

STATEMENT TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL

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THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE**

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

New York, 26 January 2021

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I would, at the outset, like to congratulate Tunisia for its able presidency of the Security Council this month and thank Foreign Minister Mr. Othman Jerandi for his presence at today's meeting as a testimony of Tunisia's long-standing support for the Palestinian cause also through its membership of the Committee.

I wish to acknowledge the presence at this debate of Ms. Ine Eriksen Søreide, Norway's Foreign Minister, and of Mr. Riyad Al-Malki, Foreign Minister of the State of Palestine.

The Committee would like to congratulate India, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico and Norway upon taking their seats on the Council and wishes them all success in exercising their Charter responsibilities.

Allow me to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, former Special Coordinator for his tireless efforts and commitment to bringing about a just and lasting solution between Israelis and Palestinians.

Similarly, I welcome Mr. Tor Wennesland, the newly appointed Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, to whom the Committee wishes success in bringing the peace process to its rightful and long-overdue conclusion: a just peace that will ensure the inalienable

rights of the Palestinian people, including to self-determination and independence. Sir - the Committee's support to your endeavours will not waver.

Mr. President, Distinguished Council Members,

The COVID-19 pandemic has further undermined the already fragile social, economic, humanitarian and political situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, complicated by the crippling restrictions on movement and access imposed for decades by Israel, the occupying Power. Notwithstanding the pandemic, Israel has continued to expand its illegal settlement network in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in and around East Jerusalem and Bethlehem. The most recent announcement concerns the construction of nearly 800 new housing units in the West Bank and the retroactive so-called "regularization", under Israeli law, of two additional illegal outposts, decisions which have been broadly denounced by the international community. This is the first announcement of furthering illegal settlements of the year, following a record for Israel's settlement campaign in 2020, as attested to by the reports of various organizations, including the Israeli organization Peace Now. Moreover, a newly open road in the Jerusalem area separating Palestinians and Jewish settlers along its entire track, and which has been called "the Apartheid road" even by Israeli media and human rights groups, offers yet more evidence that annexation remains very much on the table for the government of Israel and is being continually pursued.

Allow me to reiterate in the strongest terms that Israeli settlements in occupied areas are illegal under international law, as reaffirmed, *inter alia*, in Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), and constitute an obstacle to peace. The Committee calls on Israel to immediately halt all settlement construction and expansion and all measures of de facto annexation.

The Committee further highlights operative paragraph 5 of the resolution, calling on Member States to distinguish, in their dealings, between Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and this must include their dealings with regards to settlement activities. This would also apply to the labelling of products originating in Israeli settlements.

With the COVID-19 pandemic affecting the Palestinian civilian population, the Committee echoes the concern expressed by many about the way in which Israeli authorities are rolling-out the COVID-19 vaccine, disregarding their obligations to ensure public health in the occupied territory. The Committee calls on Israel, the occupying Power, to immediately comply with its duties under international humanitarian law by ensuring the provision of vaccines to the Palestinian population under its control in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, as well as to Palestinian prisoners and detainees being held in Israeli jails.

Mr. President,

In the absence of accountability, Israel's measures to acquire more Palestinian territory, demolitions of Palestinian homes and structures, as well as forced displacement of Palestinian civilians, settlers' violence and other violations of human rights and international law continue unchecked. The Committee calls on Israel and the international community to ensure that the rights of the Palestinian People are respected and upheld, including the inalienable right to live in freedom and dignity in an independent and sovereign State.

The Committee supports the call made by the President of the State of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas, for an international peace conference under the auspices of an expanded Middle East Quartet that would allow regional players to contribute to the advancement of the peace process. The Committee calls upon the Secretary-General to follow-up on the request made to him to facilitate the resumption of Quartet efforts to this end. The Committee also reiterates the importance of the roles of the General Assembly and the Security Council in promoting a peaceful solution of the question of Palestine and urges serious mobilization in this regard.

The Committee calls on all parties to refrain from unilateral acts that would jeopardize the possibility of restarting the peace process. Israeli and Palestinian leaders should seize the opportunity to re-engage in meaningful negotiations to realize the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, in line with international law and the relevant

United Nations resolutions. The Committee stresses the centrality of the Arab Peace Initiative, the plans for the convening of an international peace conference, the recent meeting of the Middle East Quartet, as well as the efforts of Egypt and others in advancing the reconciliation process among the Palestinians.

The Committee joins the Secretary-General in welcoming the decree issued recently by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to hold legislative and presidential elections starting in May 2021, as a way to renew democratic pillars in a way that would embody and implement the hope of generations of Palestinians for a just, peaceful and prosperous future.

In the meantime, UNRWA continues to struggle with severe financial problems, as witnessed in recent months by its inability to pay staff salaries and deliver urgently needed humanitarian and livelihood support to Palestine refugees in need and the great anxiety this has caused within the refugee community. The Committee reiterates its call for Member States to maintain their strong support to UNRWA and commits to continue its support for the Agency to attract international solidarity with Palestine refugees in a way that is sustainable, predictable, and long-term.

Ahead of the proposed international conference later in 2021 to discuss and adopt a strategy for a sustainable UNRWA, on 23 February the Committee will convene a virtual meeting with the Commissioner-

General of UNRWA, Mr. Philippe Lazzarini, with a view to help mobilize international solidarity with Palestine refugees and support to UNRWA.

In 2021, the Committee will continue to engage with Member States and regional Groups in view of harnessing a wider support for the new opportunities lying ahead for the advancement of the Palestinian cause. In this context, the Committee will support every initiative aimed at the full realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian People and a just solution based on the relevant United Nations resolutions that ensures two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security along the pre-1967 lines and with East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian State.

Let us turn the tragic phase we are living into an historic moment of bold action taking us to the just solution allowing Israelis and Palestinians to enjoy to the fullest their human rights and endless possibilities for a bright and prosperous future.

I thank you.
