

29 June 2017

Deputy Secretary-General's remarks at Opening of June Forum to mark Fifty Years of Occupation of the Palestinian Territory [As delivered]

Your Excellency Ambassador Seck, Chairman of the Committee,

Excellencies, Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will begin my remarks with a message from the Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

I send my warm greetings to everyone gathered to mark 50 years since the start of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, which resulted in Israel's occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza and the Syrian Golan, and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians and Syrians.

The occupation has imposed a heavy humanitarian and development burden on the Palestinian people. Generations of Palestinians have grown up in crowded refugee camps, many in abject poverty, and with little or no prospect of a better life for their children.

Fifty long years of occupation have fuelled recurring cycles of violence and retribution. They send an unmistakable message to Palestinians that their dream of statehood might never be realised. They signal to Israelis that their desire for peace, security and regional recognition remains unattainable.

Ending the occupation is the only way to lay the foundations for enduring peace that meets Israeli security needs and Palestinian aspirations for statehood and sovereignty. It is the only way to achieve the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

It is time to return to direct negotiations to resolve all final status issues on the basis of relevant UN resolutions, agreements and international law. It is time to end the conflict by establishing an independent Palestinian state, side by side in peace and security with the State of Israel.

Resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will remove a driver of violent extremism and terrorism in the Middle East and open the doors to cooperation, security, prosperity and human rights for all.

I repeat my offer to work with all relevant stakeholders to support a genuine peace process.

Thank you, and I will now move on to my own remarks.

Today is an occasion not only to reflect on the costs and consequences of fifty years of occupation, but also to look ahead at what must be done to end this situation.

I understand the deep sense of despair of the Palestinian people. For far too long, the international community has failed to find a just and lasting solution to their displacement. The lives of generations of Palestinians and Israelis have been confined by a conflict that

has shaped the physical and human landscape with concrete walls, checkpoints, and watch towers, all under a heavy atmosphere of fear, mutual distrust and despair.

Some think that the situation can be managed. They are all wrong. It must be resolved.

Real peace cannot be achieved without a just and lasting resolution. The two-state solution is the only path to ensure that Palestinians and Israelis can realize their national and historic aspirations and live in peace, security and dignity.

As the Secretary-General has said: there is no Plan B.

That is why it is important to stop all unilateral actions that undermine the two-state solution. Settlement construction, which is illegal under international law, is steadily preventing progress. So is the unacceptable violence and incitement, which exacerbates mistrust between Palestinians and Israelis. Militant activity and the absence of Palestinian unity also impede efforts to achieve a negotiated solution.

The humanitarian costs of this prolonged conflict are undeniable and unsustainable. Nearly half of the 4.8 million people in the occupied Palestinian territory depend on humanitarian assistance. In Gaza, the humanitarian situation has rapidly deteriorated because of the current energy crisis. The Palestinian Authority, Hamas – which has controlled Gaza for a decade – and Israel, all have obligations for the welfare of Gaza's residents and must live up to their responsibilities. As usual, the most vulnerable are paying the highest price for political failure.

For the last fifty years, the question of Palestine has remained a potent symbol and rallying cry that is easily misappropriated and exploited by extremist groups. Realizing a two-state solution will not solve all the region's problems, but as long as the conflict persists, it will continue to feed them.

Excellencies, Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Peace requires political will from all sides. We, the international community, have a grave responsibility to support the process. The United Nations will stand firmly with the parties on the road to peace by working for a future in which Palestine and Israel live in security; in which both countries thrive as vibrant democracies; and in which civil society is able to play its role as a pillar of peace-building, without hindrance.

I invite you all to reflect over the course of the next two days, on these possibilities, opportunities and on how we can turn this ambition into a reality. We cannot wait for another generation of heartbreak before we realise the rights of all Palestinians.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you in the spirit of sustainable peace for the rights of all Palestinians.