**United Nations Meeting Summary: Human Rights Council Holds Interactive Dialogue with the Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory**

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The Human Rights Council in a midday meeting held an interactive dialogue with the Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, followed by a general debate on the human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories. The Council then began a general debate on the follow-up to and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

Presenting the oral update, Santiago Canton, Chair of the Commission of Inquiry on the 2018 protests in the occupied Palestinian territory, noted that each member of the Commission was committed to discharging the mandate with the sole objective of contributing to the promotion of human rights, and only in accordance with the principles and values of the United Nations Charter. He encouraged Member States, media, individuals and non-governmental organizations to assist the Commission in its work by communicating information relevant to the mandate. The Commission would not adopt interpretations that failed to uphold universal human rights and international humanitarian law standards, Mr. Canton emphasized and called on the Government of Israel to provide access to the Gaza Strip, the West Bank including East Jerusalem, and Israel.

Israel did not take the floor as a concerned country.

State of Palestine, speaking as a concerned country, said that the unjust siege of the Gaza Strip for the past 10 years amounted to a collective punishment and had had a destructive impact on the rights of Palestinians. The siege had led the people to take to the streets in peaceful demonstration, especially after the United States’ illegal declaration recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The Great March of Return of 30 March had been faced by live fire from the occupation forces in which scores had died and hundreds had been wounded. Since the beginning of the year, 224 Palestinians had been killed. The excessive use of force against peaceful demonstrators constituted premeditated murder and amounted to a crime against humanity.

In the ensuing discussion, speakers condemned the inhumane siege imposed on the Gaza Strip by Israel, and the killing of peaceful demonstrators in cold blood, as well as the targeting of children and medical workers. They expressed hope that the Commission of Inquiry would submit clear recommendations that would put an end to the impunity by Israeli soldiers. Speakers emphasized that the disproportionate use of force could not be excused, and the failure of the international community to maintain focus and support for the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry could only be qualified as the collective shame of each Member State of the United Nations. If Israel had nothing to hide, then it should cooperate with the Commission, which was international, independent and impartial. Speakers also expressed concern about the recent withdrawal of aid contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the only international agency protecting the rights of Palestinian refugees. The international community should keep up solidarity and push Israel and Palestine towards early resumption of the peace talks.

Speaking were Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Togo on behalf of the African Group, Tunisia on behalf of the Arab Group, European Union, Qatar, Brazil, Malaysia, Libya, Pakistan, Tunisia, Maldives, Namibia, Saudi Arabia, Syria, China, Egypt, Bolivia, Sudan, Venezuela, Iran, Costa Rica, Iraq, Bangladesh, Algeria, Bahrain, South Africa, Luxembourg, Turkey, Lebanon, Belgium, Jordan, Sweden, Ireland, Spain, Indonesia, Afghanistan, Slovenia, and Morocco.

Also taking the floor were the following non-governmental organizations: Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights, Al-Haq, Law in the Service of Man, Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, Defence for Children International, International-Lawyers.Org, The Palestinian Return Centre Ltd, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association and Conseil International pour le soutien à des procès équitables et aux Droits de l'Homme.

The Council then held a general debate on the situation of human rights in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories.

Israel did not take the floor as a concerned country.

State of Palestine, speaking as a concerned country, noted that Israel thought that by not participating in discussions under agenda item 7 it would avoid accountability and responsibility. Israel was encouraging terrorism and was continuing its systematic aggression against Palestine through a policy of settlements, cleansing, attacks on religious leaders and sites, and stealing money and resources. It was violating all resolutions signed and carrying out arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances.

Syria, speaking as a concerned country, warned that Israel was moving towards a new state of terrorism and that there was no doubt it would continue its aggressive behaviour because of the support from the United States. The countries that defended Israel’s occupation of Palestine and Golan, its extremist behaviour, abuse of people and violations of humanitarian laws, were complicit in Israel’s violations. In the Syrian Golan, punishment measures were still in place on inhabitants as part of a systematic policy that aimed to cut ties between the people of Golan and Syria.

In the ensuing discussion, speakers rejected the decision of some countries to remove item 7 from the Council’s agenda. Israel, the occupying power, continued its violations against the Palestinian people through the construction and expansion of illegal settlements. Israel’s passing of the Jewish nation-State bill aimed at legitimizing its institutional discrimination against its Arab Palestinian citizens, and at turning the de facto apartheid regime into a de iure reality. That law built on dozens of racist and discriminatory laws against non-Jews. Palestinian organizations continued to be harassed and attacked by Israeli authorities and individuals, while human rights defenders faced prolonged detention. Speakers called on the international community to uphold its ethical and legal duty and protect the rights of Palestinians. Some speakers said that Israel was facing unjustified attacks at the United Nations and the Human Rights Council and the continued existence of item 7 was a barrier to any process of peace.

Speaking were Togo on behalf of the African Group, Tunisia on behalf of the Arab Group, Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Venezuela on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, Kuwait on behalf of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Pakistan, Qatar, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, China, Cuba, Venezuela, Iraq, Chile, Angola, Senegal, South Africa, Ecuador, Nigeria, Kuwait, Indonesia, Maldives, Russian Federation, Djibouti, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Bolivia, Iran, Bangladesh, Algeria, Bahrain, Yemen, Oman, Nicaragua, Botswana, Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan.

Also taking the floor were the following non-governmental organizations: Al-Haq, Law in the Service of Man, Badil Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, The Palestinian Return Centre Ltd, Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights, Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches, Union of Arab Jurists, Human Rights Watch, International Federation for Human Rights Leagues (in a joint statement with World Organisation Against Torture), Conseil International pour le soutien à des procès équitables et aux Droits de l'Homme, International-Lawyers.Org, Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association, International Youth and Student Movement for the United Nations, Ius Primi Viri International Association, Indian Movement “Tupaj Amaru”, Khiam Rehabilitation Center for Victims of Torture, Organization for Defending Victims of Violence, African Green Foundation International, Conseil de jeunesse pluriculturelle (COJEP), International Organization for the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (EAFORD), International Muslim Women's Union, Solidarity Switzerland-Guinea, Guinea Medical Mutual Association, Association of World Citizens, Zero Poor in Africa, Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling and European Union of Jewish Students.

The Council then began a general debate on the follow-up to and implementation of

the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

In the discussion, speakers noted that the principles of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action were the basis for the codification of human rights and for the establishment of institutions for the defence of human rights. They stressed the importance of the Declaration on the Right to Development as an international tool to respond to contemporary human rights challenges. Dissemination of knowledge and scientific research and transfer of technology were essential for the realization of the right to development. Speakers underlined that migration was an engine of prosperity, innovation and sustainable development and, when managed well, it was a transformative force for countries of origin and destination, and for migrants themselves. The Global Compact presented a balanced, principled and human rights-based instrument that provided an opportunity to address the challenges of contemporary migration. Speakers also highlighted the rule of law as the basis for the integrity and security of the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as the rights of lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual and intersex persons, and the activities of human rights defenders.

Speaking were Togo on behalf of the African Group, Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Mexico on behalf of a group of countries, Japan on behalf of a group of countries, Estonia on behalf of a group of countries, Austria on behalf of the European Union, Tunisia, Pakistan, China, Australia, Venezuela, Iraq, Nepal, Iceland, India, Libya, Russian Federation, Iran, Greece, and Gabon.

