

**STATEMENT TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL**

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**BY AMBASSADOR ADELA RAZ**

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

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

New York, 22 January 2020

**Mr. President,**

On behalf of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, I would, at the outset, like to congratulate the delegation of Viet Nam for its able conduct of the presidency of the Security Council this month. I would also like to thank Viet Nam, a brotherly Observer State of the Committee, for its long-standing support of the just Palestinian cause.

The Committee would also like to congratulate Estonia, Niger, Saint Vincent and Grenadines and Tunisia for taking their seat on the Council and wish them all success in upholding their lofty responsibilities.

**Mr. President,**

We thank Under-Secretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo for her briefing on the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. Let me also thank Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Ms. Ursula Mueller for the comprehensive briefing on the humanitarian situation.

As we gather in this Council in this New Year and decade to consider the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, the heightened geopolitical tensions and turmoil in the region remind all of us that peace must never be taken for granted and that it

must be preserved and nourished. We must uphold and fulfil the values enshrined in the UN Charter, which remains our shared framework to averting and resolving conflict and injustice.

Recent developments underscore, more than ever, the need for today's debate on the Palestinian question, lest it be sidelined or forgotten in the face of the current turmoil. May I remind that leaving this question unresolved, in the context of the stalled peace process and the evolving dangerous realities on the ground, constitutes a serious negligence of our collective duties under the Charter and threat to the peace and security of the region and beyond.

In particular, in this volatile environment, the ongoing illegal occupation of the Palestinian territory and worsening situation on the ground cannot be ignored as "business as usual". The year 2019 saw a 45 per cent increase in demolitions and confiscations of Palestinian homes in the West Bank including East Jerusalem compared to 2018, according to figures released by OCHA. Moreover, just at the beginning of this month, Israel approved the construction of 1,936 more new settler units in illegal settlements across the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.

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

settlements are not illegal and might even advance Israeli-Palestinian peace are totally unfounded and offensive. Israel must halt settlement construction and expansion immediately and completely. The reports of the Secretary-General on implementation of resolution 2334 (2016) should include Member States' reports on how they comply with operative paragraph 5 calling on Member States to distinguish, in their dealings, between Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, including in regard to settlement activities.

Similarly, tensions triggered by Israeli occupying forces' attacks on worshipers inside the Al-Aqsa Mosque Compound threaten further destabilization that must be averted. The Islamic Jerusalem Waqf is the sole institution responsible for administrating the affairs of the Al-Aqsa Mosque Compound, including maintenance of its inside and outside walls. The Committee urges Israeli, the occupying Power, to abide by all of its obligations under international law and avoid actions that undermine an already fragile status quo.

Mr. President,

In a positive development, on 13 December 2019, the General Assembly voted to extend the mandate of the UNRWA until 2023. The overwhelming vote in favor of the extension is an indication of the unwavering support of the international community for the mandate and the necessary work of the Agency in support of 5.5 million Palestine

refugees. 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 and thus contribute to the stability in the region.

Moreover, in December the General Assembly adopted with overwhelming majorities all the resolutions on the Question of Palestine, including the one on this Committee's mandate and another one on the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, including the right to their independent State, which garnered the support of over 90 per cent of the UN membership. This is once again a testament that these resolutions are firmly rooted in the UN Charter, international law, and human rights law and confirm the support of most of the world. This international consensus must be upheld and must serve as the focal point for all of our collective efforts to promote a just, lasting and peaceful solution.

On 20 December 2019, the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, based on the referral from the State of Palestine, and following a thorough, independent and objective assessment of all reliable information available to her Office, decided to proceed with the investigation into alleged war crimes committed in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip. The Committee welcomes the announcement by the Chief Prosecutor and trusts that such an investigation would serve the interests of justice and peace.

**Mr. President,**

The humanitarian and economic situation of the two million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip continues to deteriorate and has reached the critical juncture warned of by the UN Country Team in its report “Gaza 2020: A Livable Place?” necessitating urgent humanitarian and political action. We reiterate our strongest calls for the lifting of the 12-year long Israeli blockade of Gaza.

Allow me also to reiterate the support of the Committee for the reconciliation process led by Egypt and others that are not sparing any efforts in this regard. The Committee also expresses its full support for the holding of general elections in the State of Palestine, including East-Jerusalem, with a view to reuniting the Palestinian people under a single, legitimate and democratic Palestinian national government.

**Mr. President,**

In these uncertain times, when the Middle East is facing unprecedented levels of tensions, we call on this Council, as the guarantor of international peace and security, to take up its responsibilities, to implement its relevant resolutions, and take overdue action on the Palestinian question for the sake of generations of Palestinians and Israelis who seek to live side by side in peace and security, along the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital of the independent Palestinian State.

Thank you.