



VIRTUAL EVENT

2023 Conference on the Question of Jerusalem

“The impact of Israeli settlement policies on the Palestinian population in Jerusalem”

Convened by the
Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP)
in collaboration with the **Organization of Islamic Cooperation**

20 July 2023

CHAIR SUMMARY

The International Conference on the Question of Jerusalem **“The impact of Israeli settlement policies on the Palestinian population in Jerusalem”** was convened virtually, on 20 July 2023, under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP) in cooperation with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The event was chaired by Ambassador Cheikh Niang, Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and Permanent Representative of Senegal to the United Nations. It consisted of an opening session with remarks by Mr. Khaled Khiari, United Nations Assistant-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs; Mr. Ali Goutali, representing the Assistant Secretary-General for Palestine & Al-Quds Affairs of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC); and Mr. Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations.

The panel consisted of Mr. Munir Nuseibah, Director of Al-Quds Human Rights Clinic and Community Action Centre; Dr. Dov Baum, Director of Economic Activism, American Friends Service Committee; Mr. Josh Ruebner, Director of Government Relations at the Institute for Middle East Understanding; and Ms. Nur Arafah, Fellow at the Malcom H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Centre. Member States participated in the two-hour event on the Zoom platform. The conference was broadcast on UN WebTV and UN YouTube and the public had an opportunity pose questions to the panellists.

In his introductory remarks, **the Chair** stated that Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem as well as demolitions and seizure of Palestinian homes and structures, constituted flagrant violations of UN resolutions and international law. Settlements

were a major obstacle to the achievement of a two-State solution and a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace. He reiterated that the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Secretary-General had reaffirmed that any action taken by Israel to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration of the City of Jerusalem were illegal; he further called for a negotiated solution on the status of Jerusalem as a pre-requisite for a solution to the question of Palestine and a just and lasting peace. Jerusalem remained a symbol of the systematic attempt by Israel to entrench its occupation and change the demographic fabric of the City, and increasing settler violence in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem had to be addressed. A case in point was the recent eviction of the Sub Laban family, who had been living in East Jerusalem for generations and had fought in Israeli courts since 1978 against eviction from their home in the Muslim quarters.

Mr. Khaled Khiari highlighted the relevance of the conference's theme, as the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) continued to witness deadly escalations and confrontations. He underlined that Israel's ongoing settlement expansion was of grave concern as were recent amendments by the Israeli government to the settlement planning process to expedite building of more housing units. Settlements contravened international law, entrenched the occupation and increased frustration and friction driving violence and conflict, while undermining the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, he said. Mr. Khiari called on Israel to immediately cease all settlement activity and fully respect its obligations under international law.

Ambassador Ali Goutali welcomed the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights update of the businesses database operating in Israeli settlements in the OPT by. Similarly, he expressed the OIC's appreciation for the recent European Parliament's position calling for its member states to recognize Palestinian statehood and to support the International Criminal Court's investigation into war crimes and crimes against humanity committed in the OPT. The OIC called on the international community to pressure Israel into ensuring compliance with and respect for its obligations under international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention. The international community must take decisive action to hold Israel, the occupying Power, accountable for its violations.

Ambassador Riyad Mansour warned against the extremism of Israel's current cabinet, particularly the Ministries of Finance and Security. Settlers were openly advocating for the occupation of Palestinian villages - such as Huwara and Turmusayya – and with the support of the government, they were allegedly establishing a militia of 1,000 members to intensify their attacks and eliminate the Palestinian presence from the OPT. He lamented the narrative of Israel's Minister of Finance, Mr. Bezalel Smotrich, who published a radical manifesto entitled "Israel's Decisive Plan" advocating for the expulsion of Palestinians seeking an independent State. He further regretted the international community's reiteration of statements on the importance of the two-State solution and calls on Israel to stop settlement expansion and demolitions, without taking practical steps to implement UN Security Council resolutions. Ambassador Mansour called on the Arab States, the OIC, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), and others to resort to practical measures beyond the repetition of the same statements.

