



VIRTUAL EVENT

“Al-Khalil / Hebron - A case study for the impact of Israeli settlements on Palestinian rights under occupation”

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

27 April 2022

CHAIR SUMMARY

The event “**Al-Khalil / Hebron - A case study for the impact of Israeli settlements on Palestinian rights under occupation**” was held on 27 April 2022, 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. Mr. Armanatha Christiawan Nasir, Vice-Chair of the Committee and Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations. It consisted of an opening session with remarks by the Vice-Chair and H.E. Mr. Riyadh Mansour, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations. The panel comprised of Mr. Hisham Sharabati, Palestinian Human Rights defender; Ms. Inès Abdel Razek, Advocacy Director of the Palestine Institute for Public Diplomacy; Mr. Sulaiman Khatib, Director of International Relations, and Mr. Avner Wishnitzer, co-founder and member, both at the Israeli-Palestinian NGO Combatants for Peace.

Member States participated in the two-hour event on WebEx platform. The event was livestreamed on UN WebTV as well as the Committee social media channels and the public had an opportunity to make comments and pose questions to the panellists.

At the opening, Ambassador **Nasir** explained the Committee’s mandate to raise awareness internationally on the Question of Palestine and the challenges faced daily by the Palestinian people. This event focussed on Hebron as an illustration of the illegal Israeli settlement of the West Bank and the specific challenges faced by Palestinians living near such settlements. Israel exercises direct control over the 20 per cent of Hebron City known as “H2,” home to some 33,000 Palestinians and a few hundred Israeli settlers living in a fortified enclave protected by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF). Hebron case study stood out for the well-documented and repeated incidents of settler violence, the impact of closures for thousands of Palestinian segregated from the rest of the population by an extensive network of gates, walls and fences and a heavy Israeli military presence enforcing this segregation. The situation remained volatile and reverberate politically, economically and socially in the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT). Ambassador Nasir introduced the panellists and stated that over several years now the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Secretary-General have reaffirmed that all settlements were illegal under international law and constituted

a substantial obstacle to peace, calling on Israel, the occupying Power, to cease all settlement activity immediately and completely. The Committee also has repeatedly expressed its concern at the continuation of settlement activities and called for the implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016) and all other relevant UN resolutions.

In his introductory remarks, **Ambassador Mansour** thanked Ambassador Nasir and the Bureau of the Committee for organizing the event. He also expressed his gratitude towards the panellists and thanked them for their participation.

Mr. Hisham Sharabati stated that he wished his presentation would help to raise awareness about the situation in Hebron, especially at the United Nations. Mr. Sharabati showed several maps showing Hebron's division into areas known as "H1" and "H2" as well as details on the impact on the life of Palestinians living in the Hebron area due to the constant heavy Israeli military presence, settlers' violence, and the segregation of the city centre implemented through a widespread facial recognition equipment, fences, walls, and checkpoints. Past and present photos of Shuhada Street, in the city centre, showed the stark contrast between a thriving area with life and economic activities some thirty years ago and the current state of a totally empty street with closed shops due to the coercive environment imposed on Palestinians. Other images showed also the existence of roads with separate access for Israeli and Palestinians, which have been called "apartheid roads".

Ms. Inès Abdel Razek emphasized that Hebron was "a microcosm of the Israeli occupation and a situation of apartheid", adding that it was essential to document and show the human reality of Palestinians living in this area. This task was essential as many foreigners faced difficulties to enter the West Bank and could not directly witness the situation on the ground. To this end, the Palestine Institute for Public Diplomacy initiated the project "Palestine Virtual Reality" with videos providing an immersive experience in areas around the West Bank. Ms. Abdel Razek showed a short extract of a video virtual tour of Hebron, near an Israeli military checkpoint. Israel designed a complicated and bureaucratic system of segregation to maintain its domination over the Palestinians. She stressed that the mass violations of human rights in Hebron, the rest of the West Bank and Gaza would continue if Member States failed to provide the necessary support to end the impunity for those policies. Fostering accountability for the crimes committed and ending impunity were the bases of any future solution, either the two-State solution or other options, she stated.

