



INTERNATIONAL MEETING ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

Israeli settlements as an obstacle to peace – possible ways forward

Brussels, 7 and 8 September 2015

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

OPENING SESSION

Statement by

H.E. Mr. Fodé Seck
Chairman

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

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

This meeting is one of the series of international events organized by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. This year, the Committee organized a meeting in Vienna, on 31 March and 1 April, to mobilize international assistance to Gaza. From 20 to 22 May, a roundtable on legal mechanisms in The Hague brought together renowned international experts and young cadres of the Palestinian government. On 1 and 2 July, the Committee organized a meeting in Moscow that explored opportunities to foster conditions for a successful political process, and the international efforts in this regard.

In holding this meeting, the Committee wishes to provide a forum for experts and representatives of Member States to discuss the current situation and the impact of Israeli settlements onto the lives and economy of the Palestinian people; to examine legal aspects of this issue; and to provide a forum to present ways forward, including how to enhance advocacy and redouble the efforts of the international community.

It is the great pleasure of the Committee to welcome the Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ms. Rima Khalaf, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), and the Representative of the State of Palestine, His Excellency Mr. Riad Malki as well as His Excellency Mr. Walid Assaf.

The Committee is also particularly proud about the presence here of experts coming from the State of Palestine and Israel.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

From the standpoint of the international community, and of international law, the situation is quite clear: Israeli settlements on occupied Palestinian territory are illegal. On this issue the Security Council spoke with one voice when in 1980 it passed Resolution 465 by votes of all of its members, including all five Permanent Members. The resolution affirmed that the Geneva Convention is applicable to the territories occupied by Israel since 1967, including Jerusalem, and that “*measures taken by Israel to change the physical character, demographic composition, institutional structure or status of the Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, [or...] have no legal validity and that Israel’s policy and practices of settling parts of its population and new immigrants in those territories constitute a flagrant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention*”.

The Security Council further declared that the Israeli settlements “*constitute a serious obstruction to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East*” and called upon all states “*not to provide Israel with any assistance to be used specifically in connexion with settlements in the occupied territories.*” Subsequent resolutions, by both the

Security Council and the General Assembly, reaffirmed this clear position, and so has the International Court of Justice.

Yet, 48 years after the occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, and the beginning of Israeli settlements in the occupied territory, 34 years after the outright annexation of East Jerusalem and its suburbs by Israel, which has also been declared illegal by the Security Council, 21 years after the signing of the Oslo Accords. Settlements are growing and their expansion is the declared goal of Israeli ministers and officials.

Israeli settlements on occupied Palestinian lands are an intrinsic aspect of an unequal power relationship and of a system of occupation and domination of one people over another. As the Security Council affirmed so many years ago, the settlement project is “*a serious obstruction to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East*”, and an affront to all efforts by the international community to achieve a solution to the conflict, including the Arab Peace Initiative, that propose workable ways out of the downward spiral of violence and despair.

The international community has an important role to play not only in the search for a just and durable final status, but also in advocating for the rights of the Palestinian people and for upholding international law in the interim. In this regard, the Committee welcomes recent efforts in the European Union to strengthen its policies vis-à-vis Israeli settlements and any commercial products originating from them. Governments, parliamentarians and civil society are called upon to work together in this regard. It is with this goal in mind that our meetings are public and we welcome representatives from all spectra, and that, following our two-day Meeting, the Committee will hold consultations with NGOs here in Brussels.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I thank you all for participating in this Meeting and I look forward to stimulating sessions.

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