



## VIRTUAL MEETING

### *Closed Consultations with Civil Society Organizations*

Convened by the

**Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP)**

1 March 2022

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### CHAIR SUMMARY

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP) held closed consultations with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) on 1 March 2022, as a virtual meeting under the Chatham House Rule. Participants included CSO representatives from Palestine, Israel and the United States, as well as from members and observers of the Committee.

The session was chaired by **H.E. Ambassador Cheikh Niang**, Permanent Representative of Senegal and Chair of the Committee. In their presentations and during the discussion, the participating organizations raised the following issues: (1) impact of the #Savesheikhjarrah campaign as well as local committees' activism for international pressure and solidarity with East Jerusalemites; (2) settler-violence; (3) displacement in unrecognized villages; and (4) bringing accountability through international independent CSO monitoring.

In his introductory remarks, the **Chair** welcomed the participants and reiterated that the Committee mandate was to promote an end to the Israeli occupation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem (OPT). The Committee also sought a just and peaceful settlement to the question of Palestine and supported the realization of the two-State solution on the pre-1967 borders as well as the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people including self-determination, sovereignty and the right to return. He underlined that the objective of the Committee's engagement with civil society was to harness their potential in the OPT, Israel and elsewhere to promote its mandate through strengthened cooperation, including joint activities and exchange of information.

Addressing the impact of the #Savesheikhjarrah campaign and local committees' activism, participants underlined the two layers of the Sheikh Jarrah issue. The first pertained to the neighbourhood itself, whereas another layer concerned the Old City of Jerusalem. Israel's occupation here was characterized as "a story of resistance" that brought about new leaders and creative approaches to confront oppression. Furthermore, it was stressed that East Jerusalem belonged to everyone, and that Palestinians had always been very keen to protect its religious and cultural diversity. However, through marginalization, division, and annexation the City was slowly losing its cultural institutions and tourism infrastructure, while a process of depopulation of Palestinians was ongoing. Participants called for solidarity against Israel's ongoing annexation

policies, especially in East Jerusalem, which some participants argued was becoming a "suburb of West Jerusalem".

Concerning the impact of COVID-19 on the economic situation in East Jerusalem, participants mentioned the adverse effects on the tourism sector. Not only the drop in international tourists but the Israeli separation wall and checkpoints created obstacles for domestic tourism. As a result, many restaurants, hotels and souvenir shops have been forced to close, affecting directly merchants and others along the supply chain, including cultural and commercial centres. It was recommended to diversify and improve tourist destinations in East Jerusalem, develop additional attractive cultural, historical and traditional venues and not concentrate only on religious sites.

It was highlighted that over the last three years, Palestinians had experienced a rise in settler violence with Israeli security forces increasingly supporting it. Israeli human rights activists noted that little progress could be achieved within the framework of the Israeli judiciary, claiming that only the international community's intervention could stop this trend. Other participants underlined the importance of stressing Israel's obligations as the occupying Power and international humanitarian law.

The CSOs further suggested that recent discussions about settler violence within the Israeli Knesset should be cautiously seen as a reason for optimism. Moreover, the government's approach in this regard, especially in some Ministries, seemed different compared to previous ones. Participants noted that it was yet to be seen whether any new positive stance in Parliament or the Government would translate into actual changes on the ground and limits to settler violence.

Panelists also addressed the issue of unrecognized villages and emphasized the plight of the Bedouins who were being forced to move to urban areas and drop their traditional economy and lifestyle. According to speakers, this example pointed to the logic behind Israel's policy of displacement, segregation, Judaization and territorial control. This trend was characterized as a system of domination translated into racially motivated land confiscation and segregation. Participants considered chances of winning legal proceedings regarding displacement cases, especially in Area C, as almost impossible.

Speakers lauded the decision by the UN Human Rights Council to establish a permanent, independent, international commission of inquiry to investigate all alleged violations and abuses of international human rights law - leading up to and since 13 April 2021 - in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel. It was stressed that Israel had never been held accountable for its war crimes. Israel's lack of accountability vis-à-vis violations of international law and human rights of Palestinians was considered as prolonging the ongoing occupation, while impunity helped trigger further oppression.

Participants thus emphasized the importance of promoting accountability through monitoring and reporting. During the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent diminished international attention, Israel had intensified violations of Palestinian peoples' rights. CSOs also stressed the importance of first-hand monitoring, including visits by US delegations to Palestine and Israel to meet with different communities, which allowed them to collect evidence and knowledge about the situation on the ground, empowering them to report back and lobby members of US Congress. It was argued that this approach was the most effective way to "make

a change” and advocate for Palestinian rights. Similarly, social media campaigns around Sheikh Jarrah and other critical situations were underlined as a crucial element of advocacy at the international level.

Speakers also discussed the feasibility of sanctions that could change Israel's policies, underlining that this was extremely unlikely to happen. The alternative was to focus on informing the public about Israel’s “illegal and morally wrong” oppressive policies and practices. As evidence, Amnesty International's new report exposing abuses by Israel's government showed how Israel was affected by such criticism. While Israel’s domestic audience might be less open to agree or use the concept of “apartheid”, the most effective approach would be to focus on the well-documented facts of the report. Similarly, CSOs proposed that the question of Palestine be framed within the “racial justice paradigm”. Using the term “apartheid” would allow connecting with the experiences of injustice as lived by other people who are oppressed by their own States.

The participating CSOs formulated several recommendations to the Committee, such as continuing with their advocacy and exposing the abuses committed against the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, within a framework that highlights facts on the ground rather than the “label” attached to Israeli policies, while stressing that there had to be a “price to pay” for such actions.

Committee members stressed the crucial role of the ongoing partnership with CSOs, and how their inputs and recommendations added value to the work of the Committee.

**Ambassador Cheikh Niang** closed the event.

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