Mr. Sulaiman Khatib shared his experience of living in Hizma, a community located on the North-East of Jerusalem, near an Israeli checkpoint, settlements as well as the Separation Barrier. His family had lost a large portion of land following the construction of this "separation wall", a situation similar to those living in and around Hebron. Mr. Khatib spoke of the suffering of his family because of the Israeli occupation, in contrast with the higher quality of life enjoyed by Israeli settlers. The natural environment had also suffered from this situation and the limited resources and economic opportunities in Area C (approximately 60 per cent of the West Bank under almost complete Israeli control) pushed the population to leave for Area A (approximately 18 per cent of the West Bank under Palestinian political and security control). The constant presence of military and settlers has been highly traumatic for those communities, many of whom were 1948 refugees from the Negev, recalling the example of the Bedouin village of Khan Al-Ahmar in the central West Bank. This psychological trauma caused by the occupation, especially on children, and loss of their own culture must be addressed to ensure a lasting

political solution for this situation. Many Palestinians thought that their plight would not be heard and solved, but examples like the success achieved in South Africa provided hope.

Mr. Avner Wishnitzer presented his personal account of a system he described as both unfair for Palestinians and dangerous for Israel. Mr. Wishnitzer explained that he started his activism in the Massafer Yatta area, south of Hebron, and was exposed to what he called “slow violence” by the State of Israel against Palestinians. The aim of his organization, Combatants for Peace was to denounce the reality of the occupation and to dismantle this system of domination. The discrimination on the access to limited water resources in the South Hebron Hills was a clear example of this “slow violence”. Here, Israeli authorities did not allow Palestinian communities to get connected to the water grid and even demolish water distribution systems built without permits, which were almost never granted to Palestinians, while settlers took over water springs in those same areas. As a result, Palestinian communities must purchase their water at a cost six times higher than the regular price and transport it by tankers which were often confiscated by Israeli authorities. This discriminatory situation violated international law and basic human rights, and could not be accepted, he noted.

During the **Question-and-Answer** session, **Ambassador Mansour** thanked the Committee and the panellists for their moving testimonies and stated he knew about the situation of these communities and understood the frustration and anger over this prolonged occupation. He added that it was essential to educate the international community and put accountability and justice at the centre of the discussion on the Question of Palestine, alongside United Nations resolutions. The Observer Mission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations had been advocating to foster accountability, relaying the stories of Palestinians suffering in those communities, in order to force an end to the occupation. **Mr. Ray Sithole** from the **Permanent Mission of South Africa to the United Nations** thanked the Vice Chair, Ambassador Mansour and the panellists for their tireless activism and for sharing their experience. He stated that South Africa was a staunch supporter of the Palestinian cause, adding that the occupation was a violation of international human rights and international humanitarian law. South Africa remained committed to work on the process of revitalizing negotiations leading to the two-State solution, with a viable Palestinian State and recognized sovereignty for both states.

Panellists addressed several questions submitted by the audience. On recommendations for the international community on the protection of Palestinians in Hebron, **panellists** stressed that many resolutions had been adopted by UN organs and committees to stop settlements and the occupation, without tangible outcomes on the ground. Taking the example of the sanctions imposed as a result of conflicts in Ukraine or in Iraq, a panellist noted how no concrete step had been taken vis-à-vis Israel over the years. Hence, Palestinians did not feel supported by the international community. It was also mentioned that it was everyone’s responsibility to be engaged in ending the occupation, at every level.

Panellists also called for the UN Special Committee against Apartheid to be reconvened. It was stressed that Member States must realize that normalizing their relations with Israel was prolonging the occupation. Responding to a question related to the issue of tax deductions for organizations supporting settlements, it was noted that many settlement projects, illegal according to international law, were funded by US and European organizations. Countries had the duty to intervene against these organizations, including through courts or imposing individual sanctions. It was also pointed out that safeguarding indigenous Palestinian culture was essential,

that there was a need to create an alternative to the current status quo, and that the Palestinian diaspora must be supportive of and invested in these efforts.

In her closing remarks, **Ambassador Abdelhady-Nasser** thanked the Chair, the Committee, the Division for Palestinian Rights and the panellists for their informative presentations and testimonies, and for their message of hope. She stressed that Mr. Wishnitzer represents one of many Israeli voices that were not heard enough. She stated that the situation of the Palestinians was often desperate, but civil society organizations must continue their efforts to achieve justice. **Ambassador Mansour** added that it was essential to continue to promote the right of Palestinians at the United Nations, including through resolutions and other decisions, and to document the violations.

Ambassador Nasir 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.*