



# General Assembly

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## Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

### Summary record of the 397th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 20 November 2019, at 3 p.m.

*Chair:* Mr. Gertze (Vice-Chair) ..... (Namibia)

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*In the absence of Mr. Niang (Senegal), Mr. Gertze (Namibia), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

*The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.*

### **Adoption of the agenda**

1. *The agenda was adopted.*

### **The situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and developments in the political process**

2. **Mr. Mansour** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that, at a meeting of the Security Council held earlier that day, to which he had been invited, where the Council considered the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, he had rejected the unilateral declaration made earlier by the United States that Israeli settlements did not violate international law. It was an outrageous declaration, similar to the decision taken by the United States to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and to move its embassy to that city, in violation of international law and Security Council resolutions. Following the debate, the European Union had issued a common press statement on the need to uphold international law, in which it rejected annexation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and declared that the Israeli settlements were illegal. He, along with representatives from the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Indonesia and Kuwait, had also spoken to the media to emphasize the importance of upholding international law and Security Council resolutions. It was his hope that the support of the international community would lead to an end to the occupation, the implementation of the two-State solution and the establishment of an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

3. His delegation condemned the latest acts of aggression against Palestinians in Gaza, during which 34 Palestinians had been killed by the Israeli occupying forces. An independent investigation should be conducted into those crimes to ensure that those responsible were brought to justice, and that the occupying Power ended the blockade in Gaza, where 2 million Palestinians had been living in misery for the past 12 years. His delegation was planning to hold a ministerial meeting with the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and other countries to consider ways of preventing further threats to international law, including Security Council resolutions. The Committee was at the forefront of efforts to advance the cause of the Palestinian people, who were determined to continue to work towards the attainment of their inalienable rights.

### **Consideration of draft resolutions on the question of Palestine**

4. **Mr. Mansour** (Observer for the State of Palestine), introducing the four draft resolutions submitted under agenda item 35, said that the first three resolutions, which dealt with the work of the Committee, the Division of Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat, and the Special Information Programme of the Department of Global Communications of the Secretariat, were similar to the versions adopted the previous year, with only technical updates. The fourth draft resolution, which dealt with the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, had been shortened by removing specific examples, but all principles related to the basis of the just solution had been retained.

5. **The Chair** said he took it that the Committee wished to approve the four draft resolutions and recommend them to the General Assembly.

6. *It was so decided.*

7. **Mr. Abdelaziz** (Observer for the League of Arab States) said that the approval of the draft resolutions related to the question of Palestine with their substantive content intact was a commendable achievement. It had been especially important to approve the draft resolution that referred to the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East without the proposed concessions restricting or curtailing its mandate.

8. At the request of the State of Palestine, the Council of the League of Arab States would convene an extraordinary meeting at the ministerial level on 25 November 2019 to address the United States Government's new position on Israeli settlements in the West Bank, namely, that it no longer considered them to be in violation of international law. In the interim, the League of Arab States had issued a declaration in which it categorically condemned the regrettable change in position, which would embolden Israeli settlers to continue perpetrating acts of violence against the Palestinian people and reduce from slim to none the chances of achieving a just peace premised upon ending the occupation. The United States decision cast doubt on that country's capacity to act as an impartial mediator in the peace process and undermined its credibility as a global power. The League of Arab States also affirmed that all States without exception were required to abide by international law, and that the world continued to condemn Israeli occupation and settlements, which remained null, void and without legal effect. Any endorsement of or participation in settlement activity was morally reprehensible.

9. The Security Council had failed to issue a statement opposing the decision by the United States owing to the latter's opposition; however, it was widely recognized that the United States was isolated in its stance, as the international position remained firm. With the support of the Committee, it might yet be possible to oppose the campaign of hostile actions taken against Palestine by the United States, which had begun with that State's unilateral recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and its recognition of Israeli occupation of the Syrian Arab Golan as legitimate.

10. **Ms. Rodríguez Abascal** (Cuba) said that the progress made in gaining broader support for draft resolutions concerning Palestine by larger majorities than in previous years must be sustained. Committee members must work with the wider United Nations membership to increase the number of votes in favour of the four resolutions in order to send a clear political message of opposition to the United States Government's new illegal decision. The Cuban Minister for Foreign Affairs had condemned that decision in the strongest terms, characterizing it as an escalation against the Palestinian people that would further undermine prospects for regional peace and stability.

