

STATEMENT TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL

BY AMBASSADOR CHEIKH NIANG

**CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE OF
THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE**

**ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST,
INCLUDING THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION**

New York, 26 October 2020

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

First, I would like to congratulate the Russian Federation for its professional handling of this month's Presidency of the Council in the face of ongoing challenges due to the pandemic.

As the United Nations marked the 75th anniversary of the signing of the Charter, the question of Palestine, whose fate is inherently bound to the history and existence of the Organization, tragically remains unresolved. Today, while their territory remains under continuing occupation and millions of Palestine refugees remain exiled from their homes, the Palestinian people face ever increasing new challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused loss of Palestinian lives, compounded by social distress and economic downturn, and concerns about recent developments, including Israel's ongoing annexation threats, have put a just and durable solution of the question of Palestine in deep peril.

Since my last statement to the Council in July, the signing of agreements between Israel and the United Arab Emirates on 15 September, and between Israel and Bahrain on 18 October, has brought a change in relations in the Middle East. The State of Palestine subsequently rejected the agreements because, while ostensibly purporting to halt Israeli *de jure* annexation plans of more Palestinian territory, the Palestinian people had been excluded from the process while the threat of annexation and the occupation of their territory continues, as do the colonization measures that entrench the occupation and facilitate annexation, all in grave breach of international law. Some Member States and partners also expressed concern about the unilateral character of the action as others welcomed the decision by Israel to suspend its planned annexation and called for the permanent halting of annexation plans and measures. The Secretary-General expressed the hope that the agreements could create an opportunity for Israeli and Palestinian leaders to re-engage in meaningful negotiations to realize a two-State solution in line with relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements.

Later, at the general debate of the 75th General Assembly in September, we heard countless statements reaffirming support for the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and freedom and for the two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders and firmly opposing Israeli annexation.

The Committee calls for the total halt of any annexation plans by Israel, the occupying Power, and supports any initiatives, including a possible international peace conference, as repeatedly called for by Palestinian President Abbas, under the auspices of an expanded Quartet, that would allow for the re-engagement of the parties and the launch of a credible political horizon. 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 remains unchanged; we must double our efforts in that direction and prevent that the current health emergency and socio-economic crisis push this issue to the backburner.

Mr. President,

The Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov, in his 29 September briefing to the Council, stated that the implementation of SC resolution 2334 (2016) has not seen any significant progress. Israel's continued military occupation of the Palestinian territory is facilitating illegal settlement activity, a situation confirmed by the Special Coordinator's follow-up warning statement of 15 October issued in response to Israel's advancing plans to illegally build nearly 5,000 settlement units in locations deep inside the occupied West Bank. Settlement construction is illegal under international law and remains one of the major obstacles to peace and it must stop.

A spike in expropriations, seizures and demolitions of Palestinian-owned structures was also reported, alongside daily violence – including Israeli settler violence - against Palestinian civilians; at the same time, rockets fired from Gaza into Israel continued, highlighting a persistent risk of military escalation, which must be prevented at all costs. The arrest and imprisonment of Palestinian civilians, including children, by Israel also continues, including the use of administrative detention, and the abuse and neglect of Palestinian prisoners persists. We call on Israel to halt these illegal actions.

The Committee remains concerned by the USD 200 million financial shortfall faced by UNRWA at a time when the needs of the 5.6 million Palestine refugees supported by the Agency are increasing because of the global pandemic. We urge donors to provide UNRWA with sufficient and predictable funding for its vital core activities and emergency appeals.

The Committee notes with concern the rising COVID-19 infection rates in the Occupied Palestinian Territory – as well as in Israel – and urges increased support by the donor community to address increased needs and vulnerabilities of the population in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza.

The Committee is heartened by recent steps taken toward Palestinian unity and welcomes plans to hold legislative and presidential elections in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in the near future.

The 2020 report of the Committee – General Assembly document A/75/35 of 1 September 2020 – offers a list of recommendations to advance efforts aimed at achieving a just solution to the question of Palestine, including actions by the Committee, other intergovernmental bodies including the Human Rights Council, by Member States and regional organizations and UN entities; enhanced advocacy and outreach activities with the international community and civil society; and specific support action in response to the COVID-19 pandemic response. The Committee welcomes the Secretary-General's clear position on the question of Palestine, based on international law, countless United Nations resolutions and the search for a just solution, which echoes our own long-held stance on the matter.

Let me conclude by reaffirming the need for our collective show of solidarity with the Palestinian people and their resilience and our commitment to continue to exert our best efforts toward the achievement of a just, comprehensive and durable solution to their cause. In this regard, the Committee invites all Member States to attend this year's commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on 1 December, and for all to use this

special event to recommit and revitalize our collective efforts to resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which remains the key to lasting peace, stability and prosperity in the region.

Thank you.