

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, 22 April 2021

Mr. President,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, at the outset I would like to congratulate Viet Nam for its able presidency of the Security Council this month and acknowledge its long-standing support for the Palestinian cause also as an Observer in the Committee.

Mr. President,

Despite growing optimism in 2021, in part as a result of the launching of a global vaccination campaign, many challenges and difficulties continue to be faced by the Palestinian people on all fronts.

The Committee urges Israel, the occupying Power, to abide by its responsibilities under international law, to supply prompt and adequate vaccines protection to all in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, to avert further spread of the virus and further damage to the health and well-being of the Palestinian population under its occupation, who already face greatly diminished humanitarian and socio-economic conditions.

The inalienable rights of the Palestinian people continue to be denied, and the illegal occupation of Palestinian territory, regularly addressed in this Council, is now entering its fifty-fourth year. Yet, a solution is not in sight: on the contrary, settlement activity, demolitions and seizure of Palestinian-owned structures by Israeli authorities across the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the forced displacement of Palestinian families have accelerated to an unprecedented pace, posing a real threat to the two-State solution on the pre-1967 borders.

We are indeed at a pivotal point as the international community embarks on renewed efforts to restart meaningful negotiations within a credible peace process based on the longstanding international parameters for a just solution. In recent weeks, the Committee has reached out to key stakeholders to offer support for initiatives, including by the Middle East Quartet and including in view of the holding of an international peace conference leading to a two-State solution, as highlighted in the 23 March statement of the Middle East Quartet Envoys. In its outreach with Member States, the Committee encourages all supporters of the two-State solution to assist the parties to negotiations towards the achievement of a peaceful settlement in line with international law and the relevant UN resolutions.

Mr. President,

Charting a course to a just peace requires a de-escalation and full compliance with international law, including respect for the human rights of the Palestinian people. Let me now highlight some negative developments and trends on the ground that continue to undermine the prospect of a two-State solution.

The occupying Power has continued to expand its illegal settlement network in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in and around East Jerusalem and deep in the West Bank, reaching the highest number of over 9,000 settlement units built over the last few years and leading to the transfer of thousands more Israeli settlers to the occupied territory, in grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Let me reiterate in the strongest terms that Israeli settlements in occupied territory are illegal under international law, as reaffirmed, *inter alia*, in Security Council resolution 2334 (2016). They constitute an obstacle to peace and are destroying the viability of the two-State solution. 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 resolution 2334, calling on Member States to distinguish, in their dealings, between Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and urges concrete measures in line with international law to hold Israel accountable for its violations in this regard.

The Committee also condemns settlers' violence against Palestinians, such as the 13 March incident in southern Hebron when a Palestinian family was attacked by 10 Israeli settlers, some of them armed. Special Rapporteur Michael Lynk has reported more than 210 incidents of settlers' violence in the West Bank and one Palestinian fatality since the beginning of 2021. Such actions carried out with impunity, causing harm to civilians, their properties and livelihoods, aggravate tensions, and undermine prospects for peace.

The Committee calls for a stop to ongoing Israeli violations in Al-Aqsa Mosque, the latest of which took place on 14 April involving Israeli police breaking into the Islamic Museum and cutting the wires to the external loudspeakers of the Mosque, preventing the call to prayers during the month of Ramadan. The Committee calls on the Israeli authorities to respect the sanctity of the Mosque and the legal and historic status quo of Al-Haram Al-Sharif and the Old City, in accordance with international law.

On this topic, the Committee welcomes the UNESCO Executive Board resolution of 14 April that calls on Israel to halt its illegal and unilateral procedures against the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Old City of Jerusalem and its walls.

On 9 February, the International Criminal Court (ICC) ruled that it has jurisdiction over grave crimes committed in Occupied Palestinian Territory, including potential war crimes, as a major move towards ending impunity and ensuring justice and accountability. The Committee calls on Israel to cooperate fully with the ICC investigation, respecting its obligations under international law as well as the Court's independence.

Mr. President,

The Committee welcomes the holding of the upcoming Palestinian legislative and presidential elections, scheduled on 22 May and 31 July. They represent a crucial step to broaden the political space for Palestinians, as well as civil society organizations, allowing them to participate fully in the democratic life of the State of Palestine.

The Committee is encouraged by the ongoing preparatory work of the Central Elections Commission, including the publishing of the list of 36 parties and independent candidates set to participate in the legislative elections on 22 May. It is estimated that between 800,000 to 1 million new young eligible voters will take part in an election for the first time, together with rising number of female voters and candidates. Out of a

total of 2.55 million voters, 1.247 million are women, corresponding to 48.95 per cent of the electorate, and out of 1,389 candidates, 405 are women, corresponding to 29.15 per cent. This trend, as highlighted at the event on Palestinian women organized by the Committee on 10 March, will foster more inclusive national institutions, as well as a more equal and just society. The holding of elections is an important step forward toward a united and democratic Palestinian State.

Mr. President,

Let me also reaffirm the Committee's commitment to supporting UNRWA in its crucial role providing much-needed assistance to Palestine refugees. On 7 April, the Committee held a virtual event with UNRWA Commissioner General Philippe Lazzarini. The briefing provided an opportunity to hear from UNRWA about the challenges facing the refugee community and for Member States to express their solidarity. Member States' support is essential for sustaining the Agency's vital humanitarian and development programs and as a contribution to stability in the region. Mr. Lazzarini announced the holding, in the coming months, of a conference in support of UNRWA, which is being organized jointly by Jordan and Sweden, and called on Member States to provide predictable and reliable funding for the direct and life-saving assistance, including education and health services, at the core of the Agency's mandate.

On the same day, the revived focus on the Palestinian question and renewed commitment to the two-State solution was confirmed by the US administration announcement that it would provide a total of US\$ 235 million in aid to the Palestinians, including resumed funding for UNRWA and other economic and development assistance. The Committee is grateful to the US Government for the resumption of support to the Palestinian people.

Mr. President,

In the coming months, the Committee will continue to engage with Member States and relevant stakeholders, including regional organizations, in view of garnering wider global support for the advancement of the Palestinian cause. In line with its General Assembly mandate, 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, and a just solution for the Palestine refugees in line with resolution 194 (III).

I thank you for your attention.
