

12. Speaking about the recent peace proposal of the United States of America, Mr. Mansour referred to it as a step in political aggression against the Palestinian people, a continuation of earlier recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and the relocation of the United States Embassy from Tel Aviv to the city, in violation of international law and Security Council resolutions. He called upon all Muslims, Jews and Christians, as well as the people of Malaysia, to defend the Holy City as part of their collective responsibility and to not allow it to fall under the sovereign control of the occupying Power. He emphasized that the proposal of the United States, if enacted, would put the totality of Palestine under the control of Israel, turning it into an entity subjected to a system of apartheid. There was no need for a new plan; instead, what was called for was to rally behind the global consensus and push for the implementation of existing bilateral agreements and United Nations resolutions.

13. The Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mahathir bin Mohamad, in his keynote address, conveyed his pride in and happiness over the commitment and continuous efforts of Malaysia to address the plight of the Palestinian people. He lauded ASEAN for the successful integration of countries with different levels of economic development, political systems, ethnicities and cultural backgrounds and urged its member States to use their cooperation for the pursuit of justice and peace for the oppressed. The ASEAN collective voice in the region should espouse more than just economic development and create a united front supporting the rights of the Palestinians. He called for the use of all platforms, ASEAN and non-ASEAN, to continue to voice concerns and outrage over the occupation by Israel.

14. In reference to the peace proposal of the United States, Mr. Bin Mohamad reiterated the position of his country that the plan was utterly unacceptable and grossly unjust. It was contrary to Security Council resolutions and the principle of a two-State solution based on the 1967 borders and the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. He condemned the agreement of the United States that Israel annex all of its illegal settlements across the occupied West Bank and the vast agricultural basin of the Jordan Valley. He stated that it was unacceptable that, under the proposed agreement, Palestine would not be allowed an army, whereas Israel would control its security, borders, coastal waters and airspace.

15. Mr. Bin Mohamad stated that the Nakbah had been continuing for more than 70 years and that no tribunal had been established for the Palestinian victims, in contrast with the Nuremberg Tribunal against Germans after World War II. Malaysia would continue to defend the rights of the oppressed while it would respect all countries and their sovereignty, regardless of their ideological beliefs.

III. Plenary sessions

A. Session I

Situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

16. The panel, which focused on the theme “Situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory”, was chaired and moderated by the Permanent Representative of Senegal to the United Nations and Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Cheikh Niang. The panel comprised four speakers: an assistant professor of international relations, Dalal Iriqat; an expert on the Middle East, Alex Kane; a professor of law, Omar Dajani; and the Director of Strategic Partnerships of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Abdirahman Aynte.

17. Ms. Iriqat, joining by videoconference from the West Bank, in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, spoke of the fallout from the announcement of the “Peace to Prosperity” plan of the United States on 28 January 2020, which had been in preparation since the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, on 6 December 2017. The plan and the United States actions leading up to it were in violation of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 253 (1968), 267 (1969), 576 (1985), 578 (1985) and 2334 (2016). According to recent polls, 94 per cent of the Palestinian public rejected the proposal, as had the African Union, the European Union and other intergovernmental organizations. Those rejections should serve to remind the United States Administration of the importance of United Nations resolutions, which enjoyed a global consensus and had led to the historic compromise of the Palestine Liberation Organization that agreed to shift from armed resistance to a strategy of peace talks and negotiations, recognized the State of Israel and accepted the establishment of the Palestinian State on 22 per cent of Mandate Palestine.

18. Referring to a summary report on the United States proposal that she had shared in Arabic and English with the Palestinian public so that it could come up with its own detailed counterplan, Ms. Iriqat said that the plan was divided into two frameworks. The first was political and tackled what in the Oslo Accords had been identified as final status issues, including Jerusalem, refugees, prisoners, borders, security, international relations and sovereignty. The proposal deliberately ignored United Nations resolutions and painted a racist political framework through which the final settlement issues were solved in favour of the best interests of Israel. The second framework was economic and aimed at facilitating more than \$50 billion in investments over a period of 10 years in the form of grants and loans from Arab States, not United States aid. In other words, the 180-page plan was an ambitious vision for prosperity through an economic investment plan for Palestine and the Middle East, paid for by the region itself. She warned that the plan heavily focused on the normalization of relations between Israel and the Arab States, building on the United States attempt to achieve the Israeli settler colonial vision within Palestine. She said that, if the United States deal had been based on United Nations resolutions and existing bilateral agreements, the Occupied Palestinian Territory would gain more in terms of economic returns than those that the current deal claimed to achieve.

19. Ms. Iriqat stressed that it would be important to have a Palestinian strategy that day that would not be reactive, spontaneous and dependent on the United Nations and the international

community. The only statement in the United States plan with which she concurred was that peace was achievable, given that Palestinians were dreamers and hard workers capable of changing the miserable reality imposed on them and of bringing stability and prosperity to the whole region.

