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GENERAL ASSEMBLY FORMAL PLENARY ON THE THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST - THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

AMBASSADOR CHEIKH NIANG, CHAIR OF COMMITTEE ON THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

20 May 2021

Mr. President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me, at the outset, to express, on behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, our appreciation to you, Mr. President, as well as to the Chairs of the OIC and the Arab Group and the Non-Aligned Movement, for mobilizing to convene an urgent plenary meeting on the question of Palestine in light of the quickly deteriorating situation in Palestine and in Israel.

The past week has seen the most severe and deadly escalation of violence since 2014, already claiming many innocent civilian lives, wounding thousands, and traumatizing millions. We have all been witness to the daily worsening of the already dire and volatile situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. This has been caused by the rise in tensions due to the ongoing threats of forced displacement and dispossession of Palestinians in East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank, the violent raids by Israeli forces on the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in East Jerusalem, in which hundreds of Palestinian worshippers were injured, and also the violent clashes between Israeli forces and extremists settlers with Palestinians.

This was followed by an outbreak of fighting with the launching of rockets by Palestinian armed groups from Gaza towards Israel, and the disproportionate massive bombing by Israel's armed forces against Gaza, a deadly cycle of violence that we have witnessed too many times.

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Today, we welcome the news of a ceasefire. At the same time, the recent escalation has caused great number of casualties, suffering and destruction. Based on current information, the fighting has tragically claimed the lives of many civilians, including women, children, and infants – with at least 245 Palestinians in Gaza, including at least 68 children and 37 women, killed by Israel airstrikes on civilian areas, with entire families being killed in some attacks, along with 12 persons killed in Israel, including two children, 1 Indian and 2 Thai nationals, by Palestinian militants' rockets.

Israeli forces have used excessive and lethal force against Palestinian civilians in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, where, since 7 May, 25 Palestinians have been killed, including children, and communal violence in Israel also continue to increase, with hateful, racist attacks being perpetrated daily and excessive force being used by Israeli police against Palestinian citizens, at least 800 of whom have been detained.

The Committee concurs with the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland, that the toll of this deadly confrontation has been too high and the consequences for Palestinians and Israelis, as well for the region could be dangerous. The humanitarian situation in Gaza is becoming more dire by the day, aggravated by the 14-year blockade, intra-Palestinian divisions, recurring hostilities, and the Covid-19 pandemic. The hostilities have displaced over 58,000 Palestinians, who are by and large refugees from previous conflicts. Many of the newly displaced are seeking refuge in UNRWA schools across Gaza, having limited access to water and no access to health care or food or other basic human necessities. The damage to infrastructure is daunting, and the international community's capacity to support yet another Gaza rebuilding effort is limited by the current economic climate.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Committee reiterated the Secretary-General's appeal for an immediately halt in hostilities and welcomes the ceasefire agreed by Israel and Palestine. The Committee hopes that the ceasefire will allow for delivery of much needed medical and humanitarian aid to the affected

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people in Gaza. We urge support for UNRWA and the other UN agencies valiantly providing assistance to the Palestinian people, including in this time of emergency.

In terms of accountability, the Committee reminds that indiscriminate, deliberate attacks on civilians and civilian areas constitute war crimes.

The parties who fail to respect international humanitarian law – including the fundamental principles of distinction, proportionality, and precaution – must be held accountable. The Committee commends Egypt's efforts with the parties to agree to a ceasefire. However, this is just a first step to stop the suffering on both sides. Concrete and immediate action must be taken to revive the stalled peace process to achieve the just solution that has eluded us for so long.

The Committee calls on Israel, the occupying Power, and the international community to ensure that the rights of the Palestinian people are respected and upheld, including the inalienable rights to security and to live in freedom and dignity in an independent and sovereign State. To this end, the Committee calls for Member States who have not yet done so, to urgently consider recognition of the State of Palestine as one way to advance towards the just and fair two-State solution of this long-standing conflict.

There is also an urgent need to act decisively to address the underlying root causes of the conflict: the prolonged Israeli occupation and the denial of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

The cycles of Israeli-Palestinian violence can only stop with a just political resolution of the conflict addressing all final status issues including Jerusalem and the plight of the Palestine refugees, with an end to the occupation, and the realization of a two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 lines, in accordance with UN resolutions, international law, and mutual agreements.

The Committee will continue to advocate for the rights of the Palestinian people, engage representatives of both sides of the divide, Palestinians and Israelis alike, and strengthen efforts

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to return and advance the realization of a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to this tragedy that has gone on for far too long.

I thank you.
