

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, 25 April 2022

**Madam President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP), I would like to congratulate the United Kingdom for its able presidency of the Security Council this month. We also thank Mr. Tor Wennesland, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, for his briefing.

Madam President,

As we gather at this quarterly Council debate on the question of Palestine, the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) is deteriorating, with particular intensity in occupied East Jerusalem, where tensions are dangerously heightened.

The core problem is well known. Israel's ongoing occupation of Palestinian territory and its continuous human rights violations and use of excessive force against Palestinian civilians fuel desolation among a population already despairing from 55 years of military occupation. The 15-year land, air and sea blockade of Gaza continues to create additional immense suffering for over two million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, despite recent easing of access and trade, affecting all aspects of life and at the root of the dire humanitarian crisis afflicting the population.

On 15 and 17 April, during a sacred time when religious holidays for Muslims, Jews and Christians overlapped, the world witnessed unconscious scenes inside the Al Aqsa Mosque, when Israeli police forcibly removed worshipers and used excessive force against Palestinians, causing injury to more than 150 people, among them women and children, and causing damage to the Mosque. The Committee shares the Secretary-General's deep concern at the situation in Jerusalem. The Committee also appeals to political, religious and community leaders to help in restoring calm.

The Committee further calls on Israel to uphold and respect the historic status quo of the holy sites and its obligations under international humanitarian law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention. The Committee reminds that Israel is the occupying Power in East Jerusalem and the rest of the Palestinian Territory it occupied since 1967 and bears no sovereignty rights therein and that all measures to alter the demography, character and status of that territory, including East Jerusalem, are illegal, null and void. The Committee recalls in this regard the Security Council's relevant resolutions, including resolutions 476 (1980), 478 (1980) and 2334 (2016), and calls for their full respect and implementation.

The Committee reiterates its calls for calm and restraint and calls on Israeli and Palestinian authorities, as well as to armed groups, to avoid violence, de-escalate tensions and prevent inflaming the already tense situation of the past few weeks.

Indeed, on 19 April and 22 March, the UN Special Coordinator expressed concern at the situation and reported that between 10 December 2021 and 18 March 2022, a total of 24 Palestinians were killed - 4 of them being children - and 2,966 injured. The Committee is equally concerned about the killing of Israeli civilians.

We strongly condemn any violent act against civilians, including recurring settler attacks against Palestinians in the OPT, carried out with the passive acquiescence, and even support of Israeli Security Forces. In its report to the Human Rights Council 49th session, OHCHR noted a total of 502 such incidents between 28 February 2022 - 1 April 2022. The Committee calls for the protection of civilians, in line with the Council's relevant resolutions on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and calls in specific for protection of the Palestinian civilian population, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

The Committee reiterates that the Israeli occupation is the main driver of human rights violations and conflict in the OPT. Faithful to its mandate to raise awareness about these issues, the Committee will host, on 27 April, a discussion with CSOs on the impact of the Israeli occupation and settlements on Palestinian rights.

As repeatedly stated by the overwhelming majority of the international community – and in this Council - Israeli settlements in the OPT, including East Jerusalem, are illegal under international law. The expansion of illegal Israeli settlements, especially in and around East

Jerusalem adversely affect the contiguity of a future Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and are the source of countless other human rights violations against the Palestinian people.

Madam President,

In this regard, the Palestinian people also continue to face forced displacement, evictions and destruction of their property and structures. The negative effects of these violations, especially on Palestinian women, was echoed at the Committee's event on the margins of the 66th Commission on the Status of Women session.

Speakers gave testimony on the plight of Palestinian women in the East Jerusalem neighborhoods of Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan, where Palestinian families also face relentless settlers' violence. Such acts of infringement and violence disintegrate families and heighten tensions on the ground. They run counter to resolution 2334 (2016), which calls for "immediate steps to prevent all acts of violence against civilians, including all acts of terror and provocation and destruction."

Madam President,

The Committee stresses the decisive role and responsibility of the international community, and this Council in particular, in resolving this conflict. To this effect, the Committee continues to engage with Member States, to garner support for the resumption of peace negotiations. Also, as Committee Chair, I addressed the 48th session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC),

that took place in Islamabad, Pakistan on 22 March. I called on the OIC to help encourage broader international engagement for the realization of a just and peaceful solution to the question of Palestine.

Madam President,

New global crises and conflicts should not divert the United Nations and the international community's attention from the grave situation in the OPT, where Israel, the occupying Power, promotes policies and practices that are turning into a de facto annexation with different – and discriminatory - rights and legal systems applying to the population under its control.

On 30 March, the Bureau of the Committee met the President of the General Assembly explored alternative ways to revive the Middle East Peace process and the international efforts to address this injustice, which in May will mark 74 years since the *Nakba* that befell the Palestinian people. The Bureau issued a statement after the meeting, warning against diverting international attention from the question of Palestine and also appealing for assistance to ensure that Palestine meets its 2030 Agenda targets.

In conclusion, the Committee reiterates its commitment to work toward the end of Israel's occupation and the realization of the rights of the Palestinian people, including self-determination and independence, in accordance with international law and all relevant UN resolutions and past agreements.

Resolving the question of Palestine is long overdue. This question has at the core our unfulfilled promise to the Palestinian people and remains an ongoing source of injustice, fueling instability and violence and endangering human lives.

At a time when new conflicts shake the international community, we must not ignore this open sore. Peace and stability in the Middle East depend on the international community, all of us, taking decisive action to support a just and peaceful solution to the question of Palestine.

Thank you for your attention.
