



DIVISION FOR
PALESTINIAN RIGHTS

Bulletin

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

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	<i>Contents</i>	<i>Page</i>
I.	UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process on Palestinian elections	1
II.	UNRWA raises alarm on the situation of Palestine refugees in Lebanon	1
III.	UN Women holds virtual ceremony to launch survivors of violence project	2
IV.	UN Palestinian Rights Committee holds event on UNRWA assistance for Palestine refugees	4
V.	UN Special Rapporteurs warn of rising levels of Israeli settler violence in a climate of impunity	8
VI.	UN Special Coordinator briefs the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East	9
VII.	Statement by Chair of the UN Palestinian Rights Committee at the Security Council open debate	13
VIII.	UN Special Coordinator on recent escalation in Jerusalem and around Gaza	15
IX.	Palestinian Rights Committee calls upon Security Council to ensure elections take place in OPT	16

	<i>Contents</i>	<i>Page</i>
X.	UN Special Coordinator on the postponement of Palestinian Legislative Council elections	16
XI.	UNRWA responds to European Parliament resolution	17

*The Bulletin can be found in the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL) on the Internet at:
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I. UN SPECIAL COORDINATOR FOR THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS ON PALESTINIAN ELECTIONS

On 1 April, the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, made the following [statement](#):

With the conclusion of the candidate submissions to the Central Elections Commission, I am encouraged by the completion of this important step of the nomination process for the upcoming Palestinian Legislative Council elections. This is welcome progress.

I call on all actors to respect the electoral process and resolve any disputes in a peaceful manner through official legal mechanisms. All must work towards protecting the people's right to vote and to decide their own political future, particularly the youth.

The holding of credible and inclusive elections across the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in East Jerusalem, is a crucial step towards renewing the legitimacy of national institutions, re-establishing Palestinian national unity and charting a way back to meaningful negotiations to realize a two-State solution.

The UN will continue to support the election process.

II. UNRWA RAISES ALARM ON THE SITUATION OF PALESTINE REFUGEES IN LEBANON

On 1 April, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) issued the following [press release](#):

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is alarmed by the dire situation of Palestine refugees in Lebanon and the precariousness in which they live, particularly in the last year of acute financial crisis and pandemic. Many Palestine refugees live in 12 overcrowded camps across the country.

“Palestine refugees are suffering immensely. The misery that I witnessed in the last two days in Ein el-Hilweh and Nahr el-Bared camps is unfathomable,” said UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini during his visit to the country. “I am also aware that the entire country is plunged into its worst crisis since the civil war. Everyone, Lebanese and others, is struggling. It is disheartening to come back to such a meltdown,” said Mr. Lazzarini, who previously held a senior UN position in Beirut.

Palestine refugees in Lebanon get health, education and social services from UNRWA. The most vulnerable, including Palestine refugees who fled from Syria, get financial assistance to buy food and other basic necessities. But with the current financial crisis, most Palestine refugees have found themselves slipping further into destitution. The “dollar crisis” in Lebanon, where the official exchange rate of the US dollar against the Lebanese pound is nearly ten times lower than the black-market rate, has seen the purchasing power of the UNRWA cash assistance slashed tenfold.

UNRWA is urgently seeking to help Palestine refugees by providing them with emergency cash assistance in US dollars and a strengthened COVID-19 response to limit the spread of the virus in camps. It is also seeking funds to finish the reconstruction of the Nahr el Bared refugee camp in the north of the country near Tripoli, which was destroyed in 2007 when fighting broke out between the Lebanese Armed Forces and Fatah al-Islam, a militant group.

“What do you answer someone who says that they have three options: die from COVID-19, die from hunger or take to the sea, hoping to start a new life on the other side of the Mediterranean?” asked Mr. Lazzarini. “No one should be made to feel so desperate. The entire country is shaken by layers of crisis, so as the head of the UN Agency for Palestine refugees, I am calling urgently on donors and supporters to help an extremely vulnerable community in a country where everyone is suffering. A little can go a long way in the case of Palestine refugees in Lebanon, and I am calling on the international community to help ensure they can live in dignity and maintain stability in the camps.”

Even before the pandemic and the financial meltdown of Lebanon, Palestine refugees lived in poverty and faced systemic restrictions that limited their employment, property ownership and, at times, movement. Joblessness has been high in Palestine refugee camps for many years, but the collapse of the Lebanese economy in the last few months has left many of them feeling desperate, especially as UNRWA has been struggling with an acute financial crisis itself. COVID-19 has been the latest in a series of recent devastating blows to a community that has suffered marginalization and uncertainty for decades.

