



Symposium

“Jerusalem and the Gaza War: Palestinian Identity and Existence Under Threat of Erasure”

Convened by the

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

the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)

OIC Headquarters - Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Monday, 1 July 2024

CHAIR SUMMARY

The **2024 Symposium on the Question of Jerusalem “*Jerusalem and the Gaza War: Palestinian Identity and Existence Under Threat of Erasure*”** was convened at the headquarters of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, under the joint auspices of the OIC and the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP). Ahead of the event, the Committee Delegation held a bilateral meeting with H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha, Secretary General of the OIC. The Delegation also conducted, following the Symposium, a visit to Riyadh to meet with representatives of the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The Symposium on Jerusalem aimed to highlight Israel’s policies of forced displacement and dispossession of the Palestinian people in the city, in the context of similar efforts elsewhere in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), and particularly in light of Israel’s ongoing war in Gaza and the onslaught of massive, forced displacement of the Palestinian civilian population. The event also showed the Committee’s support for OIC’s call for international action to stop Israel’s aggression and to reach a peaceful settlement of the conflict based on international law and relevant UN resolutions leading to an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

At the Opening Session, **the Secretary-General of the OIC, H.E. Mr. Hissein Brahim Taha**, stressed that the event was being held at a time when all felt the seriousness of the situation in the occupied city of Jerusalem, as a result of the repeated Israeli attacks on its Islamic and Christian sites and its Arab identity, through settlement policies, land confiscation, home demolitions, the construction of the separation wall, attacks on Muslim and Christian worshipers,

and other serious violations. He reiterated that Al-Quds al-Sharif was an integral part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory and that all Israeli policies and measures in the city were illegal and illegitimate, constituting an attack on the political, historical and legal rights of the Palestinian people and embodying a flagrant violation of international law and relevant UN resolutions. These policies threatened to expand the cycle of conflict to a dangerous religious one, affecting the security and stability in the entire region. He called for responsible international action to put an end to this situation.

Mr. Taha reiterated OIC's principled position condemning the Israeli military aggression on the Gaza Strip of now more than eight months, which had led to the death of nearly 40,000 civilians and the injury of 80,000, the majority being women and children. The military attacks were condemned for the destruction of hundreds of thousands of buildings, properties and civilian infrastructure, the forced displacement of more than one million Palestinians from their homes and the impediment on humanitarian aid to all Gaza. He expressed his disappointment at the failure of the UN Security Council to oblige Israel, the Occupying power, to implement its resolutions calling for an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire and the complete withdrawal of the Israeli occupation forces from Gaza and to ensure safe, sustainable and unhindered humanitarian access. In this context, the international community needed to shoulder its legal, political and moral responsibilities towards putting an end to the crime of genocide that was occurring in Gaza and to use all available international judicial mechanisms in order to deter Israel from committing further crimes and put an end to its impunity for the past and ongoing violations.

In his opening remarks, **the Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to the OIC, H.E. Mr. Saleh bin Hamad Al-Suhaibani**, called on the international community to intervene to stop the unjustified Israeli aggression against unarmed civilians in the OPT and urged the immediate implementation of all UN Security Council resolutions and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) provisional measures in response to the situation. He stressed the significance of the Holy City of Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa Mosque in the conscience and heart of the Islamic community, insisting that their status and historical Islamic identity must be respected.

Mr. Al-Suhaibani highlighted that his country was committed to supporting the Palestinian people on all levels to help them achieve their aspirations and the independence of the State of Palestine. He highlighted the Kingdom's intensive support for the Palestinian cause at the UN and other international forums, as well as its leadership of the Islamic-Arab Ad Hoc Ministerial Committee dedicated to formulating an international response to the Gaza war and launching a genuine political process for a permanent and comprehensive peace, in accordance with the resolutions adopted during the joint Islamic and Arab Summit held in Riyadh on 11 November 2023. He also referred to Saudi Arabia's active participation in the public ICJ sessions on the case about the legal consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the OPT. Mr. Al-Suhaibani also stressed the humanitarian support efforts through the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre, providing assistance to the affected Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, to alleviate their suffering as a result of the Israeli war, and mentioned that over the past few years Saudi Arabia had provided \$ 5.258 billion in support to Palestine.

He reiterated his country's firm position in support of the Palestinian cause and finding a just solution to the issue that would secure the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to return to their homeland, full sovereignty over their natural resources, the right to establish their independent state in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy, the Arab Peace Initiative submitted by Saudi Arabia, and the establishment of a Palestinian state on the basis of the 1967 borders. The Palestinian cause and the rights of its people to their land would not expire over time or with Israel's attempts to impose a *fait accompli*. The Symposium confirmed the concrete efforts to defend those rights and increase international awareness on the question of Palestine.