Ambassador Mansour mentioned the State of Palestine's legal submission to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for an advisory opinion, which had garnered the support of

more than fifty Member States. The ICJ would decide on the legal consequences of the prolonged illegal occupation, including the annexation of East Jerusalem and threats of annexation of Area C, as well as the expansion of illegal settlements in the Occupied West Bank. He expressed the hope that the ICJ would define the ongoing violations against the Palestinian people as apartheid.

Panel Discussion

Mr. Munir Nuseibah reminded of the status of Jerusalem under international law as “occupied since 1948” and explained that Israel’s sovereignty was not recognized by the international community. However, Israel had continued to impose discriminatory laws on the Palestinian Jerusalemites, such as the Absentee Property Law (1950) and the Legal and Administrative Matters Law (1970). Likewise, the commemoration of the Nakba by the CEIRPP, on 15 May 2023, was an opportunity to highlight the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from the Western part of Jerusalem and the dispossession of their property in application of the above-mentioned laws – all leading to changing the demographic character of mandate Palestine.

Since the Nakba, individual Palestinian families have battled the Legal and Administrative Matters Law, which allowed Israelis to claim property in East Jerusalem dating back to pre-1948. He mentioned the example of Sheikh Jarrah, which consisted of twenty houses previously built by UNRWA for Palestinian families who had been displaced from the West Bank. Jewish settler organizations have been claiming ownership of the land for decades, triggering international condemnation. Similarly, in Silwan, and particularly Batn al-Hawa community, the Israeli General Custodian dispossessed several Palestinian residents of their lands and put them under the risk of forced eviction.

Mr. Nuseibah defined these laws and subsequent developments as part of Israel’s apartheid system. He called on the UN General Assembly to address explicitly the issue of apartheid and referred to former UN Special Rapporteur Michael Lynk’s recommendation to re-activate the UN Special Committee against Apartheid to investigate Israeli crimes in the OPT.

Dr. Dov Baum spoke of the corporations’ complicity in economic settlement activities and settler-colonialism through activities ranging from building settlements, providing the military with technological tools, enabling the privatization of state operations such as dispossessing and destroying civilian property. Dr. Baum mentioned the non-governmental organization Who Profits’ database containing 500 companies involved in Israeli settlements, as well as the American Friends Service Committee’s “Investigate. Info”, and the OHCHR publication of the list of 112 companies involved in settlement activities, in implementation of Human Rights Council Resolution 31/36.

Dr. Baum underlined the limited number of companies listed by OHCHR in its recent update, in which fifteen companies were taken off the list without new ones being added. The list lacked large corporations publicly and actively involved in settlement activities in the OPT. Dr. Baum gave the example of “General Mills”, operating in Atarot industrial zone in East Jerusalem, and which, following the publication of OHCHR database and advocacy of grassroot organizations, had committed to stop sourcing its products from the Atarot factory. It was

explained that the purpose of these grassroots campaigns was to make those multinational companies improve their human rights and businesses policies.

Dr. Baum briefly introduced the recently published report “Dispossession through bureaucracy in Occupied Jerusalem” by “Who Profits from Occupation” in February of this year. The report tackled the “Judaization” of Jerusalem through punitive bureaucratic processes such as residency, land and property registration laws – all considered discriminatory towards Palestinian residents. The companies listed in the report should be considered as an example for the expansion of the scope of corporate accountability and crimes of apartheid beyond economic settlement activities and include their responsibility in the restrictions of civil liberties and administrative discriminatory processes imposed on Palestinians in East Jerusalem.

Mr. Josh Ruebner highlighted how Israel’s settler-colonialism laws, policies and practices have sought to uproot and dispossess the indigenous Palestinian people from their lands – frequently fitting the definition of “apartheid”, as enshrined in the 1973 UN International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid. Despite a consensus on Israel’s responsibilities, the United States have failed to sanction Israel. On the contrary, they have contributed to entrench Israeli policies towards the Palestinian people. He mentioned the US Congress’ bipartisan standing ovation to Israeli President Isaac Herzog a few days prior and its failure to mention the country’s military rule over millions of Palestinians in the OPT. Similarly, the Biden administration had failed to reverse the US declaration on Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

Dozens of members of the US Congress had signed multiple letters over the years protesting US support for Israel’s ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from East Jerusalem. However, the current US administration had taken no action or response such as halting Israel’s illegal use of weapons. At the same time, growing numbers of members of Congress were naming Israeli policies as “apartheid”. Domestic public opinion was also growing in support of Palestinian rights, as indicated by a recent survey conducted by the Brookings Institute.

