



## VIRTUAL MEETING

### *Closed Consultations with Civil Society Organizations*

Convened by the

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

**“The ongoing Nakba in Gaza: blockade, dispossession and denial of rights”**

27 April 2023

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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 27 April 2023, as a virtual meeting under the Chatham House Rule titled “The ongoing Nakba in Gaza: blockade, dispossession and denial of rights.” Participants included CSO representatives from State of Palestine, Israel and the United States, alongside Members and Observers of the Committee.

The session was chaired by **H.E. Mr. Cheikh Niang**, Permanent Representative of Senegal to the UN and Chair of the Committee. In their presentations and during the discussion, the participating organizations raised the following issues: (1) The Great March of Return and its legacy; (2) Palestine refugees in Gaza and the violation of their right of return; (3) The forced transfer of Palestinians due to Israel’s restrictions on family reunification; and (4) Israel’s control over Palestinian healthcare and restrictions on access to medical care.

In his introductory remarks, the **Chair** welcomed the participants and reiterated that the Committee worked to promote the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to self-determination and return, as provided by international law and enshrined in the UN Charter. He underlined that the objective of the Committee's engagement with civil society was to harness their potential in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), Israel and elsewhere through strengthened cooperation, including joint activities and exchange of information. The Chair further added that the General Assembly (GA) adopted resolution A/77/23 calling on the CEIRPP to dedicate its activities in 2023 to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Nakba (the “catastrophe”) and its ongoing repercussions on the Palestinian people. As mandated by the GA, the CEIRPP will organize on 15 May 2023 a High-Level Special Meeting in the morning followed by an evening Special Commemorative event in the General Assembly Hall. The event is seen as overdue after 75 years, and the international community's recognition of its significance welcomed. As part of these commemorations, these consultations aimed to highlight the current situation of the Palestinian people as a continuation of a process started in 1948.

Indeed, the Palestinian people, including the Palestine refugees, continued to experience increasing levels of dispossession, displacement, violence, human rights violations and

insecurity, in what was considered an “ongoing Nakba.” As stressed by several speakers, this ongoing Nakba was not limited to Gaza but affected Palestinians worldwide. It was an ongoing process representing a “normalized injustice” and not just a past event for Palestinians.

The Gaza Strip has been particularly affected by this situation, with an extreme de-development due to the blockade imposed since 2007, with stark differences in living conditions on both sides of the fence, the population density in Gaza population being one of the highest in the world. The March of Return, a grassroots movement that started in 2018, was an expression of the desire of Palestinians in Gaza to engage in unarmed popular mobilization against the military occupation. Despite its peaceful nature, the March was met with severe Israeli violence, leading to the death of hundreds of Palestinians. The legacy of the March of Return was to highlight the ongoing Nakba and to emphasize the right of return as a dignified solution that would ensure respect for Palestinian rights.

Pannelists also highlighted the current situation in Gaza, emphasizing the looming threat of a “second Nakba” as a process of expulsion of Palestinians from their land. On that regard, speakers discussed the “Subjugation Plan” proposed by the current Israeli government giving Palestinians three options: continue to live as inferior subjects with no rights, leave Palestine, or resist by force and suffer the “inevitable” consequences. Life in Gaza was described as a “non-life” situation that Palestinians, and refugees in particular, faced in what was referred to as “slow death”, heightened by the violation of their right of return. It was also argued that Gaza had enormous potential for tourism and investments once the blockade was lifted, the occupation ended and Palestinian rights realized.

CSO representatives also highlighted the devastating impact of Israel's family separation policy and permit regime on the movement of Palestinians, particularly those from the Gaza Strip. The policy was designed to separate Gaza from Israel and the rest of the OPT, and maintain Palestinian division, as Israel controlled who could travel from and into Gaza through its control of the Palestinian population registry. The permit regime was very limited and did not allow Palestinians living in Gaza to relocate to the West Bank. As a result, many families lived separated for months and even years, with women often being the most affected. Speakers stressed the psychological toll of this separation and the need for hope and support for these families. The meeting also discussed the Israeli procedures that forced Palestinian residents of the West Bank living in Gaza to give up their right to move back to the West Bank in the future, constituting forcible transfer and a grave breach of international law.