11. **Mr. Elhomosany** (Observer for Egypt) said that his delegation reiterated its support for the Palestinian cause and its rejection of Israeli settlements, which it considered illegal. Egypt would continue to cooperate with its Palestinian brethren by voting in favour of the draft resolution concerning Jerusalem and sponsoring it in the General Assembly, and called on all Member States to follow suit.

**Briefing by the Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory**

12. **Mr. McGoldrick** (Deputy Special Coordinator for the Middle East Process, United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory) said that political failure and paralysis had led to the humanitarian crisis that was affecting Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. During a recent three-day period of heightened hostility, 34 people had been killed and 101 injured, and homes and power lines had been damaged. Moreover, hundreds of civilians had been killed and thousands wounded by live ammunition since the "Great March of Return" protests began on 30 March 2018, placing a huge strain on an already underfunded and undermaintained health system, and forcing doctors to postpone other surgical operations in order to deal with patients with gunshot wounds.

13. The dire living conditions in Gaza, which were causing residents to lose any hope for the future, had led to an alarming increase in psychosocial problems among the population, in particular children, as well as an upsurge in cases of gender-based domestic violence, drug dependency and suicide. People with serious illnesses needed to apply for permits from the Israeli authorities in order to receive the required medical treatment outside Gaza, but over a third of applications had been rejected in 2019, as were over half of all permits for parents whose children needed treatment. Cancer patients requiring radiotherapy were not receiving a full course of treatment, which made them much less likely to survive. In such a context, it was essential to ensure that key services for Palestinians living in Gaza were not caught up in a political "tug of war".

14. There was a serious problem of service collapse in Gaza, including in hospitals, where medical staff had to manually operate life support devices for children during 50-second delays in switching from power-plant to self-generated power. Moreover, a total of 97 per cent of the water supply in Gaza was not potable, which meant that residents had to devote limited resources to buying clean water, and many people relied on debt and remittances to survive. The rights of the children of Gaza were being dismissed, as evidenced by the detention of an average of 200 children in Israeli prison centres every month, and early marriage had been identified as a key driver of domestic violence. A political commitment was clearly needed to change the situation in Gaza and to ensure a better future for its population.

15. Settler violence had increased for the fourth consecutive year. Between January and July 2019, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs had documented over 190 attacks attributed to Israeli settlers, which had resulted in many Palestinian casualties and damage to property. The lack of accountability for such attacks and for the takeover of public and private Palestinian land by settlers were a serious cause of concern. Following the departure of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron in January 2019, there had also been a marked increase in settler attacks in Hebron. In East Jerusalem, the Israeli authorities had evicted three families from their homes, handing over the properties to an Israeli settlement organization, and the members of over 200 Palestinian households were facing evictions. Demolitions in East Jerusalem on the grounds of a lack of building permits took place in the framework of a restrictive planning regime, which made it impossible for Palestinians to meet their basic housing infrastructure needs.

16. **Mr. Mansour** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that his delegation urged Committee members to draw upon the information provided by the Deputy Special Coordinator, however disheartening, when articulating their positions on the conflict. The sheer brutality of the Israeli occupation and its impact on hundreds of thousands of Palestinian civilians was often obscured in media coverage,, which tended to focus on other aspects of the conflict. Over the previous year, more than 30,000 Palestinians had been injured, 7,000 of them with live ammunition, and some 1,700 were at risk of losing limbs because of the tragic state of the health sector in the Gaza Strip. Such detailed information, which attested to the cruelty of the occupation, should be made available to the widest audience possible.

#### **Update on developments since the previous meeting of the Committee**

17. **Ms. Raz** (Afghanistan) said that on 11 and 12 September, the Chair had participated in the 2019 United Nations International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East, held in Ankara, Turkey. The event, organized by the Palestine Programme of the United Nations Department of Global Communications, in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, had brought together diplomats, journalists, media experts and youth representatives from Israel, Palestine, Turkey and other countries.

18. On 3 October, a Committee delegation had met in Dublin with the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Ireland to discuss the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The Foreign Minister had reiterated his country's continued engagement and support for Palestinian rights, which ranked high on the foreign policy agenda of Ireland. The delegation had then participated in a Committee-sponsored closed-door legal seminar on deterring the annexation of the Palestinian territory and rolling back Israeli settlements through harnessing third-party State responsibility. A series of actionable recommendations had been made on holding Israel, the occupying Power, accountable for violations of international law.

19. From 21 to 25 October, the Committee, in collaboration with the Government of Senegal, had organized in Dakar a seminar for Palestinian officials on best practices in water management. The seminar had served to establish direct links between Palestinian and Senegalese experts. Palestine had offered to share expertise on advanced irrigation techniques, archiving procedures and biodiversity surveying methods, within the context of South-South and triangular cooperation.

20. On 28 October, two Palestinian staff from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had begun the annual six-week training programme at United Nations Headquarters organized by the Committee to familiarize themselves with the work of the United Nations on the Palestinian issue. From 29 to 31 October, the Committee had supported the participation of two diplomats from the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Palestinian International Cooperation Agency in a training session at the United Nations System Staff College in Turin, Italy on United Nations catalytic role that the United Nations could play in promoting South-South and triangular cooperation in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

21. On 5 November, the Chair had met with a group of Palestinian journalists participating in the annual training programme organized by the Department of Global Communications for media practitioners. The Chair had informed the trainees about the work of the Committee and engaged them in a lively informal discussion on the situation in the Middle East and the work of the United Nations.

#### **Update on activities organized in observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People**

22. **The Chair** said that the special meeting in observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People would be held on 27 November 2019, and requested delegations to be represented at the ambassadorial level. While no statements from Member States would be delivered during the meeting, the Committee would greatly appreciate messages of solidarity from Heads of State or Government in connection with the important occasion. At the meeting, the Chair would read out a list of the Heads of State from which messages had been received. Remarks by civil society representatives would be included, per the usual practice.

#### **Updates from Member States on their activities related to the question of Palestine**

23. **Mr. Awawdeh** (Observer for the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)) said that OIC rejected and condemned the declaration by the United States that Israeli settlements did not contravene international law. That stance was itself a flagrant violation of international law and relevant Security Council resolutions, all of which affirmed that Israeli settlements were illegal and represented an aggression against the Palestinian people's rights. The United States Government's biased stand in favour of the Israeli occupation, defying the international consensus,

violated international law and undermined international efforts to achieve a lasting peace based on the two-State solution.

24. OIC had conducted a number of activities in support of Palestine in recent months, including a meeting of the Executive Committee of OIC held on 17 July to examine Israeli violations in East Jerusalem, and a symposium on Israeli settlement expansion held on 6 March 2019, in cooperation with the European Parliament and with the participation of many European institutions. OIC would also be hosting a seminar in Ramallah about the Islamic-Christian identity of Jerusalem and a fundraising conference to support the OIC strategic plan for development in Jerusalem.

25. **Ms. Ashour** (Observer for Saudi Arabia) said that 70 years on, the Palestinian people continued to languish under an occupation that flouted international resolutions and norms. The question of Palestine remained central to the Government and people of Saudi Arabia and figured prominently in the country's foreign policy agenda. Expressions of the commitment of Saudi Arabia to Palestine over the month of November 2019 included an official statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs rejecting the United States declaration that Israeli settlements did not violate international law. The Council of Ministers had condemned the air raids on the Gaza Strip carried out by Israeli occupation forces, and hailed the international consensus reached in the vote to renew the mandate of the UNRWA for three years.

26. Saudi Arabia had also delivered a speech on behalf of the League of Arab States affirming the centrality of the question of Palestine in joint Arab efforts and initiatives in regional and international forums. In September 2019, Saudi Arabia had announced that it would contribute \$50 million to UNRWA, bringing the country's total contributions to the Agency since 2000 to \$900 million.

27. **Mr. Baati** (Tunisia) said that his country had issued three statements in support of the Palestinian people in recent weeks. In the first two statements, it had denounced Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people and acknowledged the thirty-first anniversary of the establishment of the State of Palestine, respectively. In the third statement, issued in response to the declaration by the United States of its change in position regarding Israeli settlements, Tunisia had stressed that legitimizing occupation of Arab territories was null, void and without legal effect and constituted a flagrant violation of international instruments and customary law, which provided the basis for any legal resolution of the question of Palestine.

*The meeting rose at 4.35 p.m.*