Also taking the floor were the following non-governmental organizations: Australian Human Rights Commission, Action Canada for Population and Development (in a joint statement with severals NGOs1), Association for Women's Rights in Development (in a joint statement with Action Canada for Population and Development and Association for Progressive Communications), Federation for Women and Family Planning and Minority Rights Group International.

India and Pakistan spoke in a right of reply.

The Council will next hold an annual discussion on the integration of a gender perspective which will focus on gender integration in human rights investigations.

Presentation of Oral Update by the Commission of Inquiry on the 2018 Protests in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

SANTIAGO CANTON, Chair of the Commission of Inquiry on the 2018 protests in the occupied Palestinian territory, in an oral update to the Council, stressed that he had been appointed as Chair on Thursday, 20 September, noting that this could be the shortest time a Commission of Inquiry had ever had to prepare its oral update to the Council. Recalling that the Council, in its resolution S-28/1 of 18 May 2018, had mandated the Commission to “investigate all alleged violations and abuses of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, particularly in the occupied Gaza Strip, in the context of the military assaults on the large-scale civilian protests that began on 30 March 2018, whether before, during or after”, the Chair reaffirmed that the Commission was committed to discharging the mandate with the sole objective of contributing to the promotion and protection of human rights, and only in accordance with the principles and values of the United Nations Charter. “To be clear”, he said, “we will not seek out nor accept instructions from any Government or any other source.” Mr. Canton encouraged Member States, media, individuals, and non-governmental organizations to assist the Commission in its work by communicating information relevant to the mandate, and said that a call for such submissions had been placed on the website of the Office of the High Commissioner.

The Commission’s temporal mandate was quite broad, continued the Chair, directing it to examine incidents before, during or after the large-scale protests that had begun on 30 March. The Commission would focus on violations and abuses that had taken place in the context of large-scale protests, which would require a link to the large-scale protests that had been taking place in and around the occupied Palestinian territory and in particular the Gaza Strip. Events not linked to those events fell outside the mandate, clarified Mr. Canton, reiterating that all the Commission’s determinations would be based on international human rights, and on humanitarian and criminal law. The Commission would not adopt interpretations that failed to uphold universal human rights and international humanitarian law standards

The events that had triggered the Council to call for a Commission of Inquiry were not over, the Chair noted with deep concern, and protests were continuing to take place. Putting aside eventual findings on the allegations, it was clear that there was a grave and deadly ongoing situation that required urgent attention. The Commission had requested Israel to provide access to the Gaza Strip, the West Bank including East Jerusalem, and Israel, and was hopeful for a positive response. The Commission had also approached neighbouring countries to seek access, added the Chair, stressing that it was in the interests of both Palestinians and Israelis to be able to communicate their views and information directly to the Commission. Where the facts and the law supported finding a violation or abuse, accountability must follow - shedding light on violations and abuses, no matter the victim, no matter the perpetrator, helped to prevent their recurrence and went a long way in providing justice for the victims, Mr. Canton said, and concluded by stressing that the Commission’s mandate could contribute to furthering accountability for the violations and abuses that might had been committed in the context of one of the world’s most long-standing conflicts.

Statement by Concerned Country

VOJISLAV ŠUC, President of the Human Rights Council, noted that the delegation of Israel was not present in the room.

State of Palestine, speaking as a concerned country, thanked the Commission of Inquiry for its preliminary report, and said that the unjust siege of the Gaza Strip for the past 10 years amounted to a collective punishment according to the Geneva Convention, and had had a destructive impact on the rights of Palestinians. The siege had led the people to take to the streets in peaceful demonstration, especially after the United States’ illegal declaration recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The Great March of Return of 30 March had been faced by live fire from the occupation forces in which scores had died and hundreds had been wounded. It had culminated on the day the United States had moved its embassy to Jerusalem, in flagrant disregard of the law and in clear provocation of the Palestinian people and the world. Since the beginning of the year, 224 Palestinians had been killed. The excessive use of force against peaceful demonstrators constituted premeditated murder and amounted to a crime against humanity. The State of Palestine called attention to the irresponsible behaviour of the United States administration, with its disregard for international justice.

Interactive Dialogue with the Commission of Inquiry on the 2018 Protests in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Pakistan, speaking on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, said that since the protests had begun on 30 March, 187 Palestinians had been killed by the Israeli occupying forces, and condemned the use of lethal and other excessive force against protesters, who did not pose an imminent threat to life. This violation of international human rights law, in the context of the occupation, was a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention that amounted to a war crime and possibly a crime against humanity. Togo, speaking on behalf of the African Group, noted with concern the excessive use of force by the Israeli army against the Palestinian demonstrators in the Gaza Strip, and underlined the necessity for the Commission of Inquiry to tackle the root causes of this protracted conflict.

Tunisia, speaking on behalf of the Arab Group of States, firmly condemned the barbaric attacks by Israeli troops as criminal practices which were methodically used and led to large numbers of wounded. Israel had continued to use lethal weapons which were in violation of international humanitarian law. The catastrophic situation had turned Gaza into an open air prison. European Union said it was deeply alarmed by the loss of lives and expected Israel to respect the right to protest. However, the European Union noted that Hamas and those leading the protest had a responsibility to ensure the protests remained strictly nonviolent. An independent and transparent investigation was needed to understand what had happened and why.

Qatar said that the attacks against peaceful Palestinian demonstrators constituted war crimes and Israel needed to be held accountable. All necessary measures should be taken to hold the perpetrators accountable, and the Gaza blockade should be lifted. Brazil supported the rights of all Palestinians to the freedoms of expression and assembly, and said that the excessive and disproportionate use of force by Israeli military forces against unarmed peaceful protesters was unacceptable. Brazil was worried about the problems undermining the prospects of the two-State solution. Malaysia condemned in the strongest terms Israel’s continued aggression against Palestinians involved in the peaceful Great Return March, and condemning the adoption of the Jewish nation-State law, urged the international community to call upon Israel to repeal racist and oppressive laws and policies.

Libya condemned the systematic violations perpetrated by Israel, the occupying power, and its systematic policy of racial discrimination. The situation in the occupied territories was a flagrant human rights violation. Pakistan condemned the arbitrary killing of more than 100 Palestinians, including women and children, by the occupation forces; urged the Commission to investigate the underlying reasons for the conflict and suggest concrete accountability measures; and urged the international community to bring lasting peace to the region. Tunisia called on the international community to put pressure on Israel to allow the Commission to carry out its duties with independence, noting that the ensuing report would put an end to Israel’s impunity and the complete absence of accountability. The international community needed to stand with the Palestinian people.

Maldives emphasized that the disproportionate use of force by Israel could not be excused, and the failure of the international community to maintain focus and support for the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry could only be qualified as the collective shame of each Member State of the United Nations. Namibia noted that if Israel had nothing to hide, then it should cooperate with the Commission of Inquiry, which was international, independent and impartial. Namibia expressed concern about the recent withdrawal of aid contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the only international agency protecting the rights of Palestinian refugees. Saudi Arabia welcomed the establishment of the Commission of Inquiry to investigate incidents in the context of peaceful Palestinian protests. The blockade imposed by Israel on the Palestinian people was a collective punishment, and Saudi Arabia called on all countries to exert pressure on Israel to lift the blockade.

