

STATEMENT TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL

**BY AMBASSADOR CHEIKH NIANG
CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE OF
THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE**

**OPEN DEBATE
ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST,
INCLUDING THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION**

New York, 24 October 2023

Mr. President,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People thanks Brazil for its Presidency of the Security Council this month and expresses appreciation for the briefing of **Mr. Tor Wennesland**, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. The Committee also commends Secretary-General **António Guterres** for his tireless efforts to address the crisis we are facing.

Over the years, we have repeatedly warned that the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, was unsustainable. Without a political horizon, and in a context of relentless human rights violations, the deterioration of the situation and escalation become inevitable. Yet the Security Council remains unable to bring a halt to the bloodshed and to protect civilian lives - as regrettably witnessed with the veto last week.

On 7 October, I issued a statement condemning the killing and wounding of hundreds of civilians in Israel; we also condemned the taking of hostages. We welcome the recent release of 4 captives and

thank Qatar and Egypt for their efforts to this end. I further call for the release of all captives as well as all political prisoners.

On 17 October, the Bureau of the Committee issued a statement that, inter alia, condemned the killing and wounding of thousands of civilians and the targeting and widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure in the Gaza Strip.

Israel, the occupying Power, bears responsibility for protecting the civilian population and for the unfolding humanitarian disaster. Everyone repeatedly warned about the risks of explosion because Israel's 16-year-old illegal blockade on Gaza has transformed the Strip into an open-air prison and impoverished the population.

We strongly condemn Israel's reprisal air strikes and bombardment of the densely populated Gaza Strip, killing, as of 23 October over 5,087 Palestinians, including women and over 2,055 children and injuring more than 15,273 Palestinians. Thousands of others are said to remain under the rubble of their destroyed homes.

Particularly abhorrent war crimes are attacks on medical facilities, like the Al-Ahli Anglican hospital in Gaza City, where an air strike killed some 500 people, including children, women, men and medical personnel, or places of worship sheltering civilians, as the attack on the Greek Orthodox Saint Porphyrius Church, killing and wounding dozens.

It is estimated by UN OCHA that over 1.4 million Palestinians in Gaza have been displaced.

The Committee further condemns Israel's military orders for Palestinians in northern Gaza to 'evacuate' to the south of the Strip: there is nowhere safe to go in Gaza.

Forced transfer of people is a grave breach of international law. We second the call by the Secretary-General and UN agencies for Israel to rescind this evacuation order. We cannot stand by and watch another Nakba being inflicted on the Palestinian people.

Mr. President,

Wars have rules, which this Organization, this body must work for to uphold and ensure compliance with - always. Collective punishment, denial of humanitarian assistance, military attacks on homes, hospitals, places of worship, and schools and facilities where civilians seek refuge are violations of international humanitarian law.

We call for an immediate ceasefire.

Israel must immediately lift its total siege of Gaza and allow food, water, electricity, medical and other lifesaving supplies as their deliberate denial is tantamount to collective punishment of the 2.3 million Palestinians living in Gaza, half of whom are children. We commend Egypt for facilitating the entry of crucial humanitarian aid into

Gaza through the Rafah crossing and urge Israel to allow an unimpeded flow of assistance. Similarly, we praise Egypt's convening of the Cairo International Summit for Peace in the Middle East, on 21 October. We need more – not less dialogue.

UNRWA reported losing 35 staff members killed by Israel's bombings. Its facilities are sheltering over 600,000 internally displaced persons while its life-saving supplies are dwindling. The Agency has called for US\$104 million in emergency support. We call on all Member States to provide urgent financial assistance to UNRWA and to continue strongly supporting its indispensable mission.

We regret that the situation in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is also rapidly deteriorating, with 91 Palestinians, including over 20 children, killed since 7 October by Israeli occupying forces and settlers.

The Committee welcomes the decision by the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel to collect evidence of war crimes committed by all sides since 7 October 2023. It also joins the call for the International Criminal Court to launch a fact-finding mission to investigate violations of IHL. There must be accountability for all human rights violations and international law breaches perpetrated in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.

Mr. President, Excellencies,

The current crisis has proved once again the centrality of the Palestinian question to Middle East and global stability. While we are absorbed by the immediate need of securing a ceasefire and providing desperately needed humanitarian assistance, we must emphasize that there is no military solution to this conflict. We need to focus on our longstanding objectives: the end of the Israeli occupation and the fulfillment of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including to self-determination and independence. These are the pillars of a just and lasting peace.

I appeal to the Security Council and all Member States to overcome divisions and to act now to stop the bloodshed and protect the Palestinian people. We reiterate our call for an immediate ceasefire and for the delivery of urgent and unimpeded humanitarian assistance to all those in need.

Lastly, the Committee reiterates its appeals for serious international efforts leading to the sovereignty and independence of the State of Palestine on the basis of the 1967 lines, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with international law and relevant UN resolutions, and for providing a just solution for the plight of the Palestine refugees.

This – and not bloodshed - is the only path for a just and lasting resolution of the question of Palestine as well as for peace in the Middle East.

Thank you.