III. UN WOMEN HOLDS VIRTUAL CEREMONY TO LAUNCH SURVIVORS OF VIOLENCE PROJECT

On 7 April, UN Women issued the following [press release](#):

UN Women Palestine, in partnership with the Ministry of Women’s Affairs and the Ministry of Social Development, held a virtual ceremony today, Wednesday 7 April 2021, to launch SHAML project, aimed at “Enhancing the Protection and Reintegration of Furthest Left Behind Groups of Women and Girls Victims and Survivors of Violence in Palestine”.

The 18-month project, funded by the Government of Sweden, seeks to contribute to the reduction of the vulnerability of furthest left behind groups of women and girls victims and survivors of violence by addressing the protection and re-integration rights of three main groups, the elderly women with disability, the girls victims and survivors of violence, as well as the women and girls users of drugs.

UN Women Special Representative in Palestine Ms. Maryse Guimond said the project is based on the principle of “Leaving No One Behind”, central to the achievement of 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

She emphasized that SHAML project comes in a timely manner in view of the rise in the number of violence against women cases witnessed in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Deputy Minister of Social Development Mr. Daoud Al Deek highlighted the importance of this evidence-based project which attempts to cover existing gaps in the protection system and the services provided by the Ministry of Social Development.

“The importance of this project is that it is built on the vulnerability analysis and operates on three levels of interventions which are rapid intervention and response, policy and decision makers, and community outreach and awareness raising,” Mr. Al Deek said.

Advisor to the Minister of Women’s Affairs Dr. Hanna Nakhleh underlined the need for such a project which, he said, was developed in a full participatory manner with the involvement of relevant parties in the Government, mainly the National Committee to Combat Violence against Women along with the Ministry of Women’s Affairs and the Ministry of Social Development.

“The project is based on national strategies. The target groups for this project were planned through the protection and prevention pillar that was put forward through the second generation of the National Action Plan for UN Resolution 1325,” said Dr. Nakhleh.

Meanwhile, head of the Development Cooperation at the Swedish Consulate-General in Jerusalem, Ms. Christina Etzell noted that her country, which is funding the project, was looking forward to have it launched, and will be following up its implementation.

“We also are looking forward to following the programme because we’ve been mainly involved in making this programme happen. The most important is that we will later see in the results, if we actually manage with this approach from both the Palestinian and donors’ side to make positive changes for those left behind”.

During the virtual launch ceremony, Project Manager Hanan Kamar outlined the project’s aims, stages and the groups that it targets.

“The project is based on a comprehensive approach that addresses three interrelated levels, including, the prevention, protection and re-integration” Ms. Kamar said.

IV. PALESTINIAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE HOLDS EVENT ON UNRWA ASSISTANCE FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES

On 7 April, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People held an event with the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Mr. Philippe Lazzarini. The Chair [summary](#) of the event is as follows:*

The virtual briefing took place on 7 April 2021, under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP). The event was moderated by H.E. Ambassador Cheikh Niang, Chair of the Committee and Permanent

Representative of Senegal to the United Nations. It consisted of an opening session with remarks by H.E. Ambassador Cheikh Niang, H.E. Ambassador Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations, Mr. Khaled Khiari, Assistant Secretary-General for the Middle East, Asia, and the Pacific, UN Departments of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Peace Operations, and H.E. Mr. Volkan Bozkır, President of the 75th Session of the UN General Assembly (by video recording). The panel of speakers comprised of Mr. Philippe Lazzarini, Commissioner-General of UNRWA and Ms. Gwyn Lewis, Director of UNRWA Operations in the West Bank.

The briefing was open to all Member States on WebEx and the public, who participated in the two-hour event live via UNTV and UN social media channels and had an opportunity to make comments and pose questions to the panellists.

At the opening, **the Chair** welcomed the participants and noted how the Committee, throughout its existence, had provided strong, unwavering support to UNRWA and that the briefing event was continuing this partnership. Tasked with a General Assembly mandate, for the past 71 years, to provide protection, relief and social services, education, health services, and economic assistance to Palestinian refugees, UNRWA's essential role had been long recognised by the international community. He mentioned that UNRWA needed all means of support – financial, material, political – to continue delivering on the mandate that the United Nations had tasked the Agency with. He reiterated the Committee's commitment to UNRWA and called upon all Member States to join this noble effort.