Syria condemned the inhumane siege imposed on the Gaza Strip by Israel, and the killing of peaceful demonstrators in cold blood, as well as the targeting of children and medical workers. It expressed hope that the Commission of Inquiry would submit clear recommendations that would put an end to the impunity by Israeli soldiers. China highlighted the risk of violence and conflict in the occupied Palestinian territory and urged all parties to implement relevant Security Council resolutions. The international community should keep up solidarity and push Israel and Palestine towards the early resumption of the peace talks. Egypt strongly condemned the use of excessive force by Israel against the people of Gaza, leading to scores of dead and wounded. It welcomed the establishment of a mandate to investigate the tragic events surrounding the recent peaceful protests by the Palestinians.

Bolivia welcomed the establishment of the Commission of Inquiry, and emphasized the need for it to tackle the fundamental underlying causes of the conflict. The Israeli military presence in East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip established Israel as an occupying power. Sudan firmly condemned the barbaric attacks by Israeli soldiers as criminal practices which led to large numbers of dead and wounded. Israel continued to use lethal weapons which were in violation of international humanitarian law. The catastrophic situation had turned Gaza into an open air prison. Venezuela condemned the military actions taken by Israel over the last 60 years, and was deeply alarmed by the brutal violence unleashed by the occupying power. Venezuela reiterated its firm condemnation of these genocidal actions against the heroic Palestinian people.

Iran said that the disproportionate and systematic slaughtering of Palestinians by Israeli forces was a clear violation of international humanitarian and human rights laws. Those responsible for war crimes and brutalities should be held accountable and brought to justice. Costa Rica believed it was important to firmly and transparently cooperate with human rights mechanisms. States had an obligation to guarantee safe spaces so the right to free demonstration was respected. Costa Rica regretted the abuse and death of Palestinian civilians as a result of Israeli violence and supported the work of the Commission of Inquiry. Iraq saw the continuation of the Palestinian suffering as a destruction of the right to life, the result of the use of lethal and excessive force, and a continuing deprivation of Palestinians’ human rights. Iraq hoped that the Commission’s establishment would address impunity and hold those accountable for mass human rights violations.

Bangladesh condemned Israel’s disproportionate use of power, which was a flagrant abuse of human rights. The accountability of the perpetrators needed to be established. The only pathway to ensure peace in the Middle East was to end the Israeli occupation and for Israel to allow the Commission of Inquiry to carry out its work. Algeria said that the occupying power’s open fire on peaceful protestors, journalists and medical staff was a grave violation of international humanitarian law and impunity had allowed Israel to continue their violent practices. Recommendations needed to be provided to take appropriate speedy measures to hold the Israeli occupying power accountable. Bahrain condemned all steps taken by the occupying power such as obstacles and non-access for the Commission of Inquiry. Bahrain condemned all violence against the Palestinian people. In East Jerusalem, the number of victims was escalating and Bahrain refused the forced displacement policy by Israeli forces.

South Africa emphasized the need for the Commission of Inquiry to address the root causes and context of this prolonged conflict in an impartial and objective manner. The use of lethal or excessive force against protesters who did not pose an imminent threat to life or serious injury violated international human rights law. Luxembourg strongly deplored the large number of dead, including many children, health workers and journalists, and the high number of wounded since the beginning of the Great Return. The violence committed by the armed Israeli forces against demonstrators in Gaza was unacceptable. Turkey said that the systematic disregard of human rights by Israel had become a new black mark in history. Turkey was horrified by the events that took place in Gaza. The massacre carried out by Israeli forces was unacceptable.

Lebanon said that Israel systematically violated Palestinians’ basic human rights. Lebanon looked forward to the Commission of Inquiry carrying out its duties impartially, and called on all States to cooperate with it. Belgium stated that it was of utmost importance for the Commission of Inquiry to investigate all alleged abuses of human rights law, including those in East Jerusalem. Belgium called for all perpetrators of human rights violations to be brought to justice in accordance with the rule of law. Jordan emphasized that the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry as stipulated by the relevant Human Rights Council resolution constituted the investigation of all human rights violations on all occupied Palestinian territories. Jordan condemned Israel for taking unilateral steps that undermined the peace process.

Sweden was appalled by the continued violence and unacceptable death toll among the Palestinians protesting in Gaza since 30 March 2018. Sweden seconded the calls on Israel to respect the right to peaceful assembly, and condemned the killings, in particular of children. Ireland was shocked by the events in Gaza in May 2018 and the scale of the casualties inflicted by Israeli forces on Palestinian demonstrators. It acknowledged that Israel had the right to defend its territory, but international law clearly defined the circumstances in which force could be used against civilians. Spain stressed that accountability was essential in the context of human rights abuses in the occupied Palestinian territory. It expressed hope that the Commission of Inquiry would be able to carry out its work in an objective manner.

Indonesia said that it had reasons to believe that the peaceful protests of the Palestinian people in March 2018 was more of a desperate cry for help to the international community rather than simply acts of anarchism or terrorism as some delegations had insinuated in the Council. It was thus imperative that the Commission of Inquiry had a first-hand look at the facts on the ground. Afghanistan noted that respect for justice, rule of law, human rights and international humanitarian law by all parties were cornerstones of peace and security. It was deeply concerned about the serious loss of life in the occupied Palestinian territory and about continuing violence. Slovenia welcomed the appointment of the new Chairperson of the Commission of Inquiry and stressed that it was necessary to shed light on the events of March 2018 in Gaza. What methodology would the Commission use to analyse those events and the circumstances surrounding them? Morocco welcomed the creation of the Commission of Inquiry. The approach taken by the Israeli authorities was against the rules of international instruments and international humanitarian law. Morocco hoped that Israel would end its occupation and expressed its wish for the recognition of a Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights said the Israeli military and State continued to validate their unlawful conduct. It was stressed that recommendations needed to be made on accountability measures to end impunity. The Centre called for the use of the International Criminal Court to address violations of human rights caused by the occupying power. Al-Haq, Law in the Service of Man said it had documented the killing of 130 Palestinians, who were shot with live ammunition in the head, chest and abdomen; the ammunition appeared to shatter bone, and increase the risk of amputation. They looked forward to the international community taking meaningful steps towards justice.

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies said that Palestinians were living in dire circumstances in the Gaza Strip. They stressed the need for the Commission of Inquiry to focus in its investigations on identifying Israeli army officers in command and in lower rank that were responsible for the killing and injuring of civilians.

Defence for Children International said the increasing use of live ammunition combined with a lack of accountability had created a situation where Palestinian children were routinely shot and killed with impunity. They urged the Council to take action to ensure the safety of the Palestinian civilian population and end the blockade against Gaza. International-Lawyers.org said international law established a clear responsibility and the Israeli occupation violated Palestinians’ rights to health, work and freedom of movement. The organization requested that the Commission investigate the link between the protests and the occupying powers and that all States cooperate with the Commission in its work.

