

Secretary-General's remarks to Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People [as delivered]

I am honoured to participate in your first meeting of the year.

I congratulate the Chair, Ambassador Cheikh Niang, and other members of the Bureau on your election.

And I commend your efforts and commitment towards a peaceful and just solution of the Palestinian question.

This can only be achieved through realization of the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side-by-side in peace and security, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States, based on relevant UN resolutions, long-held principles, previous agreements and international law.

Unfortunately, over this past year, the situation has not moved in that direction.

Protests in Gaza resulted in hundreds dead and thousands wounded by Israeli security forces.

Security incidents and provocations by Hamas and other militants in Gaza, including the launching of rockets and incendiary kites, dangerously escalated the situation.

Thanks to UN and Egyptian mediation efforts, a major escalation was avoided.

I appeal to Hamas authorities in Gaza to prevent provocations, and under International Humanitarian Law, Israel, too, has a responsibility to exercise maximum restraint and to not use lethal force, except as foreseen in international law, as a last resort against imminent threat of death or serious injury.

The United Nations stands firmly in support of Palestinian reconciliation and the return of the legitimate Palestinian Government to Gaza.

We welcome the efforts made by Egypt in this regard.

Gaza is an integral part of a future Palestinian state and Palestinian unity is needed for a politically stable, economically viable, sovereign and independent State of Palestine.

The ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza must also be immediately addressed.

Approximately two million Palestinians remain mired in increasing poverty and unemployment, with limited access to adequate health, education, water and electricity.

Young people see little prospect of a better future.

I urge Israel to lift restrictions on the movement of people and goods, which also hamper the efforts of the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies, without naturally jeopardizing legitimate security concerns.

The international community must also significantly increase efforts to revitalize Gaza's economy.

I commend UNRWA for its critical work in Gaza, the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and across the region.

This is despite an unprecedented financial crisis in 2018.

I thank those donors who have increased their commitments and enabled Palestinian refugees to continue to receive the essential services provided by UNRWA.

I ask them to maintain their support in the coming year and beyond.

There is also risk of further unrest in the West Bank.

The construction and planning of settlements by Israel have expanded deeper into Area C in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem.

Settlements are illegal under international law.

They deepen the sense of mistrust and undermine the two-State solution. Settler violence remains a very serious concern.

I was also shocked by the recent murder of an Israeli teenager, which has now been categorised as a terrorist act.

I also regret the decision by Israel not to renew the mandate of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron.

I hope an agreement can be found by the parties to preserve this long-standing and valuable arrangement.

Palestinians have endured more than a half-century of occupation and denial of their legitimate right to self-determination.

Israelis and Palestinians continue to suffer from deadly cycles of violence.

Leaders have a responsibility to their populations, not least the youth, to reverse this negative trajectory and pave the way toward peace, stability and reconciliation.

I commend the Committee for keeping the focus on the ultimate objective of a [just] and peaceful solution with two States coexisting in peace and security.

This is the only way to achieve the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. As I have said repeatedly, there is no Plan B. Thank you.