



UN FORUM ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

“International Parliamentary Support to the Question of Palestine”

Convened by the
UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People
(CEIRPP)

18 May 2021

CHAIR SUMMARY

The virtual United Nations Forum **“International Parliamentary Support to the Question of Palestine”** took place on 18 May 2021, under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP). The event was chaired by H.E. Ambassador Cheikh Niang, Chair of the Committee and Permanent Representative of Senegal to the UN, and moderated by Mr. Pedro Roque, Vice-President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM) and Member of the Parliament of Portugal.

The Forum consisted of an opening session – with remarks by H.E. Ambassador Cheikh Niang, H.E. Minister Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine, and Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo, Under-Secretary-General of the Department for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs of the UN Secretariat – and two discussion panels. The first panel, on “Parliaments, Security Council Resolution 2334 (2016), and Israeli Settlements: Calls for Accountability”, consisted of Mr. Francisco Chahuán, Senator of Chile; Ms. Julie Elliott, Member of Parliament of the United Kingdom; and Mr. Hubert Julien-Laferrrière, Member of the French National Assembly. The second panel, on “Parliamentarians and Support for Efforts to Achieve a Just Solution” comprised Mr. Alexandre Boulerice, Member of Parliament of Canada, and Mr. Solomon Lechesa Tsenoli, Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of South Africa. The Forum, which was open to all Member States via the Interprefy platform with remote interpretation into five official UN languages, was livestreamed on UNTV and UN social media channels and registered more than 20,000 viewers that day.

In his introductory remarks, **the Chair** welcomed the participants and reiterated that the Committee mandate was to promote a just and peaceful settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, an end to the Israeli occupation and to support the realization of the two-State solution and exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people including self-determination,

sovereignty and right to return. He gave examples of the successful work of parliamentarians to advocate for the same, including recent letters from European members of parliament to call for their governments to impose sanctions on Israel over its annexation policy and to put pressure on Israel to stop the eviction of Palestinian families from their homes in East Jerusalem. The Chair also referred to the recent resolution approved by the Chilean Senate, calling on the President to adopt a law banning the import of settlement goods into the country, as well as to the support provided by South African parliamentarians to Palestinian solidarity movements and civil society groups in their advocacy at the UN Human Rights Council, among other bodies. He reiterated the commitment of the Committee to continue working with a variety of partners, and especially parliamentarians because of the important legislative and diplomatic work that they contribute on the question of Palestine. The Committee was deeply alarmed by the dramatic deterioration of the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) and Israel's military actions in the Gaza Strip and reiterated the Committee's call for de-escalation.

Ms. Rosemary DiCarlo voiced her concern over the clashes and violence in occupied East Jerusalem as well as the launching of rockets from the Gaza Strip towards Israel, followed by Israeli airstrikes on Gaza – all of which had dramatically deteriorated an already fragile situation. These escalations were a tragic reminder of the urgency of a viable political path towards ending this conflict once and for all. She warned that the ongoing hostilities were also taking place against the backdrop of rising tensions and violence in occupied East Jerusalem, where hundreds of Palestinian residents of Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighbourhoods were under threat of eviction from their homes. The UN had been actively involved in mediation efforts with all sides with a view to ending the violence immediately. Echoing the Secretary-General's call on the parties to allow for the intensification of mediation efforts, which would be crucial for delivering the humanitarian assistance to the affected people in Gaza, she also called on the international community to do all it can to de-escalate the situation immediately, urge the parties to end the hostilities and chart a path toward negotiations.

Ms. DiCarlo expressed her hope that the Forum would create a shared understanding of the urgency to act resolutely on the question of Palestine. She underlined that parliamentarians could play a crucial role in reinforcing the global consensus on the two-State solution, in accordance with international law, relevant UN resolutions and bilateral agreements, based on the 1967 lines with Jerusalem as the capital of both states.

Minister Riyad Mansour highlighted tragic circumstances under which the event was taking place, with the Palestinian people facing Israeli aggression on both sides of the 1967 lines, and particularly in East Jerusalem and in the Gaza Strip. The violence had so far resulted in 213 deaths in the Gaza Strip, including 61 children, 36 women and 16 elderly, and close to 15,000 wounded, and with 7,000 buildings damaged or completely destroyed. He strongly criticised the Security Council for meeting several times and, despite the near-consensus on the need for a ceasefire, failing to speak with one voice and issue a single official document on the matter. He called on the international community, and especially parliamentarians, to help put an immediate stop to the aggression by putting pressure on their governments. He called on the Secretary-General to issue emergency assistance for the displaced Palestinians, highlighting the protection role of the United Nations Relief Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Voicing alarm about the number of deaths and pointing to the evictions pending in the Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighbourhoods of Jerusalem, he called on the International Criminal Court (ICC) to begin investigating Israeli war crimes. He warned that those who were fixated on Israel's "right to defend itself" should remember that Palestinians lived under a system of "apartheid and discrimination". Anything short of an end to the occupation would only be a preparation for the next cycle of violence. Israel could not continue to be treated as "above the law" as there had to be accountability for its crimes as an occupying Power. It remained the responsibility of the international community, and individual Member States, to end the occupation and support the establishment of a Palestinian state, beyond mere words and statements.

