

05 February 2018

Secretary-General's remarks at opening of the 2018 Session of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People [as delivered]

I am honoured to take part in this meeting of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. I congratulate Chair Ambassador Fodé Seck and the Bureau of the Committee on your election. And I commend all of you for your commitment. The Committee has worked tirelessly to help realize the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people – including their right to self-determination.

You have been a leading voice in supporting the achievement of a two-State solution able to end the Israeli occupation. You have also mobilized international support and assistance to the Palestinian people, and I thank you for all these efforts. As we all know, the question of Palestine is inextricably linked with the history of the United Nations and is one of the longest unresolved issues on our agenda. Over many decades, the international community has encouraged a negotiated process leading to a two-State solution, addressing all final status issues on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and mutual agreements as the only way to lay the foundations for enduring peace.

The Security Council has consistently reiterated its vision of a region where two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders. The General Assembly has reaffirmed the two-State solution through the establishment of a Palestinian State as the only way to achieve stability, peace, prosperity and development in the region. And I have always said that I would like to see a Palestinian state and an Israeli state, both with capital in Jerusalem. However, we must face today's difficult reality. After decades of convergence and global consensus could be eroding, making effective concerted action more difficult to achieve, at a time when it is more important than ever. Negative trends on the ground have the potential to create an irreversible one-state reality that is incompatible with realizing the legitimate national, historic and democratic aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians.

Ongoing settlement construction and expansion in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is illegal under UN resolutions and international law. It is a major obstacle to peace and it must be halted and reversed. Violence and incitement continue to fuel a climate of fear and mistrust. The humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza remains dire. The United Nations Country Team in Palestine has predicted that Gaza will become unliveable by 2020 unless concrete action is taken to improve basic services and infrastructure. Yet Gaza remains squeezed by crippling closures and a state of constant humanitarian emergency. Two million Palestinians are struggling everyday with crumbling infrastructure, an electricity crisis, a lack of basic services, chronic unemployment and a paralyzed economy.

All of this is taking place amid an unfolding environmental disaster. I am extremely concerned that the latest shortfall in UNRWA's funding will gravely impair the agency's ability to deliver on its mandate and preserve critical services such as education and health care for Palestine Refugees.

At stake is the human security, rights and dignity of the five million Palestine refugees across the Middle East.

But also at stake is the stability of the entire region which may be affected if UNRWA is unable to continue to provide vital services to the Palestine refugee population, both across the Occupied Palestinian Territory and in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

I appeal to the generosity of the international community not to let that happen. I would also reiterate the importance of advancing Palestinian unity. Reconciliation is a key step in reaching the larger objective of a Palestinian State and lasting peace. I remain steadfast in the United Nations and my commitment to supporting the parties in their efforts to make the two-State solution a reality. There is no Plan B.

A two-State solution is the only way to achieve the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and secure a sustainable solution to the conflict.

Thank you.

<https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2018-02-05/secretary-generals-remarks-opening-2018-session-committee-exercise>