20. Mr. Kane focused his remarks on the United States political arena, including the presidential elections in November 2020 and the debate over the Israel-Palestine conflict. The so-called “deal of the century” had only contributed to accelerating the polarization of United States politics regarding the conflict. The current administration had blown up the status quo of bipartisan support for Israel significantly through several unilateral steps, from recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel to the promise to do the same for illegal Israeli settlements – all culminating in the release of the one-sided peace proposal.

21. The proposal had also put a spotlight on the divisions within the Democratic Party, even if it was united in its criticism of the plan. All leading Democratic presidential candidates had emphasized their support for the two-State solution. However, some of the candidates had stated that they would not allow the use of United States military aid to Israel for the annexation of land in the West Bank and would contemplate reversing the moving of the United States Embassy to Jerusalem as a way to pressure Israel to return to the negotiating table. Similarly, a coalition of progressive Democrats in the United States Congress was contemplating the conditioning of United States military aid on the human rights record of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, whereas the party leadership disagreed. The future of the United States proposal rested on the outcome of the presidential election: a second term of President Trump would likely continue an aggressive posture against the Palestinians, in alliance with Israel.

22. Mr. Dajani, focusing on third State responsibility in reference to United States recognition of the sovereignty of Israel in East Jerusalem and, under the United States plan in future also over parts of the occupied West Bank, referred to the International Law Commission’s provision on attempted acquisition of sovereignty over territory through denial of the right of self-determination of peoples as the kind of act from which States should refrain or recognize as legal. Because the implementation of international law was a decentralized process, the actions of the United States Administration would only have the effects that the international community accorded them. However, Israeli judicial annexation – even if not recognized by the international community – would have a great immediate practical impact on the lives of Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, formalizing the long-standing process of creeping annexation. Accordingly, while non-recognition of such acts by other governments was a necessary first step, it alone would not be enough. Transformative changes in the conflict would not emerge merely from foreign ministers’ statements condemning violations by Israel of international law and United Nations resolutions.

23. Mr. Dajani said that Israel would not embrace change unless compelled to do so. The only way forward was to enhance the reach and efficacy of civil society initiatives like boycotts and divestment. Such steps should be complemented by collective governmental action, including the imposition of sanctions. He concluded that, nevertheless, the United States proposal might make a positive contribution by obliging the next President of the United States to do more than just recalibrate the policy of the United States, by enabling a total reboot, as well

as by opening the door to exploring alternative visions of a peaceful solution, including frameworks such as binationalism, federalism and confederalism.

24. Mr. Aynte provided an overview of the UNRWA mandate and operations, with the Agency providing a comprehensive service – including, inter alia, education, health care, relief and social services, microfinance – to 5.6 million Palestine refugees, for example through more than 700 schools in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, attended by nearly 600,000 students. Owing the various crisis situations in which Palestine refugees found themselves, the Agency had to increase its support at times. In Gaza alone, UNRWA currently provided food assistance to 1 million Palestinians, in comparison with 100,000 in 2007, before the Israeli blockade. The staff of UNRWA itself consisted of 99 per cent Palestine refugees.

25. With regard to the issues of the proposal of the United States and the situation on the ground in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Mr. Aynte echoed the previous speaker's view that the plan had been rejected categorically by the Palestinians because they found it to be closing the horizon of the two-State solution based on international agreements and law. He pointed out additional challenges to the Palestinian position caused by the changing attitude towards the question of Palestine in the Arab world. In the Occupied Palestinian Territory, tensions had risen since the announcement of the proposal of the United States, with the intensification of Israeli settler activity in the West Bank and demolitions of Palestinian-owned properties in East Jerusalem, all against a backdrop of continuing inability of Palestinians to defend their rights in the Israeli courts of law and to obtain the permits necessary to build on their own land. He said that, in the Gaza Strip, another war was just a matter of time, given the current tense situation.

Discussion

26. In the ensuing discussion, participants asked about the UNRWA budget, which had been subjected to cuts by the United States Administration as a way to compel the Palestinians to accept the United States peace proposal; they also asked about the International Criminal Court investigation into the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and possible scenarios for the conflict after the United States elections in November 2020.

27. Speakers evaluated the United States cuts to its UNRWA funding as the current administration's punitive approach towards Palestine as a whole. The United States decision to defund UNRWA had caught the Agency by surprise because of an existing agreement to continue funding after 2017. The UNRWA fundraising campaign "Dignity is priceless" helped to mobilize additional resources with pledging contributions that needed to be renewed every year.