The Palestinian Return Centre Ltd expressed concern about the countries that did not support the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry. On countless occasions the Israeli authorities had absolved their soldiers from the responsibility for committed crimes against unarmed Palestinians. Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association deplored the way that the United Nations system had failed to end the Palestinian tragedy, which continued on a daily basis due to the deliberate policies of Israel. The Palestinians had been stripped of their most basic rights, including the freedom of movement. Conseil international pour le soutien à des procès équitables et aux Droits de l’Homme reminded that the Trump administration had closed the offices of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. The United States and Israel had decided that Jerusalem was the eternal capital of Israel. Recently, there were many projects to change the rhetoric and convince the Palestinians that their main enemy was Iran and not Israel.

Concluding Remarks

SANTIAGO CANTON, Chair of the Commission of Inquiry on the 2018 protests in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, responding to questions about objectivity and independence, said that without credibility, any denunciations that the Commission made would not pass the test of time and there would be no advances in the work of human rights. Credibility came from different sources, and objectivity was one. Objectivity meant having no preconceived ideas of what had to be done, and listening to all sides, and the Commission was planning to do so. Objectivity also came from independence, and the Commission would not receive any instructions from Member States or non-governmental organizations, and would be totally independent. Credibility also came from transparency and the Commission would maintain transparency in its work through informing Member States and non-governmental organizations about its activities. Credibility also relied on strict adherence to international law. Turning to the issue of access, Mr. Canton reminded that the Commission of Inquiry had already asked Israel for access to the Gaza Strip and neighbouring countries. It had also received volumes of documentation with photos and videos on the situation in the region.

SARA HOSSAIN, Member of the Commission of Inquiry on the 2018 protests in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, explained that in terms of the methodology the Commission would not only rely on documentation, but on videos, photo, satellite images, and speaking with witnesses. Even if not given access, the Commission would try to directly communicate with witnesses. It would be open to contributions from States and non-governmental organizations.

General Debate on the Situation of Human Rights in Palestine and Other Occupied Arab Territories

Statements by Concerned Countries

Israel was not present to take the floor as a concerned country

State of Palestine, speaking as a concerned country, greeted all States that were upholding international law and were not abiding by Israel and the United States when it came to discussing agenda item 7. The Israeli occupation had been prevailing for too long and Israel continued to violate United Nations resolution and international law. Israel thought that by not participating in discussions under agenda item 7, it would avoid the sphere of accountability and responsibility. It was very weird that a group of countries proposed Israel as a special candidate for the Council. Israel was encouraging terrorism and was continuing its systematic aggression against Palestine through a policy of settlements, cleansing, attacks on religious leaders and sites, and stealing money and resources. Israel was violating all resolutions signed and carrying out arbitrary detention and enforced disappearances. State of Palestine rejected the decision of the Supreme Court in Israel to destroy a neighbourhood in Jerusalem; this was a crime against humanity and a war crime under the Rome Statue. Israel’s continued settlement building threatened any viable chance to peace and a two-State policy solution. Israel was conducting apartheid and racial discrimination. The Jewish nation-State law gave the right to self-determination only to people of Jewish origin. Human rights and peace were inseparable and protecting one value meant protecting the other. Palestinians had been deprived of their human rights for 70 years. Serious measures had to be invoked to end the occupation and the High Commissioner was called on to implement all relevant resolutions. This would also increase the efficiency of the Council in implementing its human rights standards.

Syrian Arabic Republic, speaking as a concerned country, conveyed its condolences to Iran as well as Russia after the martyrdom of military staff because of an Israeli aggression on Syrian territory. Israel was moving towards a new state of terrorism and there was no doubt that it would continue its aggressive behaviour because of the support from the United States. The United States, United Kingdom and even certain European Union countries protected Israel, particularly on the subject of its occupation of Palestine and the Syrian Golan. The countries that defended Israel’s occupation, extremist behaviour, abuse of people and violations of humanitarian laws, were partners in those violations. Israel’s arbitrary and indiscriminate killing in Palestine and obliging them to destroy their own houses, the collective punishment and the Jewish nation-State law that called for more apartheid, showed that the occupying power did not respect international laws. In the Syrian Golan, punishment measures were still in place on inhabitants as part of a systematic policy that aimed to cut ties between the people of the Golan Heights and Syria. The occupying power also tried to legalize their occupation in the Syrian Golan by holding elections. Syria called on the Council to protect citizens and punish Israel for more than five decades of violations. They reiterated their sovereign right to reclaim their Syrian territory and also called for Israel’s withdrawal from Palestinian and Lebanese occupied territories.

General Debate on the Human Rights Situation in Palestine and Other Occupied Arab Territories

Togo, speaking on behalf of the African Group, said they were following with great concern the use by the Israeli Army of excessive force against the Palestinian protestors. The African Group called for an end of the blockade against the Gaza Strip, an end to the detention and imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians, as well as an end to collective punishment. The African Group underlined the ethical and judicial obligation to promote and protect human rights for everyone in the world.

Tunisia, speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, rejected some countries’ decision not to address item 7 on the Council’s agenda. The occupying power continued its violations against the Palestinian people through the construction and expansion of illegal settlements. The international community was unable to stop those violations. The Arab Group drew attention to the recent destruction of a Palestinian village in an attempt to annex more of the occupied territory. The Arab Group called on the international community to uphold its ethical and legal duty and to protect the rights of Palestinians.

Pakistan, speaking on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, noted that Israel, the occupying power, had persisted with its deliberate, systematic and gross violations in the occupied Palestine with total impunity. The organization was concerned that the construction and expansion of settlements continued unabated. Israel’s passing of the Jewish Nation State bill aimed at legitimizing its institutional discrimination against its Arab Palestinian citizens, and at turning the de facto apartheid regime into a de iure reality. That law built on dozens of racist and discriminatory laws against non-Jews.

Venezuela, speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, strongly condemned the disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force by the Israeli occupying forces against Palestinian civilians, including in the context of the recent peaceful protests, particularly in the Gaza Strip. Concern was expressed about the illegal, unilateral and arbitrary decision made by the United States to declare Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Such provocative actions, which unequivocally breached Security Council resolutions, would further heighten tensions.

Kuwait, speaking on behalf of the Gulf Cooperation Council, reiterated their call for item 7 to be given appropriate time. The boycott of the discussion of this item by States contributed to Israel’s impunity. The adoption by the Knesset of the law which perpetrated racist and segregationist rule of Israel was seeking to destroy the Palestinian identity. The Israeli attitude in refusing to comply with international law was denounced. The Gulf Cooperation Council believed that the legal status of Jerusalem must not be changed.

Pakistan reaffirmed the importance of item 7 on the Council’s agenda. For the past 70 years, Palestinians had been living under conditions similar to apartheid. Millions of people had been denied the right to self-determination for seven decades. Israel was continuing its settlements policies, characterized by forced evictions and building of new colonies, all of which continued with impunity. Israel was urged to stop all settlement activities and end the illegal blockade of Gaza.

Qatar said that the racial discrimination of the occupying power continued. Any boycott of item 7 would encourage Israel to continue with its flagrant violations of international law. The Jewish nation-State law of the Israel Knesset was a flagrant violation of international law and it further denied Palestinians their rights. The decision to demolish a village and forcibly displace its inhabitants was a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Egypt said the challenges facing Palestine under Israeli occupation were increasing. The demolition of homes and changes in the ethnic make-up of Jerusalem was of great concern. Many people had been moved from their homes to a region where there was no fertile land. The Syrian Golan occupation was also a place of continued human rights violations. There needed to be an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people and a two-State solution must be promoted.