Ambassador Mansour thanked the Committee for organizing the event and UNRWA for its tireless efforts and invaluable work for the Palestinian people, particularly considering the increasingly difficult conditions due to the occupation and the COVID-19 pandemic. The briefing was an opportunity for the international community to reaffirm its support for the rights of the Palestine refugees and mobilize political and financial support for UNRWA. Ambassador Mansour hinted that according to the press and as a follow-up to the US statement to the Security Council briefing of 25 March 2021 on resumption of support, the US Administration would soon announce a humanitarian aid package to UNRWA of US\$150 million. If confirmed, the US support would

**This summary attempts to provide an overall picture of the deliberations of the virtual event. A [video](#) of the event can be found on the [webpage](#) of the CEIRPP, as well as in its [official Facebook page](#) and [YouTube account](#). 2. The views and opinions expressed in this summary are those of the speakers and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.*

help the Agency to deliver critical humanitarian and livelihood services to Palestine refugees during the incoming months.

Mr. Khaled Khiari highlighted the need to share collective ownership of UNRWA and responsibility toward the Palestinians until the achievement of a just and viable political solution to the conflict. He further described the gathering as an opportunity to better understand UNRWA's challenges and express collective solidarity with the Agency. UNRWA was one of the few sources of hope to millions of Palestine refugees and played a key role in maintaining regional stability. He cited UNRWA's budgetary crisis, aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, as putting at risk the education of half a million Palestine refugee boys and girls and health service across the region. He explained how the failure to achieve a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians remained the root cause of Palestine refugees' plight.

Mr. Khiari expressed deep concern at the continued illegal occupation of Palestinian territory and the denial of Palestinian inalienable rights that undermined the prospect of a two-State solution. He encouraged all supporters of the two-State solution to help Israel and Palestine to find a mutually agreeable framework to re-engage toward a negotiated, peaceful settlement. He further decried alleged "donor fatigue" on the question of Palestine refugees and called for investment in UNRWA that ensured sustainable, predictable, and sufficient funding. He welcomed efforts by Jordan and Sweden, in collaboration with UNRWA, to convene an International Conference later in the year to strengthen the international community's political and financial commitment to the Agency. Mr. Khiari noted that as the international community renewed efforts toward meaningful negotiations on the Israel-Palestine conflict, investing in UNRWA would contribute to generating peace dividends and be central to consolidating any agreed lasting peace as well as stability.

The statement of the President of the UN General Assembly (PGA), **Mr. Volkan Bozkir**, was presented as a video recording. The PGA noted that for over seven decades, Palestine refugees had suffered great hardship despite countless General Assembly resolutions. He indicated that resolving the situation of Palestine refugees was imperative for the achievement of justice and a lasting peace in the region. He further called on the international community to fulfil its legal and moral obligations and shared responsibility to support Palestinians and Israelis to resolve the conflict according to relevant UN resolutions, international law, and long-standing international parameters for the Middle East Peace Process. This was the only way to end the occupation and achieve the vision of two independent, sovereign states living side by side, in peace and security, within recognized borders based on the pre-1967 lines.

Mr. Bozkir explained how UNRWA continued to play an essential role in alleviating the plight of Palestine refugees, including by providing quality education to more than 530,000 students, healthcare, increasing livelihood opportunities, and access to more than US\$531 million of microfinance loans since 1991. He commended UNRWA's crucial efforts to help to prevent and contain the spread of COVID-19 throughout its areas of operation. He expressed concern that despite UNRWA's vital and fundamental work, funding gaps continue due to rising needs resulting from the pandemic's detrimental impact on socio-economic and deteriorating humanitarian conditions. To make up for critical shortfalls in funding, UNRWA issued an appeal for US\$1.5 billion to support the provision of essential services, emergency appeals and priority projects for Palestine refugees in 2021 that needed the support of Member States. He called on all governments, organizations, and individuals to contribute generously at the upcoming international conference.

He reminded participants that the question of Palestine is the most protracted-standing issue on the UN agenda and that Member States needed to prove that the UN can deliver when it was required.

Mr. Philippe Lazzarini outlined the extreme challenges in 2020 for Palestine refugees, with the global COVID-19 pandemic lockdown hitting them hard and the communities' impoverishment deepened by decades of blockades, displacement, violation of basic rights, resulting in growing despair. On unemployment, he mentioned the plight of refugees in camps in Lebanon and Syria as well as in the West Bank and Gaza, where poverty was already high before the pandemic. Young people felt abandoned because reduced contributions to UNRWA in 2020 went down to the level of 2013, at a time when needs increased significantly. Palestine refugees across the region – who exclusively rely on UNRWA services – requested that the Agency do more at a time when its resources were even more limited. He cited how UNRWA reached a breaking point in November 2020, when it failed to pay the salaries to its staff, who nonetheless remained fully determined to maintain all the critical services. He expressed worry about the possibilities of deteriorating human development.

