



DIVISION FOR
PALESTINIAN RIGHTS

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on action by the United Nations system and
intergovernmental organizations
relevant to the question of Palestine

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I. SECRETARY-GENERAL WELCOMES PALESTINIAN ELECTION PLANS

On 16 January, the following [statement](#) was issued by the Spokesperson for UN Secretary-General António Guterres:

The Secretary-General welcomes the presidential decree issued yesterday by President Mahmoud Abbas to hold legislative, presidential and Palestinian National Council elections later in 2021, beginning in May.

The holding of elections in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza will be a crucial step towards Palestinian unity. It will give renewed legitimacy to national institutions, including a democratically elected parliament and Government in Palestine.

The Secretary-General calls on the Palestinian authorities to facilitate, strengthen and support women's political participation throughout the electoral cycle.

The Secretary-General hopes that the holding of the elections will contribute to restarting a process towards a negotiated two-State solution based on the pre-1967 lines, and in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions, bilateral agreements and international law.

The United Nations stands ready to support efforts for the Palestinian people to be able to exercise their democratic rights.

II. SECRETARY-GENERAL URGES ISRAEL TO HALT, REVERSE SETTLEMENT EXPANSION, EXPRESSING DEEP CONCERN ABOUT APPROVAL OF 800 NEW UNITS IN WEST BANK

On 18 January, the following [statement](#) was issued by the Spokesperson for Secretary-General António Guterres:

The Secretary-General is deeply concerned by the decision of the Israeli authorities to advance plans for some 800 settlement units, most of which are located deep inside the occupied West Bank.

The Secretary-General reiterates that the establishment by Israel of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law.

Settlement expansion increases the risk of confrontation, further undermines the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, and further erodes the possibility of ending the occupation and establishing a contiguous and viable sovereign Palestinian State, based on the pre-1967 lines.

The Secretary-General urges the Government of Israel to halt and reverse such decisions, which are a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution, and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

III. DECREE ORDERING PALESTINIAN ELECTIONS “CRUCIAL STEP” TOWARDS BUILDING DEMOCRATIC STATE, SPECIAL COORDINATOR TELLS SECURITY COUNCIL

On 26 January, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland, made the following [statement](#) at the Security Council open debate. Excerpts from the statement are reprinted below.

I am honoured to address this Council for the first time in my capacity as the Secretary-General’s Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and by the trust bestowed upon me in this role by the Secretary-General, the parties and you, Members of this Council.

I thank the Palestinian and Israeli Governments for their warm welcome and look forward to our initial meetings in the coming days and weeks.

I wish to join the Secretary-General in welcoming the Presidential decree issued by President Mahmoud Abbas to hold legislative, presidential and Palestinian National Council elections this year. The holding of elections in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza will be a crucial step towards Palestinian unity, giving renewed legitimacy to national institutions, including a democratically elected Parliament and Government in Palestine. The United Nations stands ready to support efforts for the Palestinian people to exercise their democratic rights. Elections are a crucial part of building a democratic Palestinian State built on the rule of law with equal rights for all. The forthcoming talks in Cairo to resolve outstanding issues related to the holding of elections will be important for the planned preparatory process to move forward.

The COVID-19 crisis continues to take a staggering toll across the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) and Israel. Concerted efforts to contain and halt the spread of the virus have succeeded in lowering the overall number of active cases in the West Bank and Gaza, but the cost in lives and livelihoods remains high, particularly in the Gaza Strip.

As a result of the ongoing spread of the pandemic, Israeli and Palestinian authorities extended or tightened movement restrictions in most areas during the reporting period, significantly impacting daily life and limiting access to basic services.

The UN and its partners continue to support the Palestinian Government’s effort to control the COVID-19 pandemic through the delivery of personal protective equipment (PPE), oxygen therapy machines, testing materials and other critical equipment.

Through the efforts of the World Health Organization and UNICEF, the UN is also supporting the Government’s preparedness to receive and eventually administer vaccines. The Palestinian Government is working to procure a supply of vaccines and anticipates support through the global COVAX-AMC facility. The initial allocations of vaccines to cover priority groups are expected in the first half of 2021.