Mr. Pedro Roque said that the event came at a critical time and that the status quo of the Palestinian question was unacceptable as demonstrated once again by the recent surge in violence and military confrontation in the Middle East. He also warned that, in the absence of a permanent solution, the situation would continue to result in violence, anger, civilian suffering and violations of the rights of people to live in peace, security and dignity. He lauded the initiative of the Committee to turn to parliamentarians to mobilize the political momentum for respect of international law and the urgent need to resume efforts to reach a two-State solution, as parliamentary diplomacy remained a flexible and powerful tool that allowed for a constructive dialogue.

Ms. Julie Elliott underlined that the current situation in the OPT and Israel was a war between unequal parties, with civilians killed on both sides of the divide, yet overwhelmingly so on the Palestinian one, which was already disproportionately suffering under the Corona-19 pandemic. She spoke of recent issues related to the OPT that continued to emerge in the UK Parliament over the past year, including the importance to end a "creeping annexation through the back door" instead of advocating for a ceasefire and returning to the status quo. She underlined how annexation was increasingly making the two-State solution – "a solution we all want" – impossible to achieve. While a ceasefire would remain welcome, she invited Member States to address the underlying causes of the present situation in the region. As an example, she called on the UK to support the call for an investigation and prosecution by the International Criminal Court (ICC) of Israeli violations and human rights abuses including the freedom of assembly and worship in Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem.

The firing of rockets by Hamas and other militant groups into civilian areas would also have to cease as it constituted a war crime, she insisted, and Israel was only to take actions in the Gaza Strip in full compliance with international law. She informed of the UK All-Party group's pressure on the government to end all arms sales that could be used for the subjugation of the Palestinian people in Israel and the OPT. She called on all parties to facilitate humanitarian assistance to the residents of Gaza as their humanitarian needs needed to be met, and on the international community to put pressure on governments to seize this moment to reach real peace in the region and strike a two-State solution as the only viable end to the conflict. She appealed for the end of the blockade on Gaza, support to UNRWA for its exceptional work in difficult circumstances and the holding of free and fair Palestinian elections throughout the OPT, including East Jerusalem.

Mr. Francisco Chahuán highlighted the need of a multilateral approach to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in accordance with the UN Charter. Recalling the main UN resolutions describing Israeli settlements as illegal, he said Israel had violated the latter and continued to invoke the “law of the jungle” through the transfer of Israeli civilians into the occupied territory or the forced transfer of Palestinians out of it. He highlighted the economic effects of the occupation, which deprived Palestinians from benefiting from resource-rich areas, such as the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea. Today, 10,000 Israeli settlers in the Jordan Valley consumed a third of the water of the 2.3 million Palestinians in the West Bank. Political prisoners were held under administrative detention without charges or any guarantee of due process, while many other civilians, including child detainees, were tried by Israeli military tribunals in infringement of basic human rights and key covenants. He associated the Separation Wall, which Israel built in 2002 and which was deemed illegal in an Advisory Opinion by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in 2004, to an “apartheid system” since the wall separated Palestinian families and cities, crossed villages and infringed on the freedom of movement.

Mr. Chahuán proposed recommendations for Member States that wished to stand in solidarity with Palestine, such as the establishment of a commission of inquiry to investigate the systematic oppression based on the domination of one racial group over another in the OPT and grave crimes of apartheid and persecution, and of a UN committee to follow-up on the commission’s investigations and identify measures to prosecute the perpetrators. He also called on Member States to revise trade treaties with Israel to ban once and for all the importation of products made in Israeli settlements and any tax benefits to companies and businesses involved in the settlements, and to take concrete measures against the discrimination of citizens that are not posing any security threat, including those of Palestinian origin, when they visit the OPT.

Mr. Hubert Julien-Laferrrière informed that a large majority in the French parliament supported the two-State solution with Jerusalem as the capital of both States and the recognition of the State of Palestine – a position which had yet to be taken up by the government. As Chair of the parliamentary group for France-Palestine friendship he reported on numerous initiatives such as the mobilization of 115 parliamentarians to call on the French government to oppose the annexation of the Jordan Valley, after an Israeli government announcement to the effect in May 2020. He had also coordinated an initiative against the Abraham Accords, because they did not include any elements to facilitate the creation of a Palestinian state. He stated that while France officially supported the two-State solution, it was “soft” on sanctions and a boycott of settlement products. He recalled the decision by the European Court of Justice (ECJ) that it was legal to label settlement products and lamented the inconsistency in the application of this decision, which deserved more sustained political pressure. Finally, he called on parliamentarians to continue mobilizing at national and regional levels to establish common grounds and prospects on issues related to the question of Palestine, as resolutions adopted by consensus at bodies such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) would prove helpful to the Palestinians.

