



VIRTUAL EVENT

2022 Conference on the Question of Jerusalem

“Palestinian Youth in East Jerusalem under Occupation”

Co-organized by the

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

and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)

20 July 2022

CHAIR SUMMARY

The event **“Palestinian Youth in East Jerusalem under Occupation”** was held on 20 July 2022, under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP) and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The event was moderated by H.E. Mr. Cheikh Niang, Chair of the Committee and Permanent Representative of Senegal to the United Nations. It consisted of an opening session with remarks by the Chair, by H.E. Mr. Ali Goutali, Director of Palestine and Al-Quds Affairs Department of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and H.E. Mr. Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations. H.E. Mr. Abdulla Shahid, President of the 75th General Assembly, addressed the event in a video message. The panel comprised of Ms. Nivine Sandouka, a Palestinian activist from Hoqoqna (Our Rights); Ms. Dalia Hatuqa, a Palestinian journalist specializing in Israeli/Palestinian affairs, Mr. Ali Ghaith, a Palestinian Media, Communications and Advocacy Consultant and Ms. Sharon (Shaindy) Ort, an Israeli human rights activist.

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

At the opening, **Ambassador Niang** explained the Committee’s mandate to raise awareness on the Question of Palestine and the challenges faced daily by the Palestinian people under Israeli occupation. The event discussed ways to support Palestinian youth-based organisations while they find ways to grapple with daily struggles under occupation, including in particular in occupied East Jerusalem.

Ambassador Niang introduced the panellists and stated that over several years now, the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Secretary-General had reaffirmed that any actions taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration on the Holy City of Jerusalem were illegal. The Committee repeatedly expressed that East Jerusalem was recognized as an integral part of the Palestinian territory occupied by Israel since 1967. For the Committee, a negotiated solution on the status of Jerusalem on the basis of international law and taking into account the political and religious concerns of all sides was a prerequisite for a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and a lasting peace in the entire region. Palestinian youths were concerned about the lack of a political solution, stifled by the lack of economic opportunities and Israel's persistent violations of their human rights. At the same time, the post-Oslo generation demonstrated a strong desire to engage socially and politically and to become a catalyst for change, both in Palestine and internationally. Such engagement was seen as a necessary contribution to the Palestinian people's struggle for freedom and justice and a means to combat their sense of isolation.

In his video message to the event, **H.E. Mr. Abdulla Shahid**, President of the 75th General Assembly, stated that the theme of the discussion aligned with his belief that involving youth in decision-making, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding, were a pillar of his General Assembly agenda. He added that the situation in East Jerusalem heightened tension and resentment, denying Palestinians the right to their land and to engage in constructive negotiations ensuring young people's involvement in the peacebuilding process. Young people must be part of the solution and must be given a seat at the table. Youth are agents of change and their inclusion in the peace and security agenda was key to sustainable peacebuilding.

Ambassador Goutali condemned Israel, the occupying Power, for its colonial practices and acts of violence by extremist settlers against the Palestinian people, its repeated attacks against holy sites, the status of Jerusalem, and its plans to displace Palestinians from their homes. The OIC regularly warned against those threats that risked the region's stability and could not be tolerated. Ambassador Goutali reaffirmed that occupied East Jerusalem was part of the Palestinian territory and urged the international community to use every legal mechanisms to hold Israel accountable for its illegal "apartheid" policies, and to provide international protection for the Palestinian people. The ultimate objective of these efforts remained the revival of a credible political path for achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to end the occupation and establish the State of Palestine on pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In his introductory remarks, **Ambassador Mansour** said that this conference on Jerusalem was very relevant due to the aggressive policies of the occupying Power to change the demographic character of Jerusalem and to negate the Arab character of the City. The international community and international law, including UN resolutions, did not recognize any other borders than those before 1967. Any unilateral changes to the demography, character and status of Jerusalem were hence null and void. He recognized that youth in Jerusalem faced major problems, and it was important to discuss their reality to help them to live peacefully in the city.

Ms. Nivine Sandouka, presented the situation of youth under occupation. She stressed that it was essential to allow the voice of Palestinian youth in East Jerusalem to be heard. She shared the example of her ten-year-old son, growing up under Israel's occupation, with limitations on his freedom of movement, access to services and sports activities, and police

violence against young Palestinians. She also highlighted that due to the dire economic situation and lack of investment in schools in East Jerusalem, the dropout rate in Jerusalem among Palestinians was as high as 35 per cent, forcing many young Palestinians – including children - to leave school to seek low paying jobs in the western part of the City to support their families. Palestinians in the City were not citizens but just residents, which limited their political rights. Youth, for instance, were deterred from peaceful political engagement due to Israeli police violence. Furthermore, the lack of housing was a major issue impacting youth.

Mr. Ali Ghaith, discussed Palestinian identity and resilience in East Jerusalem. Comparing Israel's alleged progressive policies on gender identity and associated rights with its policies against Palestinian people, he stated that identity for Palestinians in East Jerusalem was most often conjugated with resilience due to the situation in the City and what its Palestinian residents were going through. As a result, Palestinians had to constantly fight to maintain their identity. Israel self-proclaimed as a progressive country and a champion of human rights but suppressed Palestinian identity and violated their human rights. As an illustration, Israeli authorities forbid the public display of Palestinian flags in occupied East Jerusalem.

Mr. Ghaith added that Palestinians in East Jerusalem chose to be called Palestinians to sustain their heritage and have the right to express their culture as enshrined in international conventions. They faced discrimination, including on identification and travel documents, having to prove that Jerusalem was their centre of life. Despite all the difficulties, Palestinians chose to stay and live in Jerusalem as part of their identity. At the same time, they often worked in Israel due to lack of opportunities but were under the constant threat of having their ID revoked. He finally stated that the killing of Palestinian American Journalist Shireen Abu Akleh further cemented the Palestinian identity and resilience, in Jerusalem and everywhere.