Saudi Arabia said the position of Saudi Arabia was constant, they always upheld the Palestinian cause because of their conviction that it was a duty because of their shared Islamic faith and because of their human conscience and desire for justice. The Arab lands remaining under Israeli occupation were part of a colonial strategy which sought to take the natural resources from those lands. Saudi Arabia called upon Israel to withdraw from occupied Palestinian and Arab lands, in keeping with international resolutions.

Tunisia called on the international community to put pressure on Israel to comply with international decisions. Not a day went by without provocation from them. Israel continued to expel Palestinians, in defiance of international law. The daily Israeli practices were criminal, including detentions and all possible violations of human rights, which made sustainable peace impossible. Israel should be a partner in the peace process, supporting the Palestinians’ right to self-determination.

United Arab Emirates said the international community remained silent while violence persisted in Palestine. The occupying power was obliged to protect the civilians under occupation, however, Israel continued to use excessive force, killings and arbitrary detentions. The deterioration of the financial institutions was also troubling, with the closure of many schools due to the restricted budget and extreme deficit. The Palestinians had a right to a free and independent State.

China noted that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the crux of the Middle East problems and it held the key to peace in the Middle East. The situation in the Gaza Strip remained fragile. China condemned any violence directed against civilians. The status of Jerusalem was a core issue, and a complex one, touching upon national sensitivities. China supported Palestine as an independent country with East Jerusalem as its capital. China planned new aid measures for Palestine and it had increased its budget allocations to help Palestinians.

Cuba reiterated its full support for a broad, just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on a two-State solution and taking into account that Palestinians had to exercise sovereignty over their borders. Israel also had to withdraw from the Syrian Golan to the pre-1967 border, and full sovereignty had to be provided to the Arab population in the Syrian Golan in order for them to enjoy their national resources.

Venezuela expressed its solidarity with the brotherly State of Palestine and its heroic people, and expressed condolences for the families suffering for the killing of over 130 people by Israel. The construction of the wall was illegal and inhumane. The use of torture and other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment against the Palestinian people was rejected. Israel sought to wipe out every trace of the Palestinian community. Venezuela also rejected the arbitrary decision of the United States to recognize occupied Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

Iraq was saddened by the worsening of the living conditions of Palestinian people, as a result of the racist and colonial policies of Israel, all of which were violating international law. The adoption of the Jewish nation-State bill was condemned as it promoted racism. The detention of Palestinians had to end. The international community was urged to reaffirm the right of Palestinians to self-determination.

Chile maintained its conviction for the need for progress towards a two-State solution, and that it would not be possible to sustain a negotiation process that did not take into account the legitimate security concerns of Israel and the aspirations of Palestinians to exert their right to self-determination. Chile affirmed that this process must be based on the resolutions and legal arsenal provided by the United Nations. Chile also expressed concern at the actions and decisions that represented a backslide and impeded dialogue.

Angola condemned the occupation of Palestinian territories, the excessive and disproportionate use of force and mass settlements, and forced displacement of civilians among others. Angola highlighted these as a clear violation of human rights that needed to be put to an end. Angola continued to believe that only through inclusive dialogue regarding the two State solution would the people of Palestine find freedom.

Senegal condemned the increased violations of human rights of the Palestinians people, which should push the international community to act in order to end the ongoing decline of Palestinian living conditions. Senegal stated that the high level of violence and the many restrictions placed on Palestinian people, particularly restrictions of freedom of movements, the pursuit of colonization, and the excessive use of violence, exacerbated the instability in the region and made any political solution more difficult.

South Africa said it was deeply concerned about the adoption by the Israeli Knesset on 19 July 2018 of the so-called Jewish nation-State law. South Africa explained that this legislation stated that the Jewish people had an exclusive right to the land; that Jerusalem, complete and united, was the capital of Israel; made Jewish settlements a national imperative; took on extra-territorial jurisdiction; and in effect denied non-Jews their basic human rights. In essence, it turned the de facto apartheid regime into a de jure reality. This could not be allowed to stand.

Ecuador recognised Palestinian rights, as well as the right of Israel to live in a safe and peaceful environment. This would be possible only if the 60-year-old occupation ended and the State of Palestine was recognized. Ecuador condemned systematic violations, the disproportionate use of force and indiscriminate attacks. Unrestricted health access in Gaza also needed to be guaranteed by Israel. Ecuador reiterated a need for continued reporting on the acts of the occupying power to ensure accountability.

Nigeria called on Israel to always exercise utmost restraint and avoid excessive use of force against innocent protestors. Nigeria reaffirmed the need to avoid a double-standard approach towards promoting and protecting human rights in occupied Palestine and other Arab territories. The Council and the global community must take action to put an end to human rights violations and the occupying power must respect and implement United Nations resolutions on the status of the occupied territories.

Kuwait condemned the occupying power’s actions. It was not enough to remind the international community of their obligations. Everyone should act in an effective manner. Attempts to remove item 7 from the agenda would only help Israel continue in its efforts to violate the human rights of Palestinians. The Supreme Court of Israel, in reviewing its decision to destroy a settlement, had voted in favour of that displacement.

Indonesia said that Israel continued its obnoxious policies, which were blatant violations of international law and international human rights law. Israel disregarded all calls for ending their illegal occupation. The Council should take measures to end impunity and pursue accountability for Israel’s continued violations of human rights. Clear differentiation needed to be made between the occupying power and the occupied people, the perpetrators and the victims of human rights violations.

Maldives said that Palestine today was a nation under siege, and Palestinians and non-Jewish Israelis lived under a de-facto system of apartheid. Since 1967, it had been made clear that the occupation of Palestine was meant to go beyond safety and security and was to change the nature, demographics and sovereign territory of Palestine for all time. Even this month that intention was evident from the Israeli Supreme Court ruling in favour of destroying the Palestinian village of Khan Al Ahmar and the expulsion of its 181 residents.

Russia was concerned about the deterioration of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and condemned the use of force. All sides were called on to refrain from taking steps that would only spiral additional violence. The decision of the United States to stop financing the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East was condemned. Tel Aviv was called on to take practical steps to alleviate the suffering, including ending the blockade.

Djibouti condemned the use of force by the Israeli army against Palestinian civilians during peaceful weekly protests organized to protest the blockade of Gaza. Adoption of the discriminatory law by Israel on the Jewish nation-State on 18 July established de-facto discrimination and legitimized a policy of colonisation and occupation. The occupying power had to refrain from activities which severely undermined peace. The ongoing attacks on Palestinians were flagrant violations of international law.

Democratic People’s Republic of Korea was concerned by the continuing violations carried out against Israel in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories. The international community had to strongly condemn actions of Israel and its main patron, the United States, which had cut funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. The civilian killings and the blockade of Gaza had to end and Israel was called on to abide by international law. Strong support for the Palestinian and Syrian people was reiterated.

Bolivia expressed concern for the serious violations of humanitarian law, including war crimes, that undermined the principles of the United Nations. It highlighted the detention and arrests of Palestinian civilians and other measures taken by the occupying power that deprived Palestinian civilians of their fundamental rights. Bolivia welcomed the consolidation of the database of businesses which support the occupation, and supported the call for the Human Rights Council to make this database public.