28. On the question of the International Criminal Court investigation into alleged war crimes committed by Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, a speaker explained that it was one of the best tools available for the Palestinian people to obtain reparations for the harm that they had suffered from Israel, but expressed disappointment at the reactions of some European Union member States, who could be more supportive of the International Criminal Court process. Regarding the potential impact of 2020 United States elections on the two-State solution, another speaker said that, for years, the United States had been reluctant to exert concrete pressure on

Israel to comply with international law, adding that there was a chance for a reboot after the end of the Trump Administration.

Day 2

B. Session II Civil society action

29. The panel, which focused on the theme “Civil society action”, was chaired and moderated by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Indonesia, Mohammad K. Koba. It comprised three experts: a media coordinator for Youth Against Settlements, Akram Natsheh; the Head of the Palestinian Non-governmental Organizations Network, Dua’a Qurie; and a long-time activist for Palestine and orthopaedic surgeon based in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Ang Swee Chai.

30. Mr. Natsheh, speaking by videoconference from Hebron, described the work of civil society in the Occupied Palestinian Territory since 2008 and specifically in Hebron, which had special status in the West Bank since Israeli settlers lived not only around but in the city centre. That situation had caused daily violence and human rights violations committed by Israeli settlers and security forces, the most heinous of which was when, in 1994, an Israeli settler had killed Palestinian worshippers at Al-Ibrahimi Mosque. Over the following 26 years until today, the occupying Power had continued to enhance the presence of Israeli settlers in Hebron and curtailed the lives of Palestinian inhabitants, including through closing off the city’s centre and main markets.

31. As part of non-violent popular resistance against the occupation by Israel, Hebron civil society had carried out several initiatives, including an international campaign to prompt the reopening of streets to Palestinians and to raise awareness of racist segregation policies against Palestinians in Hebron. A youth movement had helped to forge partnerships with other movements across the world, reaching out to social activists, journalists and parliamentarians so that they could exert pressure on their respective governments to change the status quo in Hebron. Other initiatives include to train young people and equip them with cameras to document the violations committed by Israeli settlers and security forces so that the material could be shared on social platforms and with international media outlets. Furthermore, Youth Against Settlements launched a campaign to train local Palestinians on cultivating olive trees and supporting farmers collecting their olive harvest from fields, in particular those next to Israeli settlements, as a means to encourage them to stay in their city and land.

32. Ms. Qurie, speaking by videoconference from Ramallah, introduced the Palestinian Non-governmental Organizations Network as an alliance of 142 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in various sectors, including education, health, social protection, culture, young people and women, for the benefit of the Palestinian people in the West Bank to strengthen their steadfastness, make the most vulnerable voices heard and promote their human rights. Seventy-two years after the Nakbah, 50 years after the occupation of the remainder of the Palestinian territory and 25 years after the Oslo Accords, the situation continued to worsen. In addition, at the time, Israel had the United States Administration acting as its partner in its repeated crimes and violations, as well as in implementing its ongoing policies of forced displacement of Palestinian families, expansion of Israeli settlements, enactment of discriminatory laws,

demolitions of homes and structures and transfer of settlers into the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

33. Among the consequences of these actions were a half million unemployed Palestinians, in particular young people, while those working in Israeli settlements face hazardous and miserable conditions. Widespread poverty existed among farmers, older persons, people with disabilities, women, children and young people. Despite those difficult circumstances and the high levels of exclusion and hostility, Ms. Qurie highlighted, Palestinian NGOs were not ceasing their work as they sought to influence policies affecting the Palestinian people and fight against injustice, for self-determination and the preservation of their land. On behalf of the Palestinian NGOs she called upon the international community to speak out against the United States proposal, to help the Palestinian people to remain steadfast, to put an end to the immunity and impunity of the Occupying power by applying international norms of justice and international law and impose sanctions on Israel, and to empower the Palestinian people to realize their inalienable rights – first and foremost their right to self-determination – in line with international resolutions. She said that they were not asking for more human rights than others, but that they were not accepting fewer human rights than others.

34. Ms. Chai shared her decades-long experience of helping the Palestinian people in Lebanon and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, for example as an orthopaedic surgeon with the Palestine Red Crescent Society. Describing the suffering of Palestinian children and scenes of death and destruction during the civil war in Lebanon, she explained that she had first learned about the steadfastness and resistance of the Palestinian people in the refugee camps in the 1980s. Beyond supporting Palestine refugees as a doctor, she had testified as a witness before an Israeli tribunal in Jerusalem about violations by the Israel Defense Forces within the context of a commission of inquiry into events at refugee camps in Beirut.

35. Turning to the contemporary situation, Ms. Chai condemned the proposal of the United States, given that it was aimed at revoking the status of the Palestine refugees and their return to return. Referring to her visit to the World Holocaust Remembrance Centre in Jerusalem, where she had realized that it had been built on top of a former Palestinian village destroyed in the 1948 War and that, from that location, one could also see the former Palestinian village of Deir Yassin, where many civilians had been massacred in the same conflict, she highlighted that the essence of any peace in the Middle East was justice and respect for others, and she called upon the audience and like-minded people to keep those principles at the centre of their work.