Going forward and despite the persistent challenges, Mr. Lazzarini noted cautious optimism and new opportunities in 2021. He welcomed the prospects of US resumption of assistance to UNRWA to restore a decade-long partnership with the Agency and the Palestine refugees. On how UNRWA had adapted to the difficult operating context, he talked about the digital transformation which allowed UNRWA, for example, to switch to telemedicine to reach all refugees during COVID-19 lockdown, to develop mobile phone health support apps, and to establish an Information Technology (IT) hub in Gaza - upon which the entire UN family relied - while creating new job opportunities for Palestinians. In addition, the Agency would also be launching the first online learning platform, allowing millions of students to continue their studies while schools remained closed due to the pandemic or the conflict.

Mr. Lazzarini confirmed that Jordan and Sweden would host an international conference later in 2021 to reengage the international community around UNRWA's blueprint for the years to come. UNRWA would need sufficient, predictable, and sustained funding to support its transformation into an Agency that can deliver on the mandate received from the UN General Assembly and in line with current times. He explained how the conference would be more than a pledging meeting, as it is aimed to move the Agency away from day-to-day crisis management towards sustainability until the day there is a lasting solution and a fair peace agreement. Mr. Lazzarini also discussed how UNRWA would address its challenges in 2021, including how to overcome the continued financial difficulties despite hopes for new funding; rolling out a national vaccination campaign; efforts to continue to protect the mandate and rights of the Palestine refugees in the face of growing defamatory campaigns against the Agency; navigating the prevailing global economic struggles in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis to continue supporting Palestine refugees; maintaining its cost-effective, direct implementing model; and mobilizing Member States' full support ahead of the renewal of the Agency's mandate next year in 2022. He concluded by stating that Palestine refugees were a global responsibility until there is a just and lasting solution to their plight and stressed the Agency's temporary nature as long there was no such political agreement on the horizon.

Ms. Gwyn Lewis talked about challenges in 2020 that faced the Palestine refugees in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The situation was characterised by the threat of annexation,

breakdown in cooperation between Palestine and Israel authorities and the COVID19 pandemic that dramatically affected the Palestinian economy and people. She noted that 40 per cent of households in the West Bank had seen their incomes decline by more than half; unemployment in camps in the West Bank increased to 23 per cent and 49 per cent in Gaza; growing demand for food operations, etc. She outlined a parallel between house demolitions in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and ongoing blockade in Gaza. The West Bank was currently facing a third wave of COVID-19 infections, while Gaza's situation was also getting worse. The Palestinian Authority vaccination campaign started in February 2021, with only 200,000 doses received for West Bank and Gaza. Israel had kicked off vaccination in March for Palestinians with permits to work inside Israel and for some UN staff. Ms. Lewis stressed the need for more support to assure swift access to COVID-19 vaccines by refugees.

She expressed concern at the disproportionate number of live ammunition injuries in the camps, the settler violence that has reached unprecedented numbers, and the increased number of home demolitions and continuing support for 35,000 injured in the third year since the "Great March of Return." She described the psychosocial and mental health conditions as a hidden pandemic in Gaza, while urging support for families exposed to elevated levels of violence and the ongoing blockade of the Gaza Strip. She concluded by highlighting some of UNRWA's achievements, including how the Agency succeeded in sustaining health services, assuring continuity in the education system through the quick shift to remote or blended learning modalities that benefitted about 320,000 students across the West Bank and Gaza, in clean schools with more teachers, and supplying door-to-door food assistance to one million beneficiaries during the lockdown.

During the **Question-and-Answer** session, representatives of **Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, and Turkey** made interventions in support of the rights of the Palestine refugees and their social welfare as well as in support of UNRWA. **Jordan** reaffirmed that His Majesty, King Abdullah had placed UNRWA at the top of Jordan's policy priorities to assure that the Agency be provided with the needed political and financial resources to carry out its duties, effectively and sustainably in accordance with its UN mandate. The panellists responded to questions from the floor and the public on resumption of US aid to UNRWA and transparency in education. **Ambassador Mansour** reiterated the Palestinian Authority acceptance of a

Commission from United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to review education curricula in Palestine and Israel in response to continuing distortions and defamatory claims in this regard. In response to a question on the treatment of human rights in the education curriculum, **Mr. Lazzarini** stated that UNRWA upheld the highest levels of neutrality and respect for human rights, strongly rejecting a "campaign of misinformation" alleging the promotion of hate in education materials and pointing to the Agency's zero-tolerance policy for incitement to violence and discrimination.

