**Meetings Coverage: Palestinian Rights Committee Adopts Annual Report, Reviews Latest Events while Considering How to Enhance, Streamline Its Work**

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Members Worry about ‘Shrinking’ Land for Two-State Solution as Peace Process Stalemate Continues

The Palestinian Rights Committee adopted its annual report today, for submission to the forthcoming session of the General Assembly, heard a review of the latest developments on the ground and discussed myriad ways to improve and streamline its work.

Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer for the State of Palestine, provided an overview of Secretary-General António Guterres’ recent visit to the Middle East, noting that, in Ramallah, he had led his delegation of senior officials in a visit to a women’s centre, a museum on the history of Palestine, the tomb of Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Chairman Yasser Arafat and the bunker where the late President of the Palestinian National Authority had spent the last two years of his working life. The Secretary-General had also met with Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah and attended numerous meetings with civil society stakeholders on pressing issues including opportunities for youth.

In the Gaza Strip, the tragic situation in the enclave had been reflected in the people’s poverty and bad living conditions, he said, citing a scarcely used crossing point that resembled an airport terminal designed to serve 40,000 people daily. “It’s a sad picture,” he added, noting that the Israeli blockade had exacerbated the overall employment, housing and sanitation conditions. Children faced kidney-related illnesses from drinking unclean water, he said, adding that the Secretary-General had met with students who had shared presentations on their concerns.

Summarizing the Secretary-General’s sentiments, he said there was an expression of hope for a future in which two States could live side by side and that the occupation could end. The visit had also invigorated personnel of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and hopes for action to address the current situation, he added.

Responding to a question by a representative of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Mr. Mansour elaborated on the fragile situation in the West bank city of Hebron, where 1,000 Israeli settlers and a Palestinian population of 200,000 lived. Expressing concern that settlers were challenging the status quo by creating the municipal council of Al-Khalil, he pointed out that the occupying Power would not tolerate that type of civic organization in occupied East Jerusalem, where 300,000 Palestinians lived.

Committee Rapporteur Carmelo Inguanez (Malta), presented the Committee’s draft report (document A/AC.183/2017/CRP.2), outlining its various chapters covering developments on the ground since 5 October 2016. He said they contained a review of the situation relating to the question of Palestine, the Committee’s organization of work and recent activities, including the Chairman’s participation in Security Council debates. Chapter V informed about various international meetings and conferences organized by the Committee, including the 2017 United Nations Forum to Mark 50 Years of Occupation. Chapter VI provided an overview of the Department of Public Information’s Special Information Programme on the question of Palestine, he said. Finally, Chapter VII contained the conclusions and recommendations that the Committee would send to the General Assembly.

Recognizing that 2017 marked 50 years of the Israeli occupation that began in 1967, he urged the international community, including national Governments, parliamentarians and civil society, to redouble efforts for a negotiated peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine. The Committee — known formally as the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People — would continue to urge the Security Council and the General Assembly to play a constructive role in ensuring full accountability and implementation of various United Nations resolutions, which most recently reaffirmed the illegality of Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, he emphasized. The Committee also requested that the Secretary-General present his next report on implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016) in written form rather than the oral version of his first two reports. In relation to Gaza, he said the Committee reiterated the need for the international community to demand an end to Israel’s 10-year-old air, land and sea blockade of the Strip and the lifting of all closures.

He went on to call upon international donors to fulfil all their pledges so as to expedite the provision of humanitarian assistance. The Committee also emphasized the need to recognize the importance of the seventieth anniversary of the expulsion of Palestine refugees from their homeland in 1948. It recommended shifting from a humanitarian to a political and human rights framework that could take into account the legal obligations of all stakeholders, including those in the Gaza Strip. There was essential need for a Palestinian unity government to carry out governance and security functions in Gaza and exercise control over the crossings, he said. He underlined the responsibility of States and private entities not to contribute to grave Israeli violations of Palestinian rights.

Many speakers voiced support for the aspirations of the Palestinian people and efforts to drive forward the process of ensuring a two-State solution. Some said not enough was being done, with Rafael Darío Ramírez Carreño (Venezuela) stressing the need to ensure that Israel upheld the relevant Security Council resolutions. Israeli settlements were in practice a form of colonization intended to weaken the likelihood of a two-State solution, he added.

Jerry Matthews Matjila (South Africa) said it was clear from the testimony presented today that peace was moving further away. The days marked every single year were a reminder of the torturous journey that Palestinians continued to endure, and of humankind’s inability to react to the oppression that the Palestinian people suffered. People in South Africa had taken on the Palestinian cause “almost as if it is our cause”, he said. “I’m worried the ground is shrinking. Where will they return?”

Jaime Hermida Castillo (Nicaragua), emphasizing that the situation was getting worse by the day, called upon the Committee “to pause ad recall what we are doing”. It was important to be more organized and streamlined as Palestinian people continued to struggle under injustice. “Everything that we do in this Committee must address that struggle,” he added.

Some speakers cautioned that actions, not words, were sorely needed, with Neville Melvin Gertze (Namibia) pointing out that beautiful and powerful reports often ended up unimplemented. He joined Alexander Temitope Adeyemi Ajayi (Nigeria) in pledging to stand by the Palestinian people’s quest to ensure respect for their rights, and to support efforts to implement the Committee’s report with a view to ensuring that no one was left behind.

Anayansi Rodríguez Camejo (Cuba) said that despite all efforts, “we are at a stalemate”, as settlement activity, destruction and confiscation continued unchecked.

Mr. Mansour expressed, in closing remarks, his clear awareness of the Committee’s deep frustration, while whether asking members could imagine the frustration of millions of Palestinians, many of whom often asked him: “Have you ended the occupation?” There was no silver bullet, but only a cumulative struggle, he said, citing ongoing peaceful demonstrations that were liberating occupied land every week. Such stories should inspire all, he said, emphasizing that more remained to be done, creatively and by thinking outside the box. “We will not stop until the occupation ends and there is a State of Palestine,” he declared. “I tell my people that this Committee is working for them. They love you and want to name streets after you.”

Previewing forthcoming events, Committee Vice-Chair Mahmoud Saikal (Afghanistan) outlined various activities including a 2 November lecture to mark the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration and its impact on the Palestinian people. On 29 November, the Committee would convene a special meeting to mark the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, marking 2017 as the fiftieth anniversary of the military occupation and the seventieth anniversary of the General Assembly’s adoption of the partition resolution. The General Assembly was also scheduled to consider the “Question of Palestine” on that day, he added.

The Committee will reconvene at a time and date to be announced.