Discussion

36. Answering a question on effects of the internal division between Hamas, in Gaza, and the Palestinian Authority, in the West Bank, on the work of Palestinian NGOs on the ground, panellists acknowledged that there were challenges in mobilizing resources and unified action. For example, many organizations had branches in both Gaza and the West Bank, but it was difficult to transfer funds between the two areas. Nonetheless, speakers argued that the need to restore Palestinian people's fundamental rights took priority over an intra-Palestinian political

solution. Furthermore, it was pointed out that, while the occupation was profitable for Israel, it was difficult for the Palestinian economy to grow under it.

37. Addressing options for support in South-East Asia, panellists highlighted that, while it would be difficult for Malaysian civil society organizations to go to the Occupied Palestinian Territory and help Palestinians in person owing to the restrictions under the occupation, they could help to educate the public in their country and the region on the question of Palestine. Other projects could include the promotion of joint ventures in development and livelihood programmes through charity organizations that would boost the production capacity of Palestine and therefore the steadfastness of Palestinians in preserving their land. Comments on the two-State solution raised the role of the Committee in prompting the United Nations organs to end Israel's impunity and address their human rights violations in the occupied territory.

38. In response to arguments and interventions questioning the validity of the two-State solution in a changing political landscape, Palestinian government representatives in the audience stressed that the priority was to end the occupation by Israel and urged the panellists not to fall into the trap of holding an abstract debate on a one-State solution versus a two-State solution and on the rights of individuals from the river to the sea. They reminded the audience of third State responsibility to prevent the annexation of illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank and to put an end to the blockade of Gaza.

C. Session III

Regional support for Palestinian rights

39. The plenary, which focused on the theme “Regional support for Palestinian rights”, was chaired and moderated by the Permanent Representative of Malaysia, Mohamad Hasrin Aidid. It comprised four experts: the Chair of International Movement for a Just World, Chandra Muzaffar; a trustee of the Perdana Global Peace Foundation, Zulaiha Ismail; a representative of the Australian Palestine Advocacy Network, Sara Saleh; and a representative of Palestine Solidarity Campaign Thailand, Stuart Ward.

40. Mr. Muzaffar, speaking about South-East Asian regional support for the Palestinian cause, said that governments in the region had generally supported the Palestinian cause, while at the societal level, there was active support in some countries and only passive support in others. He argued that there was a correlation between decreased support of regional governments and the decline of socialism, using the examples of China opening its market to the global economy and a change in Indonesia bringing an end to left-wing politics, among other things. That shift had helped Israel, through its association with capitalist prosperity and its expansion of its arms trade, to consolidate a more positive standing in the region. Singapore, for example, had established diplomatic relations with Israel early on. While those powerful capitalist trends could not be reversed easily, popular consciousness and elite awareness could be a corrective, as demonstrated by some Latin American countries, such as Bolivia, Cuba and Venezuela, that continued to support the Palestinian cause and stood up for it with much more determination and perseverance than many Islamic countries. He noted that, while it would be difficult for South-East Asian countries to do the same, they could, however, afford openings in terms of technology, trade and investments, which may affect political stances vis-à-vis Palestine. Going forward, the rise of new centres of power may determine the level of regional support for Palestine.

41. Ms. Ismail presented the mandate of the Perdana Global Peace Foundation, accredited to the Committee, as energizing peace and criminalizing war. The Foundation advocated going beyond ending conflicts and included relying on justice to enable accountability and restitution to take place. The priorities of the Foundation and other Malaysian NGOs in support of the Palestinian cause were to advocate and enlighten the Malaysian public on the Palestinian plight through forums, dialogues, exhibitions and social media; support infrastructure projects in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, such as sewage system reconstruction, desalination plants and the provision of equipment to laboratories; sponsor scientific research on the effects of illegal weapons of mass destruction on Palestinian civilians; and advocate breaking the blockade of Gaza, for example through the Gaza Freedom Flotilla. Humanitarian aid missions were extended to Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. The Foundation had built kindergartens and begun a rehabilitation centre for Palestinians wounded during the Great March of Return protests in Gaza.

42. Ms. Ismail highlighted Malaysian civil society engagement with the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement and how NGOs in the region could learn from their European counterparts aggressively pursuing those campaigns. She proposed more enhanced support for the Palestinian cause in South-East Asia, including projects to counter Israel’s “memoricide”,

aimed at destroying individual and collective memory in an attempt to erase Palestinian civilization and identity. Regional NGOs could also counter the institutionalized impunity of Israeli violators of human rights by holding tribunals, which could give impetus to action on the part of the International Criminal Court.