At the same time, Israel has launched a large-scale vaccination campaign for its citizens and residents. In this context, the UN continues to encourage Israel to help address the priority needs of Palestinians in the OPT and to support COVID-19 vaccine availability more generally. This will be critical for the broader efforts of both Governments to control the pandemic and is also in line

with Israel's obligations under international law. Israel has worked closely with the UN and its partners throughout the course of the pandemic to ensure that equipment and supplies have been delivered throughout the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza. It is important that the same level of engagement and cooperation be sustained with regard to the delivery of vaccines.

As noted in my opening remarks here today, President Abbas issued a long-anticipated presidential decree on 15 January stating that legislative, presidential and Palestinian National Council elections would be held later in the year. According to the decree, legislative elections will take place on 22 May, followed by presidential elections on 31 July and PNC elections on 31 August.

I also note the amendment of the elections law raising the quota for female representation from 20 to 26 percent. I welcome this step and join the Secretary-General's call on Palestinian authorities to take further steps to facilitate, strengthen and support women's political participation, including as voters and candidates, throughout the electoral cycle.

The UN has continued its engagement with the Palestinian Central Elections Committee in support of free and fair elections and stands ready to support the Committee and the Palestinian people as plans for elections progress.

In a separate development in Israel, on 23 December 2020, the Israeli Knesset dissolved after failing to pass a budget and general elections were scheduled for 23 March.

In a concerning development, on 17 January, Israeli authorities advanced plans for some 800 housing units in Area C settlements. The following day, on 18 January, Israeli authorities published tenders for some 1,900 units in Area C and an additional 210 units in East Jerusalem. Of the units advanced and tendered, the majority are in settlements in outlying locations, deep inside the occupied West Bank. Over 200 units are located in illegal outposts that Israeli authorities are retroactively regularizing under Israeli law.

On 19 January, the Jerusalem District Court denied a request for an interim injunction to freeze the tendering process for some 1200 units in Givat Hamatos. The bidding period for the tender closed on 18 January and winning bids were announced on 20 January.

I reiterate that settlements are illegal under international law and are a major obstacle to peace. They undermine the prospect of achieving a two-State solution. I urge the Government of Israel to cease all settlement activity in the occupied territory, including in East Jerusalem.

During the reporting period, Israeli authorities demolished, seized or forced owners to demolish 71 Palestinian-owned structures, including 19 residential structures, displacing 73 Palestinians, including 17 women and 37 children. The demolitions and seizures were executed due to the lack of Israeli-issued building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain.

Israeli forces also bulldozed agricultural land and uprooted over 2,000 Palestinian-owned trees claiming they were planted on state land.

On 23 December, the Magistrate Court in Jerusalem ruled in favour of a settler organization, upholding an eviction order against four Palestinian families in the Batan al-Hawa section of the Silwan neighbourhood in East Jerusalem.

I urge Israel to cease demolitions and seizures of Palestinian property, in line with its obligations under international humanitarian law, and to allow Palestinians in Area C and East Jerusalem to develop their communities.

Violent incidents unfortunately continued throughout the reporting period.

On 25 December, Palestinian militants in Gaza fired two rockets towards Israel, which were both intercepted by the Iron Dome system. On 26 December, Israel Defense Forces (IDF) retaliated against what it said were Hamas targets in Gaza. As a result, three Palestinian civilians were injured, including a six-year-old girl, and damage was caused to civilian structures.

On 18 and 19 January, three additional rockets were fired from Gaza towards Israel, with two landing in the sea off Israel's southern coast, and one reportedly landing in an open field, causing no damage or injuries. The IDF retaliated by striking what it said were Hamas targets in the Strip, with no injuries reported.

On 23 January, an explosion reportedly caused by materials stored in a house in Beit Hanoun resulted in the injury of 47 people, including 19 children and 15 women.