In concluding remarks, **Mr. Lazzarini** stated that keeping all UNRWA services, investing in the human development of Palestine refugees and preventing despair in a volatile region brought a sense of normality and stability in the refugee community that also contributed to regional stability. A healthy UNRWA was a tribute to the international community to protect and assist Palestine refugees until there is a just and lasting solution to their plight, he added. **The Chair** concluded by thanking the speakers for taking the time to participate in the briefing, sharing

valuable information and insights and answering all questions. He reiterated the call on all Members and Observers of the Committee, and on Member States at large to continue and enhance support for UNRWA, for Palestine refugees, within the framework of the larger support to the Palestinian people in their just quest to exercise their inalienable rights and realize a just and enduring solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Chair closed the event.

V. SPECIAL RAPPORTEURS WARN OF RISING LEVELS OF ISRAELI SETTLER VIOLENCE IN A CLIMATE OF IMPUNITY

On 14 April, Mr. Michael Lynk, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967, Mr. Balakrishnan Rajagopal, Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context, and Ms. Claudia Mahler, Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, made the following [statement](#):

Violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinian civilians in the occupied West Bank has risen markedly in recent months, with assaults and property destruction occurring in an atmosphere of impunity, UN human rights experts said today.

“We note that, in 2020, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) documented 771 incidents of settler violence causing injury to 133 Palestinians and damaging 9,646 trees and 184 vehicles mostly in the areas of Hebron, Jerusalem, Nablus and Ramallah,” the experts said. “Already, during the first three months of 2021, more than 210 settler violent incidents were recorded, with one Palestinian fatality. We call upon the Israeli military and police to investigate and prosecute these violent acts with vigor and resolve.”

The experts said settler violence was predominantly ideologically motivated and primarily designed to take over land but also to intimidate and terrorize Palestinians. The violence and intimidation often prevents Palestinians from accessing and cultivating their land, and creates a coercive environment pressuring Palestinians to stay away from certain areas or even move.

“They primarily target the livelihoods of rural Palestinians, vandalizing livestock, agricultural lands, trees and homes. Besides the presence and expansion of Israeli settlements, which are intended to establish illegal claims for Israeli sovereignty, settler violence is meant to make the daily lives of Palestinians untenable,” they said.

“Similarly worrying are reports that over 70 families living in the Karm Al-Ja’buni area of Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem are under threat of forced eviction to make place for new settlements. Seven households have already received eviction orders and asked to vacate their homes by 2 May 2021. Such forced evictions leading to population transfers are strictly prohibited under international law,” the experts said.

The UN experts noted that settler violence continues to target pregnant women, young children and older persons. “The pattern of attacks, particularly by violent and ideologically motivated

settlers consistently confirms that the boundaries of attacks on all categories of Palestinians is being erased.”

They said in one incident in southern Hebron on 13 March, a Palestinian family — parents and their eight children – were attacked by 10 Israeli settlers, some of them armed. The injured parents were treated at a medical facility in Hebron, and the children left traumatized.

“We are deeply worried by the atmosphere of impunity in which these attacks are taking place,” the experts said. “In many cases, the Israeli military has been present, or nearby, and has not taken sufficient steps to protect the Palestinians from this violence. This amounts to a discriminatory two-tier approach to military protection and policing in the West Bank.”

The situation is particularly dire in the H2 area in Hebron, where a long-standing pattern of protracted Israeli settler violence, heavy ISF presence and undue movement restrictions to the benefit of settlers, has been inflicted on the Palestinian residents in the city.

The UN experts noted that, according to Yesh Din, an Israeli human rights organisation, in the period between 2005-2019, 91 percent of the investigations in cases filed by Palestinians for ideologically motivated crimes, have been closed without indictments by the Israeli military. “This number is abysmal when compared to the number and nature of crimes committed by Israeli settlers and it testifies more than anything to the institutional and systematic impunity that prevails in the occupied Palestinian Territory.”

The experts pointed out that international law requires the occupying power, in all circumstances, to protect the population under occupation. Article 27 of the Fourth Geneva Convention stipulates the protected population “shall at all times be humanely treated, and shall be protected especially against all acts of violence or threats...”