43. Ms. Saleh presented the work of the Australian Palestinian Advocacy Network, a national coalition of NGOs advocating a peaceful solution of the question of Palestine based on international law and United Nations resolutions. The Network aimed to raise awareness of the question of Palestine in the halls of parliaments, on social media and across the Palestinian diaspora in Australia. Although the federal Government of Australia had provided unequivocal support to Israel and had tried to block the access of Palestine to the International Criminal Court, the Network had recently provided much momentum to NGOs with regard to addressing the Palestinian question

44. Ms. Saleh said that the Australian Palestinian Advocacy Network had fostered alliances across the country. For example, NGOs had begun to host one-on-one webinars connecting young people from eastern to the western Australia, with a focus on showing that the question of Palestine and the Palestinian people, despite its seeming complexity, was simply an indigenous struggle for self-determination. The network had also spearheaded a media and advocacy boot camp for Palestinian young people in Australia and New Zealand of diverse backgrounds and skills to undergo intensive training in the field of lobbying, campaigning and media. Thus, the Network had provided young Palestinians with the tools necessary to put the issue of Palestine on the agenda through various means and avenues, including traditional and digital ones. That approach was meant to have a long-term exponential effect, given the size of the Palestinian diaspora in Australia.

45. Mr. Ward, representing the Palestine Solidarity Campaign Thailand, described how, in 2007, he had begun a movement to support the Palestine cause in Thailand. He described his outreach efforts throughout the years to the Government of Thailand and members of the Parliament, as well as his collaboration with the Muslim Thai community on the Palestinian issue through the Central Mosque in Bangkok. He cited the effectiveness of the Central Mosque at holding expressive exhibitions, which the Campaign had supported through various initiatives, including petitions and the dissemination of pamphlets. He described cultural challenges that needed to be taken into consideration when undertaking advocacy efforts in South-East Asia, such as language barriers and high costs of interpretation, and how they could be overcome.

46. Mr. Ward said that, over the years since its inception, the Palestine Solidarity Campaign Thailand had been able to play an important role in the diplomatic community and with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He spoke about the official recognition by the Kingdom of Thailand of the State of Palestine and the full establishment of diplomatic relations in 2012 as an example of the Campaign's contribution.

Discussion

47. During the ensuing discussion, speakers focused on civil society's campaigns for recognition of the State of Palestine. Coalitions of NGOs and unions in general were described as working in tandem to reach out to key political parties to push forward draft bills on the issue. For example, the Australian Palestinian Advocacy Network had organized a visit of nine members of the Australian Labour Party to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, resulting in them becoming strong advocates within the party, in addition to the adoption by that party of a resolution in which West Jerusalem was recognized as the capital of Israel. The latter step represented a crucial ground and platform on which civil society could act, once the party was in power.

48. Another speaker commented that ASEAN had failed to put forward a united stand for Palestinians in response to a question on regional efforts. As for the contribution of international organizations such as the United Nations, the suggestion for a peacekeeping force in the Occupied Palestinian Territory would only contribute to the entrenchment of the occupation by Israel. The panel, however, praised the efficiency of non-violent resistance initiatives against occupation, in particular the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement, despite the smear and discreditation campaigns of Israel.

IV. Closing session

49. In his closing remarks on behalf of the Committee and as Chair thereof, the Permanent Representative of Senegal highlighted the opportune timing of the Conference, which was being held just a short time after the unveiling of the peace proposal of the United States for Palestine and Israel. He expressed his gratitude for the hospitality of the Government of Malaysia and for its overwhelming support to the Palestinian cause.

50. The Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations, Riyad Mansour, reaffirmed the excellent relationship between the peoples of Palestine and Malaysia and shared his wishes for a more active relationship between the two countries at the highest level, given that the State of Palestine was at a critical juncture and required consultations and coordination with allies at the highest possible level. He urged Member States to shoulder their legal responsibility to defeat the United States peace plan and support the existing global plan that envisaged an independent Palestinian State based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. He reiterated that the two-State solution was the only solution to the conflict and, quoting the Secretary-General, said that there was no plan B.

51. The Deputy Secretary-General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Malaysia, Nadzirah Osman, referred to the honour that her Government had to host that conference, which it considered as a stepping stone in the direction of resolving the long-standing question of Palestine. She condemned the peace plan of the United States as an assault on peace and a non-starter, contrary to the multilateral efforts, embodied by the Committee, towards achieving a lasting two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine, as well as General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and previously signed agreements.