Mr. Solomon Lechesa Tsenoli said the current violence in the OPT reminded South Africans of what apartheid had done to them. He called on Israelis to join in greater numbers the world’s disquiet and to object to “unsustainable violent and hegemonic imposition of all kinds” on the Palestinian people. He regretted that this continued to be the legacy of the provocative

approach by the previous US administration. He recalled former President Nelson Mandela's and his grandson's commitment to the Palestinian cause, repeating the stance that "Our freedom in South Africa is dependent on the freedom of Palestinians." As Israeli violations of international law and UN resolutions were unacceptable, he fully supported his government's efforts in all multilateral bodies to pursue peace for the Middle East. In the name of his parliament, he reiterated its solidarity with the Palestinian people and their right to self-determination and the full support for the establishment of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. The situation on the ground could not be allowed to remain unchanged as it represented an impediment to the security, peace, stability and development of a broader Middle East.

Mr. Lechesa Tsenoli underlined the position of South Africa on ending the Israeli occupation, which would be in the interest of both Israel and Palestine and called on both parties to take concrete steps to that end. The outstanding final status issues would need to be resolved through negotiations between them with support from the international community and South Africa through international platforms and through engagement to resume the peace process for a lasting and just settlement of the Palestinian question. He stressed that any peace plan should not allow for the Palestinian State to become an entity devoid of territorial contiguity and economic viability. Solidarity from world parliaments and civil society would contribute significantly to prospects of peace.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice said that the essential work in solidarity with the Palestinian people in the Canadian parliament was carried by the group of Palestine-Canada friends, of which he had been a member for many years. He had in 2018 accompanied a delegation of parliamentarians to the West Bank to meet Palestinian senior elected officials, humanitarian organizations and NGOs. The delegation saw the impact of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory and discrimination taking place on a daily basis for thousands of people, including how Palestinian olive groves and villages were disappearing because of the expansion of illegal settlements. The delegation also visited refugee camps that were practically towns since they were established in 1948, and had an "unsettling" visit to Hebron, where the settlements were protected by the Israeli soldiers. The parliamentarians then sent a report of the visit to the Prime Minister through the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

While the official position of Canada on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was principled, the refusal of the government to stand by it remained an issue, as the government was unwilling to apply pressure on Israel beyond a few words in press statements. In that context, he outlined his party's recent demand to the House of Commons to put an end to Canadian support to Israel as long as the latter continued to violate international law and the rights of the Palestinians.

During the **Question and Answer** session, a representative of **Cuba** underlined that the event was taking place in an uncertain escalation of violence and Israel's disproportionate use of force in the West Bank and East Jerusalem against its population. He informed that the Cuban parliament, through its Foreign Affairs Commission, had issued a declaration to express its strongest condemnation of the bombings of Palestinian people in Gaza, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of civilians including children, many more wounded and extensive material damage, and to demand an immediate cessation of the aggression by the Israeli military and of the country's expansionist and colonialist policies. It had further denounced the continued support of

the US government for crimes committed against the Palestinian civilian population and had called parliamentarians around the world to act decisively and force Israel to put an end to these crimes and to respect the UN Charter, international law and relevant Security Council resolutions. The representative of **Indonesia** called on the Committee to urge the immediate cessation of violence, respect of international law, facilitation of emergency humanitarian assistance and a push for the relaunch of negotiations for the realization of the two-State solution in line with agreed parameters. He called on parliamentarians to work hand in hand with their governments on the question of Palestine and continue to raise awareness and put the necessary pressure on the relevant parties to reach a just settlement.

In the ensuing discussion, Mr. Boulerice expressed that he was ashamed to see his Government being so cautious with regards to condemning Israeli violations, given that historically Canada had shown leadership when it came to the situation in South Africa. The tragedy that was unfolding right now in Gaza before everyone's eyes should incite the international community to demand accountability. Mr. Julien-Laferrière said that the history of Israel's creation and the right of existence of the State of Israel made it difficult to impose sanctions against it, despite its breach of international laws. Ms. Elliot said that while the situation in Israel and the OPT was not identical to what had happened in South Africa, in the former areas there were rampant inequalities between children born within a half mile of each other, depending on whether they are Israeli or Palestinian, and governments around the world needed to take actions the way they did for South Africa.

Ambassador Cheikh Niang closed the event.

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****Note: 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, www.un.unispal.org as well as in its official Facebook page and YouTube account.*

****Note: 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.*