Iran expressed its support for item 7 on the Council’s agenda. Iran also condemned the human rights violations that had been imposed on the Palestinian people. Iran highlighted the severe restrictions on Palestinians’ freedom of movement imposed by Israel. Iran also paid tribute to the men, women, and children who fell victim to the recent violence.

Bangladesh reiterated its unflinching support to the two-State solution and the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian State within the pre-1967 borders and with east Jerusalem as its capital. Bangladesh deplored the backtracking by Israel and its allies from the repeated commitments made in this regard. Bangladesh condemned Israel’s blatant disregard of all United Nations resolutions and persistent refusal to cooperate with United Nations mechanisms and bodies.

Algeria emphasized the need to keep item 7 on the Council’s agenda until it became no longer necessary with the end of Israel’s occupation. Algeria also condemned the ongoing Israeli violation of civilian human rights in Palestine. Algeria highlighted the damage caused to sacred sites and the blockade imposed on Gaza, which made any solution remote. Algeria expressed concern that the untenable humanitarian crisis in the region made it almost impossible for civilians to live there.

Bahrain supported the end of the illegal occupation of Palestine and other Arab territories. This was a preoccupation for Bahrain, which hoped for a lasting solution to the conflict. The establishment of peace in the region was closely aligned to the restoration of the rights of Palestinian people, the return of refugees back home, and the release of all detainees by Israel. Bahrain condemned the Knesset’s Jewish nation-State law.

Yemen said the occupied territories had witnessed a constant violation of citizens’ rights. The Council needed to give particular importance to Palestinians, particularly the occupying power’s human rights violations. Yemen denounced all measures taken by Israel to change the legal, geographic and demographic situation, and asked that the rights of all Palestinians be secured and their country be redrawn with borders preceding 1967.

Oman said that to diminish the importance of item 7 on the Council’s agenda only supported the occupying power’s prevention of a two-State solution from happening, which undermined peace and peace negotiations and the possibility of many Palestinians returning to their homes. The High Commissioner’s reports demonstrated the deterioration of the situation in Palestine. Oman urged countries not to move their embassy to Jerusalem.

Nicaragua said the unilateral blockade on the Gaza Strip was a human rights violation. Nicaragua condemned Israel’s arbitrary restrictions as well as illegal settlements, and human rights violations of the Syrian Golan. Nicaragua called for a fair, peaceful and lasting solution to the Israel-Palestinian, and Israel-Arab conflicts. The only lasting solution for peace was a two-State policy.

Botswana welcomed the work of the Commission of Inquiry and noted concerns about the violations of international humanitarian law. Botswana called for the end of the blockade. The right to food, shelter and other necessities had to be ensured and assistance to civilians had to be provided. Israel was called on to abide by the Security Council resolutions and international human rights law.

Turkey noted that the situation was still far away from peace, due to the reckless policies pursued by Israel. The Palestinian people were the last responsible for the impasse, and yet they were the first to suffer the consequences of the conflict. Israeli was urged to lift the illegal and inhumane blockade on Gaza. The Government continued its illegal settlement policy despite the reaction of the international community. The recommendations formulated by the Secretary-General in its recent report had to be implemented.

Lebanon reiterated the importance of item 7. It was important to end the occupation which had been prevailing for over seven decades and stop the severe violations of human rights. Boycotting item 7 meant implicitly agreeing with the occupying power. What happened in Khan Al Ahmar was just one episode of forced displacement, which was fully reinforced with the Jewish nation-State bill.

Jordan said that King Abdullah would continue to follow the situation in the occupied city of Jerusalem and all attempts to destroy the Arab identity of Jerusalem were rejected. The Jewish nation-State bill was against international laws and norms. The two-State solution was the only solution to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East was reiterated, and refugees were entitled to return and be granted compensation.

Al-Haq, Law in the Service of Man said that since 1967, Israel had supported businesses operating in Israeli settlements, and exploited natural resources over which Palestinians had legal rights. Al-Haq said it was deeply concerned about the continuing delays in the release of the list of businesses which supported this occupation. It was an urgent matter that Israeli businesses did not benefit from Israel’s occupation of Palestine.

Badil Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights said that while other occupation conflicts had been examined by the Human Rights Council, there were no other crimes against humanity as severe as those carried out by Israel. The cry to remove item 7 was unfair, and was heard most loudly from Israel and the United States. Badil Resource Centre emphasized that the Council should not be bullied into shifting its gaze away from the Palestinian occupation.

The Palestinian Return Centre Ltd highlighted the complicity of the Israeli State in apartheid, and drew attention to Israel’s decision to inform residents in the village of Khan al-Ahmar that they must demolish their own homes and leave. It also drew attention to the drop in funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East due to the United States decision to withdraw all funding. It called on Member States to step in and fill the funding gap.

Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights said it had documented the killing of 141 Palestinians, including 28 children, two journalists, three paramedics and three persons with disability. Al Meyan said that outside the demonstrations, the Israeli forces had also attacked civilian structures, including schools, and killed nine children this year. Al Meyan Centre also expressed concern that hundreds of children were unable to reach hospitals because of Israeli restrictions, and hundreds of thousands of children lived in extreme poverty.

Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches reiterated its grave concern about the rapid advancement of forcible transfer plans of 46 Bedouin communities into relocation sites in the central West Bank, in particular the community of Khan Al Ahmar. The organization underlined that Israel as an occupying power was bound by international humanitarian law to protect the Palestinian civilian population. It could not destroy or seize property on the territory it was occupying.

Union of Arab Jurists reminded that item 7 had been adopted to address the issue of occupation which was becoming increasingly bloodthirsty and racist through the confiscation of land and expulsion from land, and the building of Israeli settlements. The occupying power continued to remove the natural resources from occupied Palestinian lands in cooperation with United States companies. Through the carrot and stick policy, the occupying power continued to terrorize the occupied population.

Human Rights Watch recalled that Israeli forces continued to fire on peaceful Palestinians demonstrating. Any Israeli officials who had ordered firing into unarmed crowds should be identified. Palestinian armed groups had also fired rockets on unarmed Israeli civilians, but the number of those rockets was much inferior to the number of rockets fired into Palestinian demonstrators.

International Federation for Human Rights Leagues, in a joint statement with World Organisation Against Torture, noted that civil space for human rights defenders working on various issues in the occupied Palestinian territory had shrunk significantly in the past several years. Palestinian organizations continued to be harassed and attacked by Israeli authorities and individuals. Human rights defenders faced prolonged detention. It was urgent that international donors and the international community took measures to safeguard the space for civil society.

Conseil International de Soutien à des Procès Equitables et aux Droits de l'Homme said that the occupation continued with the destruction of holy places. The United Nations had adopted hundreds of resolutions. Palestinian land continued to be confiscated and Israeli settlements continued to spread. The occupying power was attacking women and children and peaceful demonstrations. Laws were being adopted in an arrogant fashion while the United States had unilaterally recognized Jerusalem as Israel’s capital.

International-Lawyers.Org said that the humanitarian situation in Palestine was deteriorating. All States were called on to assist. However, there could be no resolution of the problem without the end of the Israeli occupation, which had lasted for half a century. The right of Palestinians to freedom of movement, health and work had all been systemically violated. A peaceful solution might be possible with the end of occupation.

Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights Association said that it was witnessing the tragedy suffered by the people in Gaza. Israel’s forces had no consideration for women, children or disabled persons, as was evidenced by recent events. Israel was showing complete disregard for international humanitarian law and international human rights law in its actions. The authorities were urged to end the blockade and all countries to assist in this endeavour.

International Youth and Student Movement for the United Nations said that this discussion was being held at a time of not only escalated attacks on the people of Palestine, but also attacks on the United Nations itself, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. A deceptive campaign was being held against agenda item 7. This agenda item had to remain until the end of Israel’s occupation.

IUS PRIMI International Association called on the Council to put an end to the violations committed in Palestine and to the suffering of Palestinian children. It also called on the Council to put an end to the blockade of the Gaza Strip. IUS PRIMI International Association condemned Israeli forces for their continued violation of international humanitarian law and for the obstacles placed on the movement of Palestinians. The Association called for the rights of Palestinian peoples to be recognized.

Indian Movement “Tupaj Amaru” expressed solidarity with the suffering of the Palestinian people and condemned the Israeli Government for continuing to commit crimes with full impunity against Palestinian citizens. The Movement condemned the decision taken by Washington to stop funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East as direct blackmail and support for Israel as part of United States’ foreign policy.

Khiam Rehabilitation Centre for Victims of Torture spoke of the arrests of Palestinian children: while children around the world went to school, Palestinian children awoke to the arrests of Palestinian people. Many children faced physical violence and were deprived of their basic rights as children. Children were detained under the orders of the occupying power. The Council must support and save the children of Palestine.

Organization for Defending Victims of Violence expressed grave concern that the Great March of Return was hampered by Israeli forces. The Organization for Defending Victims of Violence said that since protests began, Israeli forces had killed at least 172 people, despite the fact that none of the protesters were reported to be armed. The Organization also expressed its deep concern over the human rights situation ongoing in the Gaza Strip, and called on Israel to stop the violation of human rights.

African Green Foundation International called on the Human Rights Council to respect the right of return of Palestinian people to their lands, and also called on the Council to do the same for Singhalese people trying to return to the northern province of Sri Lanka.

Conseil de jeunesse pluriculturelle (COJEP), in a joint statement, condemned Israel’s bill on the Jewish nation-State and urged the Commission of Inquiry to look at that law adopted by the Knesset, which defined Israel as the country of Jewish people and of the Hebrew language, thus suppressing the status of Arabic as official language. That racist law simply confirmed the state of apartheid.

International Organization for the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (EAFORD) noted that Palestinians were paying a heavy price for the racist policies imposed by Israel on them only because they were Palestinians. Palestinians were treated as third-class citizens and were forcefully displaced from their villages, in what amounted to a crime against humanity.

International Muslim Women’s Union supported the peaceful resolution of the Palestinian issue. The demolishing of schools had augmented the suffering of Palestinian children. The organization appealed to the Council to help political prisoners and human rights defenders whose treatment was the worst form of punishment. The Palestinian people fought for a just cause and against the occupation by Israel.

Solidarity Switzerland-Guinea drew the attention of the Council to the escalation of violence committed against women in the occupied Palestinian territory. In the village of Al Khan al-Ahmar, Israeli forces had carried out beatings and arrests of those inhabitants who had resisted forced displacement. Israeli forces also used violence against female medical workers and journalists.

Guinea Medical Mutual Association said that violations in the Middle East continued. The organization drew attention to the systematic policy of expulsion of Israeli authorities against Palestinians. Their houses were demolished and they could not obtain permits. In Saudi Arabia, there were arbitrary restrictions against Qatari citizens coming to pilgrimage. Syrian pilgrims had also not been able to go to pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia in years.

Association of World Citizens said that women who came to speak in the Council on behalf of other women faced a difficult situation. Political changes would not change anything when it came to occupation. The Israeli occupation continued. People were expelled from their territories and homes were destroyed and replaced by settlements. That was the reality in which those women lived.

Zero Poor in Africa said that Israeli forces were carrying out physical violence against children. Arbitrary arrests were often accompanied by beatings. The Council was taking steps to monitor the level of violations during protests. However, that would not make an impact since it was States that needed to exert pressure on Israel in order to ensure that they stopped violations in Palestine, particularly against children. The Council was asked to urge for accountability of perpetrators in front of the International Criminal Court

Women’s Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling said that Israel had unceasingly failed to meet its responsibilities under international humanitarian law through the excessive and disproportionate use of force on peaceful Palestinian demonstrators in Gaza. The Council must hold Israel accountable and seek criminal accountability for Israel’s violations of international humanitarian law, including by requesting the International Criminal Court to open an investigation.

European Union of Jewish Students explained that it was an organization of Jewish students across 35 countries which worked to spread a message of tolerance and reconciliation. Israel was facing unjustified attacks at the United Nations and the Human Rights Council and the continued existence of item 7 was a barrier to any process of peace. The Union drew attention to the case of Ari Fuld, a father of four who was stabbed to death near Jerusalem earlier this month.

General Debate on the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action

Togo, speaking on behalf of the African Group, noted that the principles of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action were the basis for the codification of human rights and for the establishment of institutions for the defence of human rights. Human rights were inherent to human beings, without any distinction. The African Group underlined the importance of the Declaration on the Right to Development as an international tool to respond to contemporary human rights challenges.

Pakistan, speaking on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, reiterated that all human rights were universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. The realization of the right to development and the elimination of obstacles to development merited special attention. Dissemination of knowledge, scientific research and the transfer of technology were essential for the realization of the right to development. The organization condemned racism, xenophobia and related intolerance, noting that fighting them should be a priority for the international community, given contemporary challenges.

Mexico, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, stressed that migration had always been part of the human experience. Migration was an engine of prosperity, innovation and sustainable development and, when managed well, it was a transformative force for countries of origin and destination, and for migrants themselves. The Global Compact presented a balanced, principled and human rights-based instrument that provided an opportunity to address the challenges of contemporary migration.

Japan, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, commended the tireless efforts by the international community to promote the rule of law. While much had been achieved, much remained to be done. When progress was reviewed, the group of countries wished to see due attention given to human rights and the rule of law, which were the basis for the integrity and security of the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Estonia, speaking on behalf of a group of countries, noted that the World Economic Forum in last year’s report concluded that at the current rate of progress, the global gender gap would take 100 years to close. The strive for equal opportunities demonstrated it was high time to move from words to actions. The number of thematic reports presented to the Council demonstrated the need for a gender responsive approach in all policy fields, be it on safe drinking water and sanitation, the death penalty, or preventable maternal mortality.

Austria, speaking on behalf of the European Union, noted that the Council had to address the interface between human rights and new global trends which would shape the human rights agenda for the next decade, such as urbanisation, digitalisation, demographic changes and climate change. The outcome document of this year’s international conference in Vienna listed a number of recommendations on how the international community could respond to those new developments, by integrating human rights dimensions in all of them.

Tunisia said the commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action was an excellent opportunity to reiterate principles enshrined in the Declaration. How could principles be implemented more effectively? Human rights were universal and indivisible but in upholding such rights, huge gaps were recognized. This was a precondition in ensuring that no one was left out and capacity building and cooperation were needed for fulfilling the gaps.