52. Ms. Osman assured the audience that the Government of Malaysia would continue, along with the rest of the international community, to work towards enhancing the rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to self-determination, national sovereignty and independence, as well as the right of return of Palestine refugees. In that regard, Malaysia welcomed the report published recently by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights naming 112 business entities involved in activities in illegal Israeli settlements and urged all countries to consider such a list and jointly condemn those settlements as a violation of article 49 of the Geneva Convention and the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council. She welcomed the decision by the International Criminal Court to open an investigation into the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and invited the international community to continue to galvanize the efforts of all parties, including civil society, in order to put an end to the atrocities committed against the Palestinian people.

V. Key themes and recommendations

The following key themes and recommendations emerged during the Conference deliberations:

- To enhance South-East Asian regional support for the Palestinian cause, platforms such as ASEAN should be used to continue to voice member States' concerns and outrage over the occupation by Israel. The ASEAN collective voice regionally should espouse more than just economic development and create a united front in support of the rights of the Palestinians.
- Palestinians should not simply reject the United States peace plan but come up with a detailed counterproposal and organize a strategy that would not be reactive or spontaneous and would not rely on the international community.
- While a completely new plan was not necessary, and rallying behind the global consensus and the implementation of existing bilateral agreements and United Nations resolutions was sufficient, the unveiling of the plan of the United States should be considered as an opportunity to explore alternative visions of a peaceful solution and for a new United States vision of peace between Palestinians and Israelis.
- Third State responsibility should not only entail official statements condemning Member States' unilateral steps; it should also enhance the reach and efficacy of civil society initiatives.
- In partnering with Palestinian NGOs, Malaysian civil society should first advocate an end of the occupation and then engage in initiatives that would promote the livelihoods of the Palestinian people and the economic sustainability of their State as a way to promote their steadfastness in the land.
- South-East Asian civil society initiatives to promote the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people should seek to include young people from the Palestinian diaspora in the region and train them on how to raise awareness of and affect policies that would improve the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Annex I



International Conference on the Question of Palestine

Convened by the
Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in
cooperation with the Government of Malaysia and the Perdana Global Peace Foundation

Southeast Asian Support for the Rights of the Palestinian People

Kuala Lumpur, 28 and 29 February 2020

Programme

28 February 2020

3.30–4 p.m.

Opening session

Venue: Hall 6 A, Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre

Statements by:

Cheikh Niang

Representative of the Committee on the Exercise
of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People
Chair of the Committee and Permanent
Representative of Senegal to the United Nations in New York

Stefan Priesner

Representative of the Secretary-General
United Nations Resident Coordinator in Malaysia

Riyad Mansour

Representative of the State of Palestine

Permanent Observer of the State of
Palestine to the United Nations

Keynote address by:

Mahathir bin Mohamad
Prime Minister of Malaysia

Recess

4–6 p.m.

Plenary session I
Situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Venue: Hall 6 A, Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre

Dalal Iriqat
Professor of international relations, Arab American University
Adviser to the Office of the Prime Minister of the State of Palestine
(by videoconference)

Alex Kane
Expert on the Middle East

Omar Dajani
Professor of law, University of the Pacific
Former legal adviser to the Palestine Liberation Organization

Abdirahman Aynte
Director for Strategic Partnerships, United Nations Relief and Works
Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

29 February 2020

9 a.m.–12 p.m.

Plenary session II
Civil society action

Venue: Hall 6 A, Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre

Dua'a Qurie
Head of the Palestinian Non-governmental Organizations Network
(by videoconference)

Akram Natsheh

Youth Against Settlements, Palestine
(by videoconference)

Ang Swee Chai

Long-time activist for Palestine based in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Lunch

Reception with the Chair of the Committee

2–5 p.m.

Plenary session III

Regional support for Palestinian Rights

Venue: Hall 6 A, Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre

Chandra Muzaffar

Chair, International Movement for a Just World, Malaysia

Zulaiha Ismail

Perdana Global Peace Foundation

Sara Saleh

Australian Palestine Advocacy Network

Stuart Ward

Palestine Solidarity Campaign Thailand

4.45–5 p.m.

Closing session

Venue: Hall 6 A, Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre

Statements by:

Riyad Mansour

Representative of the State of Palestine

Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine
to the United Nations

Nadzirah Osman

Representative of Malaysia
Deputy Secretary-General, Ministry of Foreign
Affairs, Malaysia

Annex II



International Conference on the Question of Palestine

Southeast Asian Support for the Rights of the Palestinian People

Kuala Lumpur, 28 and 29 February 2020

Summary of the Chair

The International Conference on the Question of Palestine “Southeast Asian Support for the Rights of the Palestinian People” was convened in Kuala Lumpur on 28 and 29 February 2020 under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in cooperation with the Government of Malaysia and the Perdana Global Peace Foundation. Ahead of the Opening Session, the Committee delegation held a bilateral meeting with the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mahathir bin Mohamad.

The Conference brought together Palestinian and international experts and civil society actors in South-East Asia as a contribution towards the mobilization of efforts in support of the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. It addressed the difficulty of life for Palestinians under the occupation by Israel, emphasizing the need for concerted action aimed at halting negative trends on the ground and promoting a comprehensive and just two-State solution long endorsed by the international community.