“We call upon the international community to impose meaningful costs on Israel’s protracted occupation, and to demand that the occupying power halt its settlement enterprise immediately,” they said. “Palestinians must be protected from settler violence and the perpetrators must be held to account for their actions.”

VI. UN SPECIAL COORDINATOR BRIEFS THE SECURITY COUNCIL ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

On 22 April, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, delivered the following [briefing](#) to the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East. Excerpts from the briefing appear below.

I brief you today as Palestinians and Israelis are immersed in consequential political and electoral processes. Preparations continue for the Palestinian Legislative Council elections, scheduled for 22 May, while Israelis are engaged in efforts to form a governing coalition after the elections held on 23 March.

These developments may have significant implications for the prospects for advancing peace in the months ahead.

The holding of credible elections in Palestine is a crucial step towards renewing the legitimacy of national institutions and re-establishing Palestinian national unity. I encourage international support to these efforts.

The UN has engaged regularly with the Palestinian parties and the Central Elections Commission (CEC) to facilitate preparations for the elections and will continue its support for the election process. To date, the CEC has performed its duties with professionalism and integrity, enhancing trust in the electoral process. In particular, I welcome the CEC's efforts to plan for and implement special measures to ensure safe voting in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. I also underscore the critical role of election observers to ensure respect for the results of a credible and transparent process.

The candidate registration period concluded on 31 March. On 6 April, the CEC announced that all 36 registered electoral lists were approved. On 11 April, the CEC announced that of the 231 objections submitted to the CEC against registered candidates, 226 had been rejected, four withdrawn and one accepted. The Electoral Court upheld CEC decisions on 18 appeals brought before the Court. This concludes the legal process to challenge electoral lists. Final lists are expected to be published on 30 April, the start of the official campaign period.

I emphasize that any disputes should be resolved in a peaceful manner and through official legal mechanisms.

All sides must provide for and protect the right of Palestinians across the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza to participate in credible and inclusive Palestinian elections, as well as to stand for elections, free from intimidation. In particular, I urge all parties to refrain from any arrest, detention or interrogation based on freedom of opinion, freedom of expression or freedom of association.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to pose a formidable threat throughout the OPT. I am seriously concerned by the significant rise in active cases in Gaza where the daily infection rate is reaching its highest level since the onset of the pandemic. In the West Bank, many hospitals remain at or near full capacity. My colleague from OCHA will brief after me and will provide greater detail on this situation.

As the socio-economic impact of the pandemic has significantly exacerbated a seemingly never-ending fiscal and economic crisis in both the West Bank and Gaza, support for the Palestinian Government's response must continue to be a priority.

The Palestinian Government vaccination campaign, which officially began in the West Bank and Gaza last month, continued throughout the reporting period. The Palestinian Ministry of Health has received over 300,000 vaccine doses to date. Israel has continued its efforts to vaccinate segments of the Palestinian population in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, as well as over 100,000 Palestinians holding permits to enter Israel.

I welcome all efforts carried out thus far to vaccinate the Palestinian population, but the process needs to be accelerated and more vaccines are needed.

In a positive development, on 7 April, the United States announced plans to restart its economic, humanitarian, development and security assistance to Palestinians, including some USD 150 million in funding for UNRWA.

I welcome the resumption of US support, including to UNRWA. I appeal to all Member States to remobilize support to UNRWA, whose services are not only a lifeline for millions of Palestine refugees but are also critical for stability throughout the region. Funding the UN response is the fastest and most efficient way to address urgent needs in the OPT.

On 5 April, the Palestinian Government adopted the second National Action Plan on the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325. I welcome the efforts of the Government to translate international frameworks into commitments and actions. I reiterate UN support for the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda in Palestine.

The demolition and seizure of Palestinian property throughout the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem continued during the reporting period. OCHA will provide details on relevant developments shortly. But allow me to reiterate my call upon Israel to cease this practice, in line with its obligations under international law, and to allow Palestinians to develop their communities.

On the basis of an Israeli law, passed in 1994, which bars activity in Jerusalem by the Palestinian Authority without prior approval, on 6 April, ISF shut down a meeting related to Palestinian elections at the Ambassador Hotel in East Jerusalem, calling in for questioning the hotel manager as well as the director of the Fatah office in Jerusalem.

Daily violence also continued throughout the OPT.

In Gaza, on 24 March, Israel Defense Forces fired some ten missiles at what it said were Hamas targets, in retaliation for a rocket fired towards Israel the previous day. On 15 and 16 April militants in Gaza fired two rockets towards Israel. The rockets landed in open fields, causing no damage or injury. In retaliation for each incident, IDF fired at what it said were Hamas-linked targets in the Strip. No injuries were reported.