Mr. Ruebner called on the UN to urge the United States to fulfil its third-party obligations to hold accountable perpetrators of Israeli apartheid and to seek the reestablishment of the UN Special Committee against Apartheid for effective recommendations, including placing an arms embargo on Israel.

Ms. Nur Arafah reiterated that Jerusalem was a microcosm of Israel’s apartheid regime and its settler colonial regime seeking to displace the Palestinian population and expand Jewish domination over the City. This settler colonial project was a continuous practice, with the goal of transforming a multicultural and multireligious Jerusalem into a unified Jewish city under exclusive Israeli control and sovereignty. She referred to John Collins’ book “Global Palestine” to highlight that Israel’s occupation strategy focused around four logics: the elimination of Palestinian indigenous presence in East Jerusalem; the expansion through land acquisition with the annexation of the West Bank territory, including East Jerusalem, and the establishment of illegal settlements; the denial of historical Palestinian indigenous presence; and the logic of exceptionalism exemplified by the claim that the Jewish population represented the “chosen

people”. The denials were also based on the manipulation of history and archeology as powerful political tools to recreate and manufacture Jerusalem as a Jewish city.

In the ensuing discussion moderated by Ms. Arafah, speakers agreed on the existence of an apartheid regime in the City based on the structural domination of one group over another through violations of residency, family reunification and property rights. There was a need for action by the UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council to begin defining Israeli ongoing violations as “apartheid”. The panellists supported the grassroots call to revive the UN Special Committee against Apartheid, as it would provide a holistic way of understanding Israeli policies towards the Palestinians not only in the OPT. Such policies included Israel’s Nation-State Law stating that only Jewish people can enjoy the right to self-determination. The revived UN Committee would also provide a space for Member States to reflect on multilateral actions that could help overcome the US veto in the Security Council, and replicate tools such as comprehensive sanctions and arms embargo used to end South Africa’s Apartheid. On the OHCHR database of companies complicit of the Israeli settlement enterprise, the mere publication of the list represented a powerful tool to sensitize the companies on human rights violations and the need to disinvest in settlements. Its yearly update and publication remained critical.

During the Questions and Answers session that followed the discussion, the Permanent Observer of **the Arab League** to the United Nations explained the need for legal recognition of Israel’s apartheid system in an advisory opinion by the ICJ, to enable a General Assembly resolution on the reactivation of the UN Special Committee. While advocating for a GA referral to the ICJ, he called on Member States to continue their advocacy to the Security Council on the protection of Palestinian civilians and the status of Jerusalem. The representative of **Cuba** called on the international community to shoulder its responsibilities to provide protection to the Palestinian people and to pressure Israel to cease its repeated attacks on civilians and infrastructure. Questions from viewers in Cyprus and Mali inquired about the role of the ICJ in ending Israeli illegal occupation; the international community’s next steps in bringing Israeli accountability and civil society’s contribution in addressing the costs of occupation.

From East Jerusalem, **Rafat Sub Laban**, a member of a recently evicted East Jerusalemite family and a human rights lawyer, shared the story of his family’s eviction from their home in the Muslim quarter in the Old City. The 47 long-year legal battle leading to the eviction highlighted how Israeli courts, the Jerusalem municipality, the Antiquities Department, the Ministry of Interior, and the police work hand by hand with Jewish settler organizations for the forcible transfer of Palestinians in East Jerusalem to change the City’s demographic makeup and increase Jewish presence. He warned that the ethnic cleansing and forcible transfer committed in a systematic manner to expand the new Jewish quarter was spreading to other areas in the West Bank, such as South Hebron hills and Nablus. Mr. Sub Laban called on the UN to act for an end to settler colonialism that had been happening for seventy-five years.

The Chair concluded by thanking the speakers for taking the time to participate in the briefing, sharing valuable information and insights, and answering the questions.

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