Pakistan stressed that by implementing the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, the international community could reaffirm its commitment to the cause of human rights and at the same time effectively support the Sustainable Development Goals. Pakistan, in collaboration with China, had launched the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, a $ 65 billion project. This was a unique example of international cooperation for the realization of the right to development.

China said that international cooperation in the human rights field still faced many challenges. China called on all parties to respect the development of a constructive dialogue and cooperation around the world. China emphasized that the international community should uphold multilateralism and support the Human Rights Council and other organizations to uphold impartiality in their efforts to protect human rights worldwide. China reaffirmed its commitment to promote international progress on the human rights cause.

Australia commended the work of the Global Alliance of Human Rights Institutions and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in supporting the establishment, strengthening, and operation of national human rights institutions globally. National human rights institutions were a critical element of the international human rights architecture. Their work was particularly critical for groups that could be vulnerable to systemic human rights violations.

Venezuela called on the Human Rights Council to guarantee universality, objectivity, and non-selectivity in examining matters of human rights, without politicization or double standards. Venezuela lamented the growing selective and piecemeal use of human rights issues as an instrument of domination on the Council by certain powers and their minions which imposed their hegemonic designs on countries in the Global South. Venezuela also reaffirmed the necessity to safeguard the human rights of migrants, and condemned the criminalization to which they are subjected to.

Iraq said that the implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was the only path that could lead to global development. Iraq highlighted the progress it had made on promoting human rights, particularly its newly democratic Government which was focused on promoting the human rights of everyone. Iraq encouraged the involvement of civil society and had simplified the registration process for non-governmental organizations. Iraq also highlighted advances on the rights of women, who were now represented in the executive, judicial, and legislative arms of the State.

Nepal stated that the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action stipulated that the right to development was an integral part of human rights. There was a need for sustained international cooperation to achieve a shared prosperity for all. All human rights, including the right to development, could be enjoyed only in a climate of constructive cooperation. The long-cherished aspirations of the Nepalese people were enshrined in the national Constitution, and an inclusive development agenda had been strengthened through the participation of women and vulnerable groups.

Iceland said that it firmly believed that all human beings were born free and equal in dignity and rights, and that everyone was entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. As a member of the Human Rights Council, Iceland would continue to support the human rights of lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual and intersex persons both home and abroad. Too many States still retained laws on their books that criminalized consensual adult same-sex relationships.

India stressed that the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action guaranteed the equal treatment of all human rights. It reaffirmed that the right to development was a universal and inalienable right, which was the prerequisite for the realization of all other rights. The Council and its mechanisms should undertake steps to ensure the promotion of human rights of all, and to allow countries to choose for themselves the best framework for the pursuit of human rights.

Libya affirmed the importance of the recommendation that Member States create effective mechanisms against reprisals against human rights defenders. It underlined the constructive cooperation between Governments and national human rights institutions, as well as the mainstreaming of women and youth. Reprisals against human rights defenders should be duly investigated.

Russian Federation said the implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action had encountered serious obstacles. Unilateral measures by the United States were imposed for purely political motives; there were sanctions that acted indiscriminately. Those restrictions against Russian businessmen, who employed tens of thousands of people, were a form of collective punishment under the guise of human rights.

Iran said that the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action called on States to refrain from imposing unilateral measures. However, the United States continued to disregard such recommendations. Imposing unilateral coercive measures was in defiance of States’ obligations under the human rights-related international legal instruments. The extension of sanctions to life-saving medicines and medical equipment affected Iranian citizens and was a violation of their rights to health and life.

Greece said they strongly believed in the universality, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelation of all human rights and sought to improve legislation accordingly. Legislation taken to improve the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Greece included the enactment of a law on legal gender recognition. As long as there was a willingness to cooperate, human rights could be achieved for all.

Gabon said they had nothing to hide concerning operations to maintain peace following their 2016 elections. The highest authorities in the country wanted to avoid being accused of bias. They took note of the International Criminal Court’s decision and hailed their impartiality in making a fair, courageous submission. Gabon also welcomed the publication of the report of the Working Group on enforced disappearances. They commended the efforts of all countries to uphold human rights.

Australian Human Rights Commission, in a video statement, called for the Council’s ongoing support for national human rights institutions, ensuring their participation in human rights related mechanisms of the United Nations. The Australian Human Rights Commission emphasized that national human rights institutions were critical for fostering inclusive societies and assisting governments to deliver their obligations. These institutions were also emphasized as central to fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals. The Australian Human Rights Council was undertaking a range of activities of crucial importance to the 2030 Agenda. It called on the Council to strengthen the role of national human rights institutions.

Action Canada for Population and Development, in a joint statement with severals NGOs1, drew attention to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, through which States had agreed to prioritize the realization of all women’s rights. Women human rights defenders were taking to the streets, to the courtrooms and to the ballot boxes to reclaim control over their own bodies and lives by demanding access to comprehensive abortion care. The 223 civil society organizations were united in solidarity to recognize and fight the shared roots of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.

Association for Women's Rights in Development, in a joint statement with Action Canada for Population and Development and Association for Progressive Communications, drew attention to the fact that, despite the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, women defenders were facing increasingly repressive environments and threats to their legitimacy and security. States were increasingly violating the rights of feminist activists through criminalization, restrictions on rights to freedom of assembly and expression, and funding, among others. The Association called for an urgent response to the growing global trend of pushback and reprisals against feminist activists, and to counter anti-rights propaganda.

Federation for Women and Family Planning welcomed the May 2018 report of the Working Group on discrimination against women in law and in practise. They echoed the concerns raised in the report, in particular around the backlash against sexual and reproductive health and rights which resulted in additional barriers to access legal and safe abortion. The Federation for Women and Family Planning emphasized that States should recognize women’s decisions about their own bodies as personal and private, and called on States to place women’s bodily autonomy at the centre of policy and law-making in all matters, including sexual and reproductive rights.

Minority Rights Group noted that read together with the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action should leave no one behind, including those suffering from caste-based discrimination. In South Asia and in diaspora communities, persons belonging to scheduled casts, the Dalits, continued to face deep-rooted social stigmas, as victims of the untouchability practice. The situation of Dalit women was even more dire as they suffered specific gender-based and caste-based violence.

Right of Reply

India, speaking in a right of reply in response to Pakistan’s statement, said that no country could accept a project such as the economic corridor between China and Pakistan which flouted its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Pakistan, speaking in a right of reply, rejected India’s remarks, noting that they were uncalled for. Pakistan had referred to the China-Pakistan corridor, a project between two sovereign countries. The only reason India commented on it was because it did not want to see economic progress in Pakistan. India should refrain from raising that issue in the Council.

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1Joint statement: Action Canada for Population and Development; Amnesty International; Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW); Associação Brasileira Interdisciplinar de AIDS; Association for Women's Rights in Development; Center for Inquiry; Center for Reproductive Rights; Center for Women's Global Leadership; Centro de Promoción y Defensa de los Derechos Sexuales y Reproductivos; Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era; Federation for Women and Family Planning; Fundacion para Estudio Investigacion de la Mujer; International Federation for Human Rights Leagues; International Humanist and Ethical Union; International Planned Parenthood Federation; IPAS; Plan International, Inc; Rutgers; Swedish Association for Sex Education and Swedish Federation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights.