

Check against delivery

STATEMENT TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL

BY AMBASSADOR NEVILLE GERTZE

**VICE-CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE OF
THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE**

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

New York, 28 October 2019

Mr. President,

On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian people I would like, at the outset, to commend the leadership of the delegation of South Africa in its presidency of the Security Council this month.

Mr. President,

As we gather quarterly in this Council to collectively consider the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, I can only lament the ongoing illegal occupation of the Palestinian territory and the worsening situation on the ground, negatively impacting the rights of Palestinians, including children, but also the security of Israelis and the prospects for a peaceful and just solution of the question of Palestine, which has already been too long delayed.

Violence and loss of life have continued, illegal Israeli settlements have expanded, demolitions of Palestinian homes and evictions of their inhabitants have accelerated, and the humanitarian and economic situation in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, have continued to deteriorate under the oppressive weight and as a result of the illegal practices of Israel's 52-year military occupation.

Allow me to reiterate in the strongest terms that Israeli settlements in occupied areas are illegal under international law and, as reaffirmed, *inter alia*, in Security Council resolution 2334 (2016). Israel must halt

their expansion immediately and completely. The Committee joins calls for reports of the Secretary-General on implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) to be provided in writing and to include Member States' reports on how they comply with operative paragraph 5 requiring Member States to distinguish, in their dealings, between Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

Such measures of distinction/differentiation are of utmost necessity for upholding international law, including relevant UN resolutions, and ensuring non-support to and non-recognition of this illegal situation. In this regard, the Committee looks forward to the publication by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the relevant database, as mandated by Human Rights Council resolution 31/36 (2016).

The Committee expresses its profound concern about escalating rhetoric and threats by Israeli officials regarding intentions to annex settlements and the Jordan Valley. The Jordan Valley makes up to 30 per cent of the occupied West Bank and is home to more than 65,000 Palestinians. Annexation is strictly prohibited under international law and cannot go unchallenged by the international community, obliging this Council to act should such an aggression be committed.

As recently stated by UN Special Rapporteur Michael Lynk quote-
“by annexing these areas, Israel will further confine Palestinians to live

in small, fragmented and disconnected cantons while others will continue to live under Israeli military rule. The annexation, if realized, will effectively entrench a one-state reality of separate and vastly unequal legal systems, political rights and social opportunities.” End of quote. The international community must consider what this would mean in regard to the viability of the longstanding international consensus on the two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders, which such an action would effectively terminate.

The Committee also expresses its grave concerns regarding recurrent and rising tensions in Jerusalem at the Holy Sites, including continuing provocations, incitement and violations at Al-Aqsa Mosque. The Committee urges Israeli authorities to abide by international law and avoid actions that undermine an already fragile situation there and calls for respect of the historic and legal status quo and of the sanctity of the holy sites.

Mr. President,

In Gaza the situation equally remains volatile as weekly “Great March of Return” demonstrations and ensuing casualties among Palestinian civilians have continued, alongside the indiscriminate firing of rockets into Israel. The dire economic situation and especially insufficient energy supply, combined with scarcity of essential medicines, is causing a health care crisis, with the health system reported

to be near collapse. We reiterate our call to Israel, the occupying Power, to abide by international standards in regard to the use of force. We also call on Palestinian militants in Gaza to stop the indiscriminate firing of rockets into southern Israel.

The Committee welcomes steps by the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC), as presented in its September report, to bring relief to the population through a package of urgent humanitarian and economic interventions for Gaza. These measures should go hand in hand with efforts to address the continuing fiscal crisis faced by the Palestinian Government, hampering its ability to deliver services to the population.

While welcoming different measures to alleviate the suffering of the residents of Gaza, the Committee is of the view that only the lifting of the 12-years long Israeli blockade of Gaza would allow for the normal movement of people and goods, the recovery and growth of Palestinian economy, and lift the population out of poverty and chronic unemployment, providing needed hope and opportunities, especially to youth, who continue to experience rising rates of despair.

Mr. President,

In September, UNRWA was able to reopen 709 schools allowing 530,000 refugee children to continue their education. However, the Agency's financial situation remains challenging, albeit improved following the Ministerial pledging conference held on 26 September in

New York. The Committee reiterates its call to all Member States to provide UNRWA with reliable and sustainable funding necessary to deliver critical humanitarian services to the Palestine refugees in all five fields of operation, contributing to their development, protection and to stability in the region. We also urge Member States to continue strongly supporting its General Assembly mandate, which is to be renewed in November.

We commend Egypt and others for their ongoing efforts to advance the reconciliation process and call on the Palestinian parties to actively engage toward this end. Achieving reconciliation, and holding general elections to be organized soon, as announced by President Mahmoud Abbas at the 74th High-level session of the General Assembly, would constitute positive steps toward reuniting the Palestinian people under a single, legitimate Palestinian national government.

Mr. President,

The only just and viable solution to ensure peace and prosperity in the region remains the international consensus on how to resolve this conflict: two States living side by side, in peace and security along the pre-1967 borders with East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian State.

We are at a critical juncture and it is time for the parties and the international community alike to break the inertia and “walk the talk”. We must implement all the resolutions adopted in this Chamber and face our collective responsibility vis-à-vis past and future generations of Palestinian and Israelis. We all know that making the two-State solution a reality is the only way forward for peace and stability in the region. It’s time to act to bring an end to the Israeli occupation, to realize long-denied Palestinian rights, including to self-determination and freedom, and to make peace a reality. The failure to act will only hasten the demise of the two-State solution and bring more conflict and suffering.

I thank you.

////// End ////