

**04 February 2021**

**Secretary-General's remarks at the 2021 Opening Session of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People [as delivered]**

I was very honoured to preside over the beginning of this year's first meeting of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

My congratulations to the Chair, Ambassador Cheikh Niang, and other members of the Bureau, on your election.

Excellencies,

The unresolved question of Palestine underlines the continued importance of the Committee.

This is affirmed by the General Assembly's adoption, last December and by large majorities, of all the resolutions on the question of Palestine recommended by the Committee.

The year 2021 presents tremendous tests and opportunities across the board.

It challenges us to reinvent how we make and sustain peace, while confronting the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic has had a severe impact on the Palestinians, particularly in Gaza.

The public health system has been pushed to the brink due to the occupation and the fragile socio-economic, humanitarian, and political situation.

The United Nations and its partners are supporting the Palestinian Government's work to control the spread of the pandemic.

Through the efforts of the World Health Organization and UNICEF, the UN is also supporting the Government's preparedness to receive and administer vaccines.

The Special Coordinator continues to encourage Israel to help address the priority needs of Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory – and to support COVID-19 vaccine availability more generally, which is in line with Israel's obligations under international law.

Excellencies,

The United Nations remains committed to supporting Palestinians and Israelis to resolve the conflict and bring an end to the suffering.

I reiterate my call on the Government of Israel to immediately halt all settlement activity, which is a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution, and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

Persistent acts of violence in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem and Gaza, as well as Israeli movement and access restrictions and other violations of international humanitarian and human rights law exacerbate mistrust between Israelis and Palestinians and drive us further from peace.

The Committee plays an important role in mobilizing international opinion and assisting Palestinians and Israelis to re-engage in meaningful negotiations.

The long-agreed goal is clear: to end the occupation and realize a two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, in line with international law, relevant United Nations resolutions, and bilateral agreements, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States.

President Mahmoud Abbas's call for an international peace conference under the auspices of the United Nations – and an expanded Middle East Quartet – with considered preparation and involvement by the key parties – provide a positive opportunity to advance peace in the region.

I call on the parties to refrain from unilateral acts that can jeopardize the possibility of restarting the peace process.

I welcome the Presidential decree issued by President Mahmoud Abbas to hold legislative, presidential and Palestinian National Council elections this year.

The holding of elections in the occupied West Bank – including East Jerusalem and Gaza – will be a crucial step towards Palestinian unity.

It will give renewed legitimacy to national institutions, including a democratically elected Parliament and Government in Palestine.

Elections are a vital part of building a democratic Palestinian State founded on the rule of law with equal rights for all.

The Committee's support to these efforts will be crucial.

I also commend the Committee's efforts to mobilize support for UNRWA in a way that is sustainable, predictable, and long-term – as Palestinian refugees need and deserve.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me conclude by restating the important advocacy role of the Committee.

Together, let us strive to uphold the values of the UN Charter as our shared framework of cooperation for the realization of the rights of Israelis and Palestinians, the Middle East region and beyond.

Thank you.

Link: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2021-02-04/secretary-generals-remarks-the-2021-opening-session-of-the-committee-the-exercise-of-the-inalienable-rights-of-the-palestinian-people-delivered>