For his part, **the Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations for the Middle East, Asia and the Pacific, Mr. Khaled Khiari**, reiterated the call of Secretary-General Guterres to all parties for a humanitarian, permanent and immediate ceasefire, the release of all hostages, respect for humanitarian principles and international law, and to ensure that UN workers were protected. There was no better and more secure answer to preserving Palestinian identity than the vision of two States – Israel and a fully independent, contiguous, viable and sovereign Palestinian State, of which Gaza was an integral part – living side by side in peace and security within secure and recognized borders, on the basis of the pre-1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States.

As international efforts continued towards reaching a deal that would release the hostages and put in place an immediate ceasefire, he called to establish a political framework that would also move towards a long-term political resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the vision of two States living side by side in peace.

The Chair of the Committee and Permanent Representative of Senegal to the United Nations in New York, Ambassador Cheikh Niang, reminded that amid the ongoing Israeli aggression in Gaza, at least 1.7 million Palestinians had been displaced – more than three quarters of the area's whole population – and more than one million people did not have drinking water or food, nor access to medical assistance. He referred to the recently published UN Secretary-General report on Children and Armed Conflict, which found that this conflict alone has led to a 155 per cent increase in grave violations against Palestinian children.

He highlighted that in East Jerusalem, amidst the ongoing war, the demographic and historical character of the city continued to be altered by illegal Israeli policies and measures, including the violation of Palestinians' freedoms of movement and worship, the destruction of old buildings owned by Palestinians and the construction of railroads and cable cars, as well as archaeological excavations affecting the Christian and Muslim quarters.

Mr. Niang welcomed the recent recognition of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, by a number of countries in the Caribbean – Barbados, the Bahamas, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago – and Europe – Armenia, Ireland, Norway, Slovenia and Spain. Similar steps were consistent with international law and relevant UN resolutions and would strengthen international efforts aimed at ending the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territory. He called on Member States to accept Palestine's membership in the UN as an independent and fully sovereign state in common with the others, and to uphold all inalienable rights of the Palestinian

people. Finally, he reiterated the Committee's firm commitment and advocacy efforts with Member States and in collaboration with the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation to achieve a just and lasting peaceful settlement, based on the two-State solution, and leading to an independent and sovereign Palestinian State on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.

In his remarks, the representative of the State of Palestine, **Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations in New York Ambassador Riyadh Mansour**, underscored that since the beginning of the Israeli aggression in Gaza, the State of Palestine had been able to unite the Arab and Islamic position at the UN in New York, around three important goals – the immediate cessation of the aggression in the Gaza Strip and throughout the OPT, the unhindered entry of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip, and the cessation of war crimes and the forced displacement of the Palestinians in Gaza. Additionally, he highlighted the adoption of a set of Security Council and General Assembly resolutions supporting these objectives.

He pointed at the advocacy in the Caribbean region and Western Europe which have led to the recognition of the State of Palestine by many Member States in these regions, including all CARICOM. In this regard, the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine praised the role played by the Islamic Arab Ministerial Committee, led by Saudi Arabia, which had toured capitals, including those of the five permanent members of the Security Council, to stop the Israeli aggression and promote the recognition of the State of Palestine.

During the plenary session, **the Minister of Jerusalem Affairs of the State of Palestine, H.E. Mr. Ashraf Al-Awar**, expressed his appreciation to the UN Committee and the OIC for their constant and crucial support for the Palestinian cause and their continuous efforts to preserve the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. The Symposium came at a critical time when Israel was intensifying its aggression against the Palestinian people, reflected by the growing indiscriminatory ideology of political parties in Israel and their actions on the ground. In addition to the war on Gaza, there was the Judaization process to alter the judicial and historical status of the Holy Sites in Jerusalem, including the ongoing excavations under Al-Aqsa Mosque and the imposition of restrictions on Palestinian worshippers during the Friday prayers. Displacement, dispossession, land confiscation and evacuation orders in Sheikh Jarrah and other neighbourhoods in Jerusalem continued to allow illegal Israeli settlements to expand and separate Jerusalem from its Palestinian hinterland, making Palestinian residents a minority in their own city. In the occupied West Bank, Israeli settlements were being built with the intention to isolate Jerusalem from Hebron, Bethlehem and Ramallah, and the E1 project aimed to separate the southern West Bank from its northern parts.

Mr. Al-Awar called for an international response to bring accountability and justice to Israeli actions and concrete measures to end the Israeli occupation. The Security Council must implement its resolutions, avoid double standards and abide by the legal and moral obligations to afford protection to the Palestinian people in the Occupied Territory, including East Jerusalem.

Ms. Maha Samman, Associate Professor at Al-Quds University, gave a presentation on Israel's colonialist planning in Jerusalem, touching on the geopolitical context of the city, the Israeli alterations of its boundaries since 1948 and the ensuing demographic war that had

been taking place with the purpose to decrease the existence of a group that preceded the creation of an Israeli state – the Palestinians. She explained how colonialist urban planning has been one of the important tools employed to achieve a full control over Palestinian residents and their marginalization, leading to a disconnection of the people from their land and heritage. For example, after the 1967 War, the boundaries of the city were expanded in a crooked way so as to include as much as possible vacant land for the construction of Israeli settlements and exclude Palestinian populated areas – culminating in the construction of the Separation Wall in 2002.

The Old City of Jerusalem had subsequently suffered from degraded housing units following difficulties in obtaining rehabilitation permits for the Palestinian residents and a commercial dry-up with the shutdown of shops due to the inability of owners to pay imposed high fees and taxes. The difficulty to obtain construction permits led to “illegal” units that were then demolished by the Israeli authorities, with 22,000 demolition orders to date and an average of 100 demolitions per year in the city, leading to a state of dispossession and loss among the Palestinian residents and to some case to self-demolition of property. In areas where the Bedouin communities resided, the latter also faced displacement, demolitions and sewage dumping from Israeli settlements in an attempt to force them to leave. The use of colonialist urban planning therefore resulted in deteriorated Arab neighbourhoods, affecting the everyday life of Palestinians.

Ms. Samman explained that Gaza, following the Israeli 2005 Disengagement Plan, had become the biggest open prison with unmet basic education, medical, food, power assistance needs. Restricted access within 300 meters of the perimeter side with Israel and off the Gaza coast had affected the access to livelihoods including agriculture and fishing – all showing how the Israeli control of space and people has changed from one form to another, but never ceased. Over the years, these restrictions had been compounded by military aggression, culminating in the current war.

Mr. Munir Nuseibah, Director of Al-Quds Human Rights Clinic and Community Action Centre, spoke of an unprecedented level of suffering faced by the Palestinian people today in Gaza with mass destruction and displacement, famine and degrading treatment inflicted upon them. In East Jerusalem, there was also an increasing oppression through the revocation of residencies, dispossession of lands and their confiscations for Israeli “public interest” through the use of Israel’s legal system, including the Absentee Property Law.

He welcomed the intensified efforts at the United Nations to hold Israel accountable for its crimes and address the complicity of some Member States in Israel’s continuing impunity. He lauded recent initiatives towards individual sanctions, including by Malaysia and Turkey. He called for a similar move by regional organisations such as the OIC and the League of Arab States. Member States should also join legal efforts initiated by South Africa against Israel at the ICJ and support other initiatives to enforce Third State responsibility, as done by Nicaragua against Germany, also in the ICJ. Other laudable initiatives in the framework of a prolonged campaign to hold the Israeli state officials accountable included the investigations of the International Criminal Court (ICC), which had requested arrest warrants against Israeli officials. He also recommended that the UN Committee consider means for the reactivation of the previous UN Committee Against Apartheid to work against apartheid in Israel.

During the discussion, **the Kingdom of Morocco** reaffirmed its support for the Palestinian cause as key to the stability and peace in the Middle East and its commitment to achieve a permanent solution, as well as its humanitarian assistance to Gaza. The Morocco representative called for a ceasefire and the protection of civilians to stop the bloodshed and to create conditions conducive to a peaceful solution. **Indonesia** thanked the Committee for holding the Symposium. It highlighted the need for OIC Members to uphold the status of Jerusalem in times of war on Gaza and to address the root causes of occupation, mediate for a ceasefire in Gaza and work towards accountability for the crimes committed, to continue to push for the freedom of the Palestinian people and their independence based on the two-State solution.

In the closing session, **Ambassador Riyad Mansour (Palestine)** called the event an important step in reviving collective action. The presence of the full Bureau delegation at the event showed the determination of the Committee to continue its collaboration with the OIC to achieve justice for the Palestinian people. He underscored that the summation of these collective efforts would soon lead not only to stopping the genocidal war on Gaza, but also to the accomplishment of common goals – the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including those to self-determination, return and statehood.

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****Note: This Summary attempts to provide an overall picture of the deliberations of the Conference. A detailed report, including specific questions that were addressed during the interactive discussions, will be published by the Division for Palestinian Rights in due course.*