During the opening session, the Chair of the Committee, Cheikh Niang (Senegal), recognized the long-standing, principled support for the quest of the Palestinian people to be free of oppression and occupation among the peoples of South-East Asia. The path to achieving a just solution was clear: the establishment of two States – Israel and Palestine – on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine, as set out in relevant United Nations resolutions and international law. The occupation prevented a just solution because it profited from the injustice of the current reality, cementing a system of exploitation, expropriation and annexation. Many painted the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as an ethnic or a religious one. Instead, it was a conflict between those on the side of truth and justice, and those who are benefiting from false narratives and oppression. There were also Israelis who sought a way towards a just solution, with freedom and dignity for all. They were allies.

In his opening statement, the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Malaysia, Stefan Priesner, representing the Secretary-General, reiterated the United Nations commitment to helping the parties to the conflict to overcome the current impasse and to return to meaningful

negotiations to end the occupation and realize a two-State solution. Noting that the Committee had convened that conference in times of tension in the Middle East, he stated that a political solution was needed more than ever. He said that the United Nations position that annexation of Palestinian territory in the occupied West Bank, if implemented, would not only be illegal under international law but would also close the door to negotiations and deal a devastating blow to prospects for a viable two-State solution. It would also have negative repercussions across the region, and severely undermine opportunities for peace. He said that the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Organization that year was an opportunity to uphold the values of the Charter of the United Nations to advance the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

The representative of the State of Palestine and Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations, Riyad Mansour, highlighted the historically strong relationship between Palestine and Malaysia. He strongly criticized the proposals presented by the President of the United States of America, Donald Trump, which he defined as a continuation of a policy that had already seen the recognition of Jerusalem as the sovereign capital of Israel, and the move of the United States Embassy to the city. Those actions were violations of international law and ran counter to Security Council resolutions. It was the collective responsibility of all to defend Jerusalem, he said, appealing to brothers and sisters in Malaysia for help. No single Palestinian would accept the proposals, which would divide Palestinian land. He stated that Palestine was not looking for a new plan, adding that what it needed was not a new plan, but a mechanism to implement existing agreements and United Nations resolutions. He pointed out the need for Palestinian unity. He said that Palestine must put its house in order and called for the holding of elections across the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

In his keynote address, the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mahathir bin Mohamad, stated that powerful nations and self-proclaimed defenders of justice, freedom and democracy were keeping silent with regard to the suffering of the Palestinian people or, worse, were party to the perpetrations of injustice and cruelty inflicted on the Palestinians. Noting that the theme of the conference was “Southeast Asian support for the rights of the Palestinian people”, he said that it aptly highlighted the key message on the rights of the Palestinian People, consistent and in line with what the United Nations stood for. Drawing attention to the remarkable achievements of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, he urged the bloc’s member States to continue their cooperation with the Palestinian people not only in political and economic affairs, but also in the pursuit of justice and peace for them. He said that their collective voice should also extend a united front in supporting the rights of the Palestinians. That was the primary purpose of the peace Conference.

With regard to the United States proposals, Mr. Bin Mohamad said that they endorsed and fomented the position of Israel without any attempt at dialogue or negotiation with Palestinian representatives from the West Bank or Gaza. That was a mockery of international efforts to find a solution to the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian crisis, contrary to a two-State solution, and did not respect previously signed agreements and commitments. If implemented, Israel would be allowed to annex all of its illegal settlements, which were then littered across the West Bank and the vast agricultural basin of the Jordan Valley. Malaysia stood by its position of

support for the creation of an independent State of Palestine through a two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine.

During the first panel, on the theme “Situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory”, speakers discussed how the announcement of the United States proposal affected the situation on the ground and the international efforts to resolve the conflict. Ninety-four per cent of the Palestinians rejected the plan because it fell far short of their minimum expectations. Its implementation would deprive Palestinians of basic rights, confiscate more Palestinian land and ultimately serve the interests of Israel. The core of the plan was not an agreement between Israel and the Palestinians but, instead, one between Israel and the United States. That was proof that the United States had abandoned its role as a mediator. However, participants stated, what was needed was not only to understand the content of the more than 180 pages of the United States proposal but also to come up with a detailed counter-offer.

Within the United States, the plan had blown up a status quo according to which Israel could always count on bipartisan support. Now, all Democratic contenders for the presidency were opposed to the United States proposal, emphasizing support for a two-State solution, which the plan would effectively destroy. Thus, the future of the plan, and of United States policy on the question of Palestine, rested on the outcome of the 2020 elections.