In the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, clashes, attacks, search and arrest operations, and other incidents resulted in the death of one Palestinian, and injuries to 29 Palestinians, including five children and one woman. Eight Israelis, including one woman, were injured in the course of these events.

Since the beginning of Ramadan, there have been repeated clashes between Palestinians and ISF and Israeli civilians in and around Jerusalem's Old City, leading to injuries and arrests. I call on all sides to take steps to de-escalate tensions and maintain calm.

On 6 April, Israeli security forces (ISF) shot and killed a 45-year old Palestinian man at a checkpoint set up during an ISF operation in Bir Nabala village, north of Jerusalem. The man died of his injuries and his 35-year old wife, also in the vehicle, was injured. ISF initially said that the man had attempted a ramming attack, an account disputed by the man's wife and eyewitnesses. ISF opened an investigation into the incident.

Meanwhile, settlers and other Israeli civilians perpetrated some 20 attacks against Palestinians, resulting in eight injuries and damage to property. Palestinians perpetrated some 20 attacks against Israeli settlers and other civilians in the West Bank, resulting in seven injuries and damage to property.

I underscore that all perpetrators of violence must be held accountable and swiftly brought to justice. 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. In addition, the indiscriminate launching of rockets towards Israeli population centers violates international law and must stop immediately.

...

In closing, I wish to emphasize that expectations for the holding of elections in Palestine are high and come after a long wait of almost fifteen years. Since my last briefing, a growing number of young people are expected to participate in shaping their political future and having the opportunity to vote for the first time.

In recent interviews conducted by UN Women with youth in Gaza and the West Bank, one young woman, whose view was not unique, said the following: “Although I am not into politics, I am a member of this society and want to have a voice. Even if those I vote for do not win, at least I will have exercised my right to vote.”

The successful completion of inclusive Palestinian elections is a critical step toward renewing democratic legitimacy of the Palestinian Government. These elections should also pave the way to uniting Gaza and the West Bank under a single, legitimate national authority, which would be an important step towards reconciliation and could advance Middle East peace.

The path forward will not be easy and will require political courage from all sides. Despite the myriad challenges, we remain focused on the goal of advancing a two-State solution – an independent, viable and sovereign Palestinian State living side-by-side with Israel in peace and security – in line with UN resolutions, international law and previous agreements.

It is crucial that the international community, and particularly the Middle East Quartet, signal a way forward towards an end to occupation and the achievement of a sustainable peace. This includes creating a clear political horizon and encouraging practical steps by all sides to set the stage for a successful return to negotiations.

The United Nations remains committed to working, through the Quartet and with other regional and international partners, to support Israelis and Palestinians in these efforts.

I thank you.

VII. STATEMENT BY CHAIR OF THE UN PALESTINIAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE FOR THE SECURITY COUNCIL OPEN DEBATE

On 22 April, the Chair of the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, H.E. Ambassador Cheikh Niang, issued the following [statement](#) to the Security Council during the open debate on the Middle East, including the Palestinian question:

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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).

VIII. UN SPECIAL COORDINATOR ON RECENT ESCALATION IN JERUSALEM AND AROUND GAZA

On 24 April, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle-East Peace Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, issued the following [statement](#):

I am alarmed by the recent escalations in Jerusalem and around Gaza. Over the last 48 hours there was a spike of violent clashes between Israelis and Palestinians in Jerusalem and the launching of rockets by militants in Gaza.

The provocative acts across Jerusalem must cease. The indiscriminate launching of rockets towards Israeli population centers violates international law and must stop immediately.

condemn all such acts of violence and I reiterate my call upon all sides to exercise maximum restraint and avoid further escalation, particularly during the Holy month of Ramadan and this politically charged time for all.

The UN is working with all concerned parties to de-escalate the situation.

IX. UN PALESTINIAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE CALLS UPON SECURITY COUNCIL TO ENSURE ELECTIONS TAKE PLACE IN OPT

On 28 April, the Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People issued the following [press release](#):

On 28 April, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People urged the Security Council to intervene immediately to ensure that Israel ceases its interference in the preparation and holding of democratic Palestinian elections throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.

In a letter submitted to Ambassador Dinh Quy Dang (Viet Nam), President of the Security Council, and in a meeting with him later the same day, the Committee Chair, Ambassador Cheikh Niang (Senegal) and an accompanying Committee delegation stressed that “the Palestinian people are avid to take charge of their own destiny and participate in the elections throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, as reflected in the advanced preparations by the Palestinian Elections Commission and the high number of registered eligible voters, including women and youth”.