Ms. Sharon Ort, an Israeli and Jerusalem-based human rights activist, discussed her experience promoting Palestinian rights. She stated that there was no robust human rights movement in Israel fighting against the occupation and Israeli policies toward Palestinians, adding that Israelis generally were not interested in Palestinian rights or their self-determination. Accountability for Israel's actions by the international community was therefore essential. Nevertheless, activism in Jerusalem by Israelis took several forms, including presence to document home demolitions and settler violence. Israelis were also involved in campaigns against the displacement of Palestinians and did legal advocacy upon the request of the affected families and communities. Taking the examples of Masafer Yatta or Wadi Humus, she stated that Israel's policy of colonisation and apartheid happened throughout Palestine. She recalled that very few Israelis protested during the recent demolition in Wadi Humus. The UN and the international community could support Palestinians in the realisation of their inalienable rights by using all the tools at their disposal, as change would not come from within Israeli society.

Ms. Dalia Hatuqa, shared her experience empowering youth to promote change. She recalled how youth activists were very active during the Israeli strikes on Gaza in May 2021 but stressed that the potential for Palestinian democracy had long been limited by Israel's control of every facet of daily life in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including the electoral system. The last time a Palestinian legislative election was held, in 2006, Israel heavily obstructed voting in East Jerusalem. The recent Palestinian election postponement contributed to growing disillusionment among Palestinians, who had registered to vote in large numbers despite deep scepticism that elections held under the current circumstances would be free and fair. She

emphasized that many Palestinian youth born after the 1993 Oslo Accords had never cast a ballot.

Ms. Hatuqa further recalled youth's recurring involvement in protests in East Jerusalem and Israeli repression at Al- Aqsa Mosque and Sheikh Jarrah. Without a political manifesto to which adhere, young Palestinians took to social media to raise awareness about the Israeli attacks on Gaza and the looming eviction of their fellow Palestinians in East Jerusalem. She stated that, with the Palestinian Authority having no de facto jurisdiction in East Jerusalem, the protests in Sheikh Jarrah and the Old City had largely been grassroots-based, social media-enhanced popular movements without political affiliation and detached from formal political parties from Ramallah or Gaza. She added that this was a different generation that emerged after two Intifadas and a failed peace process. Ms. Hatuqa added that Palestinian youth in East Jerusalem live a different life than their fellow Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, being able to move and work within Israel. At the same time, they were largely not assimilated into the Israeli society, with limited access to building permits, being subject to land expropriation and family separation because of Israeli policies and settler organizations. These policies were part of Israel's attempts to establish a Jewish majority in the city. While media organizations have traditionally deferred to accounts presented by the Israeli government, Palestinian youth on TikTok, Instagram, WhatsApp, and other social media provided an alternative narrative and the dissemination of live footage of events, pictures, and memes. Palestinian youth saw themselves as the ultimate power to challenge Israel, knew they held power, agency, and keys to the future, even under Israeli occupation.

H.E. Mr. Mohammed Hussein Bahr Al-Uloom, Permanent Representative of Iraq to the United Nations, made a statement calling to support the voice of young Palestinians to find a solution to the Palestinian issue socially, economically and politically. The current period represented a momentum for youth in Palestine, including through the different UN platforms, to be engaged to reach the end of the occupation and a durable solution to the conflict. Iraq supported Palestinian youth in their aspiration to establish a Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital and to oppose all policies and activities violating the cultural plurality of Jerusalem.

During the **Question-and-Answer** session, panellists addressed a question submitted by the audience on the impact of the construction of the Light Rail in Jerusalem and its impact on the expropriation of Palestinian properties and expansion of settlements. **Ms. Sandouka** responded that the new Light Rail line runs through East Jerusalem, and that more and more land was being taken from Palestinians for infrastructure projects and for new settlements, as in her own neighbourhood, Shuafat. **Mr. Ghaith** added that Israel was using urban planning to engineer a demographic Jewish majority, supporting an increasing number of settlers moving in to limit the presence of Palestinians in the City. **Ms. Ort** concurred that infrastructure projects were aimed at reducing Palestinian presence in Jerusalem, which Israeli officials sometimes even recognized publicly.

Ms. Sandouka asked for international protection of Palestinians, especially in East Jerusalem, against police violence targeting individuals and civil society groups. She further asked for the creation of youth forums where young Palestinians could express their opinion without risking being detained. She finally urged the international community to protect civil society organisations so they could work freely, without fear of retaliation.

In his closing remarks, **Ambassador Mansour** thanked the panellists for their presentations and insights on the reality of youth under occupation, especially in East Jerusalem. Such testimonies provided solid arguments for the international community to support Palestinians. It was, therefore, the duty of the international community, the OIC and the CEIRPP to provide much-needed concrete help to Palestinians in East Jerusalem in combatting their oppression. He added that UN protection for Palestinians was needed in Jerusalem but also in Gaza and other parts of the OPT. For instance, the Secretary-General used strong language regarding the situation of children in the OPT in his Annual Report on Children and Armed Conflict. Ambassador Mansour regretted the lack of support from the Israeli population to fight the occupation, and further stressed the importance of holding Israeli authorities accountable for the violation of Palestinian rights.

Ambassador Niang closed the event by thanking the panellists for highlighting the situation of Youth in East Jerusalem. Ambassador Niang also thanked the OIC for its support.

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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.*