Turning to the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, two Palestinians, including one child were killed after reportedly carrying out attacks against Israelis and 63 Palestinians were injured, including two children and two women, in clashes, attacks, search and arrest operations, and other incidents. Eight Israelis, including two soldiers, two women and one child were injured by Palestinians during the reporting period.

On 21 December, a 52-year-old Israeli woman was found killed in a forest near the settlement of Tal Menashe in the occupied West Bank, having been attacked with a stone. On 24 December, Israeli forces arrested a Palestinian man in the village of Tura, near Jenin, on suspicion of the killing in a premeditated attack. According to Israeli authorities, he subsequently confessed to the killing. Four other Palestinian men were also arrested in connection with the killing.

On 21 December, a 17-year-old Palestinian opened fire at an Israeli police post in the Old City of Jerusalem and was subsequently shot and killed by Israeli Security Forces.

On 1 January, a Palestinian man was left paralyzed after being shot by live ammunition by Israeli forces in the al-Rakeez community in the southern West Bank, during a dispute between

Palestinians and the Israeli forces over the seizure of an electricity generator. An initial Israel Defense Forces internal probe found that the shooting was accidental and happened in circumstances where the soldiers feared for their lives, an account disputed by Palestinian eyewitnesses. The IDF opened a further enquiry into the incident.

On 5 January, a Palestinian man was shot dead by ISF at the Gush Etzyon junction in the West

Bank after he allegedly attempted to carry out a stabbing attack. The man's body is being withheld by Israeli authorities.

I reiterate that Israeli security forces must exercise maximum restraint and may use lethal force only when strictly unavoidable in order to protect life. Particular care should be taken to protect children from any form of violence. Furthermore, the indiscriminate launching of rockets towards Israeli population centers violates international law and must stop immediately. There can be no justification for attacks against civilians.

There was an increase in settler-related violence throughout the reporting period. This increase took place in the aftermath of the death of a 16-year-old boy from the settlement of Bat Ayin while being chased by Israeli police on suspicion of throwing stones at Palestinians.

During the reporting period, OCHA recorded 45 incidents where Israeli settlers and others injured Palestinians or reportedly damaged their property, resulting in 22 injuries and damage to property. In two separate incidents in East Jerusalem and Al Lubban ash Sharqiya, near Nablus, a boy and a man were physically assaulted and injured.

Meanwhile, Palestinians perpetrated some 55 attacks against Israeli settlers and other civilians in the West Bank, resulting in 6 injuries and damage to property. On 3 January, a woman was critically injured by a thrown rock while driving near Deir Nidham, close to Qalqilya.

All perpetrators of violence must be held accountable.

On 23 December, the Envoys of the Middle East Quartet met virtually to discuss the prospect of Israeli-Palestinian peace and the latest developments on the ground. I look forward to engaging with my counterparts very soon to identify concrete steps to bring the parties back to the path of meaningful negotiations.

On 11 January, the foreign ministers of Egypt, France, Germany and Jordan met in Cairo to discuss ways to advance the Middle East Peace Process. In their joint statement following the meeting, the ministers emphasized their support for the two-State solution based on the 1967 lines, UN resolutions and international law, rejected unilateral steps, and urged all parties, including the Quartet, to take steps towards launching negotiations.

...

As we contend with one urgent crisis after another, we must not lose sight of our overarching goal: supporting Palestinians and Israelis to resolve the conflict, end the occupation and achieve the vision of two States living side by side in peace and security, based on the 1967 lines, UN resolutions and international law.

A solution that reflects that both peoples have an undeniable historic bond with this place, that its Holy Sites are deeply important to three world religions, and that both peoples have a right to live on it independently and as a free people.

Despite the significant challenges, achieving this outcome remains possible and there are opportunities unique to this moment that should not be missed. I join the Secretary-General in welcoming the agreement signed between Israel and the United Arab Emirates. I hope that the

promise of the recent agreements made between Israel and Arab countries will lead to a situation where a more peaceful Middle East can be realized. However, it requires leaders on all sides to re-engage meaningfully and return to the path of negotiations. I look forward to working with Palestinians, Israelis and Quartet partners, along with Egypt, Jordan and other regional and international stakeholders to ensure that we create and preserve the necessary conditions for progress.