The President assured that Viet Nam will circulate the letter to Council members and draw their attention to the situation on the ground.

The Committee further underlined that “democratic elections are a crucial factor for the full realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and for a just solution to the question of Palestine based on relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and agreed parameters that ensure the realization of 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”.

X. UN SPECIAL COORDINATOR ON THE POSTPONEMENT OF PALESTINIAN LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ELECTIONS

On 30 April, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle-East Peace Process, Mr. Tor Wennesland, issued the following [statement](#):

I take note of the Palestinian leadership decision to postpone Legislative Council elections scheduled for May 22. I fully understand the disappointment of the many Palestinians who have so clearly expressed a desire to exercise their democratic rights after nearly 16 years without elections.

Recognizing widespread international support, I encourage Palestinians to continue on the democratic path. The holding of transparent and inclusive elections throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in East Jerusalem as stipulated in prior agreements remains essential for renewing the legitimacy and credibility of Palestinian institutions and opening the path to re-establishing Palestinian national unity. This will also set the path toward meaningful negotiations to end the occupation and realize a two-State solution based on UN resolutions, international law and previous agreements.

Setting a new and timely date for elections would be an important step in reassuring the Palestinian people that their voices will be heard. The United Nations reaffirms its support to strengthening the Palestinian national institutions. A prolonged period of uncertainty risks exacerbating the fragile situation.

I call on all parties to maintain calm, show restraint and refrain from violence. I urge leaders on all sides to take steps to reduce tensions and create the conditions for a resumption of the electoral process.

XI. UNRWA RESPONDS TO EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

On 30 April, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) issued the following [statement](#):

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is disappointed by the language adopted by the European Parliament in its 2019 discharge resolution on European Union (EU) budget implementation. The language implies that UNRWA teaches and disseminates hate speech and encourages violence within its schools. UNRWA is a United Nations Agency with zero tolerance for hatred, incitement to violence or discrimination. It unequivocally rejects such unfounded assertions and confirms that its educational materials uphold and advance the UN principles and values of neutrality, human rights, equality and non-discrimination regarding race, gender, language and religion.

Host country curricula are used by UNRWA in all its fields of operations and the content of the educational materials is thoroughly reviewed to ensure that it is in line with UN values and principles. In the rare cases where discrepancies are found, a robust system is in place to address them. To suggest that hate is widespread within the Agency and schools is not only false and misleading, but it validates sensationalist and politically motivated attacks which deliberately seek to discredit UNRWA and harm the most vulnerable section of the community: the Palestine refugee children.

The European Parliament's call for an open-source platform to publish all our educational materials is misplaced: UNRWA has recently launched a centralized [digital learning platform](#) which hosts our educational materials for teachers and students. It provides a safe and centrally monitored system for teachers and administrators which includes a process for rigorous review of all content through a humanitarian principled lens. This approach ensures an Agency-wide coherence and alignment with educational objectives and UN values. UNRWA has a zero-tolerance policy for any deviation to UN principles. Nevertheless, UNRWA acknowledges that there cannot be zero risk when operating in a complex humanitarian setting and in a highly politicized environment. To this end, the Agency spares no efforts to reduce the risks of ensure that violations of UN values are at an absolute minimum. Members of the Parliament have been duly informed and kept up to date regarding this important development, and we profoundly regret that UNRWA investments have been ignored by many members of the European Parliament in its 2019 discharge resolution on EU budget implementation.

The EU and UNRWA have partnered for 50 years in support of Palestine refugees and the European Parliament has always been a key actor in this partnership. The investment of the

European Union in UNRWA has enabled over 2.5 million Palestine refugees to graduate from UNRWA schools, developing their full potential and contributing to the prosperity and the stability of the Middle East. Numerous external parties have validated the quality and content of the UNRWA education, including its unique [Human Rights, Conflict Resolution and Tolerance and Conflict Resolution](#) programme. A number of former UNRWA students have joined [world-leading institutions](#) or have become part of [scientific research groups](#) in some of the most exclusive research centres in the world. These achievements are so far from the assertion that UNRWA is a vehicle for hate, on the contrary, they are the antidote for a very troubled region.

Oversight and accountability of any organization is vital and UNRWA welcomes the opportunity to receive any member of the European Parliament in any of its 711 schools to see first-hand the environment and teaching, and to engage with the students and educators.