Within the international community, it would be important to focus on the tenets of international law. For example, the International Law Commission had offered just one illustration of the kind of act that States should refrain from: formally or informally recognizing as legal attempted acquisition of sovereignty over territory through denial of the right of self-determination of peoples. A more fitting characterization of the actions of Israel in the West Bank would be hard to come by, and such arguments should be used by the champions of the two-State solution. Other speakers argued for enhanced civil society initiatives like boycotts and divestment, as a complement to collective action by Governments, which should also include the imposition of sanctions on Israel.

The situation with regard to UNRWA was a further focus of discussion. The agency had been surprised by the decision of the United States to cut its funding because, as recently as 2017, both entities had signed an agreement on the continuation of funding. In December 2019, the UNRWA mandate had been renewed for another three years, but there was concern that, in the run-up to the next renewal, in 2022, there would be attempts to effect substantial changes to the mandate.

In the second panel, on “Civil society action”, speakers outlined various anti-occupation campaigns in the Palestinian territory. Among them were non-violent popular resistance to make the world aware of the segregation in which Palestinians live, campaigns to train Palestinians on how to document crimes committed by Israeli forces and publish them on media to counter soldiers and settlers who denied their violations, and projects to preserve olive groves. Representatives of Palestinian NGOs were looking forward to ongoing communication with their counterparts in South-East Asia.

Palestinian speakers called on the international community to help to end Israeli impunity, apply international law and justice, realize their right to self-determination and speak out against the Trump plan. One speaker said that they were not asking for more human rights than others, but were not accepting fewer human rights than others.

Another speaker shared her experience of providing humanitarian support to the Palestinian people over the past four decades, from working with the Palestine Red Crescent Society as an orthopaedic surgeon helping Palestinians in Lebanon to organizing relief for the Gaza Strip.

Speakers acknowledged that the divisions between the Palestinian factions, and the separation of the Gaza Strip from the West Bank, made it more difficult for civil society organizations to mobilize resources. They pointed out that the occupation was profitable for Israel, while the Palestinian economy was suffering from the occupation. Addressing options of support in South-East Asia, while it would be difficult for Malaysian civil society organizations to come and help Palestinians owing to the restrictions under occupation, they could help to educate the public in their country and the region on the question of Palestine.

The third panel, which focused on the theme “Regional support for Palestinian rights”, outlined how Governments in the region had generally supported the Palestinian cause. At the civil society level, there was active support in some countries and at least passive backing in others. Since the heyday of support for the Palestinian people in the global South, in the 1960s and 1970s, Israel had consolidated power through its association with capitalist prosperity, whereas South-East Asian support for Palestinians had declined.

Local organizations, such as the Perdana Global Peace Foundation, advocated the Palestinian cause by holding forums, using media and supporting projects – including the installation of sewage pipes, desalination and the setting up of computer laboratories at universities – in the occupied Palestinian territory. The Foundation built kindergartens and started a rehabilitation centre for Palestinians wounded during the Great March of Return protests in Gaza.

Civil society could undertake several initiatives, including measures to counter Israel’s “memoricide” – the destruction of individual and collective memory in an attempt to wipe out Palestinian civilization and identity – as well as counter the institutionalized impunity of Israel by holding tribunals, which could be an impetus for the International Criminal Court to take action. Collective efforts could lead to impactful outcomes for a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Speakers argued that there was much to learn from European counterparts, including on the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement.

Other groups, such as the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network, were engaged in capacity-building and forming national and regional alliances, which helped to create new narratives and were good at articulating the problems. The organization started working with Palestinian young people in Australia and New Zealand, holding one-on-one webinars and boot camps, and also organized the visit of Australian parliamentarians to Palestine. Panellists also

explored measures that civil society organizations could take to influence government policy on Palestine.

In the closing session, Riyad Mansour (Palestine) said that the State of Palestine looked forward to more high-level exchanges with Malaysia. He urged States to shoulder responsibility to defeat the current United States proposals and support the international consensus to end the occupation, based on the pre-1967 borders. As the Secretary-General always said, there was no plan B with regard to a two-State solution. It was the collective responsibility of all, Palestinians and others, to implement the global plan.

The Deputy Secretary-General of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Malaysia, Nadzirah Osman, expressed the hope that the international community would find a lasting two-State solution that would allow both sides to live side by side in peace. Stating that she welcomed the list of companies doing business with settlements, which had been published by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, she urged all countries to take a closer look at it. Settlements were illegal under international law. The International Criminal Court was prepared to open an investigation into alleged war crimes committed by Israel. The international community could not sit idle, watching Palestinians being killed and their land confiscated; it must galvanize efforts and ensure that the question of Palestine remained high on the United Nations agenda.

Note: The present summary attempts to provide an overall picture of the deliberations of the Conference. A detailed report, including specific questions that were addressed during the interactive discussions, will be published by the Division for Palestinian Rights in due course.