In this context, allow me to reiterate that the financial situation of UNRWA remains a serious concern. The Agency is not only a lifeline for millions of Palestine refugees but is also critical for regional stability. I renew the Secretary-General's appeal for support.

I assume this role with deep appreciation for the crucial work that is being carried out every day by United Nations personnel on the ground and I look forward to working with Deputy Special Coordinator, Lynn Hastings, and together with the entire UN family to support the peace process and redouble our collective efforts to support strengthening the institutions of the Palestinian Authority in line with our respective mandates.

I wish to acknowledge and thank my predecessor for his perseverance in his role and his friendship to me personally, both now and in my previous capacity. Nickolay Mladenov's performance as Special Coordinator is a hard act to follow.

I intend to continue Nickolay's efforts to speak openly and frankly with all sides. I will support and encourage Israelis and Palestinians in pursuit of peace, urge them to refrain from damaging unilateral steps, and help to create an environment conducive to dialogue. I humbly request your support in these efforts.

IV. STATEMENT BY CHAIR OF THE PALESTINIAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE AT THE SECURITY COUNCIL OPEN DEBATE

On 26 January, the Chair of the UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP) made the following [statement](#) at the Security Council Open debate:

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.

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.

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, 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.

V. ISRAEL'S CONVICTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER SHOWS DISDAIN FOR INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS, SAY UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEURS

On 26 January, Mr. Michael Lynk, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967, and Ms. Mary Lawlor, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, issued the following [press release](#):

UN experts said today Israel must immediately stop using its array of military security tools to obstruct the legitimate and indispensable work of human rights defenders.

Their comments come after an Israeli military court convicted Issa Amro, a Palestinian human rights defender and founder of Youth Against Settlements, a Hebron-based group which opposes settlement expansion through non-violent civil resistance.

Amro was convicted of six charges on 6 January 2021 related to his human rights activities between 2010 and 2016. The experts said they fear he will be imprisoned when he is sentenced on 8 February 2021.

“This is part of a clear and systematic pattern of detention, judicial harassment and intimidation by Israel of human rights defenders, a pattern that has increased in intensity recently,” the experts said. They said Israeli authorities had arrested Amro numerous times, with the aim of silencing those who would defend the human rights of others.

“Rather than prosecuting human rights defenders, Israel should be listening to them and correcting its own human rights conduct. Israel must obey its international obligations to provide protection to human rights defenders,” the UN Special Rapporteurs said.

Amro was convicted of three counts relating to participation in demonstrations without a permit. Another two counts relate to obstructing security forces, which concerned alleged refusal to accompany Israeli law enforcement officers during arrest. As well, he was convicted of assault for allegedly pushing a settlement guard in 2010.

His conviction appeared to be politically motivated, the experts said. “This conviction is part of a pattern where Israeli military law is used to restrict and penalise Palestinians for exercising their inviolable political and civil rights.”

The experts said convicting Amro for participating in demonstrations without a permit is contrary to new developments in international human rights law. “The failure to notify authorities of an upcoming assembly does not in itself render the act of participating in the assembly as unlawful.”

They said Article 21 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights guarantees the right to peaceful assembly. The UN Human Rights Committee’s General Comment on Article 21 states that a failure to notify the authorities of upcoming assembly, where required, does not render the act of participation in the assembly unlawful.

Amro was first put on trial in an Israeli military court in 2016 on 18 charges dating back to 2010, including incitement, entering a closed military zone, and participating in a march without

a permit. He had been taking part in a peaceful protest calling for the re-opening of Shuhada Street, the former commercial centre of Hebron.

“The Israeli military court system in the West Bank is deeply flawed and has been repeatedly used to silence human rights defenders. The system follows a vague interpretation of offences and military orders fail to clarify what conduct can result in criminal offence,” the experts said.

The Special Rapporteurs and other human rights experts have sent several letters to Israel seeking clarification on Issa Amro’s case.