Discussions also touched upon the devastating impact of Israeli policies on the Palestinian healthcare system, especially in Gaza. Palestinians were routinely denied access to healthcare and needed permits to access health facilities in Israel and the West Bank. Cancer patients needed to apply for travel permits every time they had to undergo treatment, which greatly affected their condition and chances of survival. Because of these permits' limitations, children often had to undergo treatment without their families. The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasized in a report from 2021 that all aspects of life in Gaza undermined the development of the healthcare system. While Israelis had access to advanced medical equipment and treatment, Palestinians were left to suffer due to the Israeli occupation. This was mentioned as a clear example of the ongoing Nakba and the denial of Palestinian rights to health, that one panelist called an “apartheid in health.”

The presentations were followed by a questions-and-answers session. Participants explained that the “ongoing Nakba” was a process and a state of “non-life” which captured what it meant for Palestinians, who were forced to live in refugee camps for years so that Israel could exist as a Jewish-majority country. Palestinian life as a community was thus “suspended” as was their ability to achieve self-determination and live freely and in dignity.

Answering a question about viable measures for promoting awareness on the situation in Gaza and the ongoing Nakba, panelists pointed out that on one hand, Israel denied the Nakba and tried to erase its memory, considering the term as antisemitic under the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition. Similarly, panelists argued that any form of criticism of Israeli policies and practices risked falling under such categorization. At the same time, the threat of a new Nakba was made by Israeli radicals to intimidate Palestinians. Speakers believed that mutual recognition of suffering and trauma was essential for peace, but blaming, bigotry and racism prevented this from happening. Speakers also argued that settlement construction in the OPT, including East Jerusalem, and the mistreatment of Palestinians were practices constituting apartheid, but some Western nations were reluctant to use this term. Participants stated that they could not discuss certain topics, such as the Nakba, without being accused of threatening Jewish self-determination, demonizing Israel, or denying Israel's right to exist in accordance with the IHRA definition of antisemitism.

It was suggested that the only possible course of action to advance Palestinian rights was “shock therapy”, declaring the occupation of the OPT as illegal and putting pressure on Western governments to reject settlement expansion and impose consequences. The conflict in Ukraine was cited as a flagrant case of double standards including international massive support against occupation, accountability and in upholding of international law.

A participant highlighted the need for more regular conversations on Gaza, as it embodied broader transnational issues of legal, environmental and moral standing. Focusing on Gaza would help to build bridges and to see the reality on the ground as a way of countering the sense of abandonment by the international community felt by Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. In this context, the Committee was encouraged to visit Gaza, even by experiencing the challenges of getting entry permits. Gaza should be kept at the center of attention, not only every few years when there was a conflict. Palestinians must continue building global support to promote their rights, including through advocacy within the UN system, and change the perception on the situation of Palestinians around the world, and their aspirations to freedom. Another speaker pointed out that the right to health was impacted by political choices made by Israel, and solutions needed to be political, not just humanitarian.

Speakers also pointed out that Palestinians in refugee camps, Jerusalem, and cities within Israel were all affected by the Nakba and the continued struggle of the Palestinian people. But many organizations were now arguing that Palestinians were facing a situation of apartheid. The General Assembly requested the International Court of Justice (ICJ) an advisory opinion to determine the legal consequences of Israeli policies and practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. If the ICJ gives an advisory opinion toward acknowledging the illegality of the Israel occupation, it would carry significant moral and legal weight. A panelist emphasized that Palestinians were active agents in influencing their own situation, and they would continue to fight for their inalienable rights, including the right of return for refugees.

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

**Ambassador Cheikh Niang** closed the event.

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