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**United Nations Department of Political Affairs (DPA) in Conversation with Dr. Hanan Ashrawi**

FODE SECK, CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE OF THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE: Excellencies, esteemed guests, ladies and gentlemen, a very good morning to you all. What a pleasure to be here with you. My name is Fode Seck. I happen to be from the Delegation of Senegal to the UN and Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. I have the honor to welcoming you today in this interactive meeting, and I must insist on the word interactive.

Our Committee is a superior body of the UN General Assembly with the mandate to advocate for the right of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination in accordance with national law and the principle of the UN Charter. Our Committee is comprised of 50 members and observers, and we believe it plays a key role in mobilizing international support of a peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

2017 marks the fiftieth year of the Israeli occupation of Palestine, which began in 1967. Today’s briefing gives us a rare opportunity to hear about recent political development and the current situation in Palestine with distinguished Palestinian, Dr. Hanan Ashrawi. Dr. Ashrawi all of you know, but I should introduce her anyway, is a known Palestinian legislator, activist, and scholar who made history as the first woman to hold a seat on the Executive Committee of the PLO. Whether as official spokesperson of the Palestinian delegation to the peace process, Minister of Higher Education, human rights advocate, or elected legislator, Dr. Ashrawi has been a staunch advocate for Palestinian rights and the rights of free men.

Dr. Ashrawi is a recipient of a long list of awards and honorary degrees, including 2005 Mahatma Gandhi International Award for Peace and Reconciliation, and the 2003 Sydney Peace Price.

Dr. Ashrawi, it is a privilege to have you with us today. Thank you for taking the time out of your hectic schedule to join us.

I am also pleased to introduce Professor Anne Marie Goetz, who is moderating today’s briefing. In addition to teaching international relations and comparative politics at NYU Center for Global Affairs, Professor Goetz has served as UN Women’s Chief Advisor on Peace and Security where she promoted [movements in parliament] in peace building, peace talks in [both countries’] selection and protection of women from violence. Professor Goetz has authored several books on her website, democratization and accountability institutions. Professor Goetz, it’s an honor to have you.

Before handing over to you, I must review some very positive happenings on this [subject] seeing Palestinian women and Israeli women marching together, demanding for peace, right of [indiscernible] was very, very happy. So hope this is it, especially when women take the lead. We also heard news of President Trump calling President Abbas. I think all of that are good progress.

So without further delay, I give the floor to Professor Goetz, who will be moderating this interactive dialogue. We will have to finish by 1:00 sharp. Time is of the essence.

Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you so much, Ambassador Seck. Thank you to the Committee for organizing this unusual opportunity to be in conversation with someone who clearly is a hero to many, and what an extraordinary turnout. Thank you all for coming. Dr. Ashrawi is a traffic stopper in New York and at the UN. It was a little bit difficult to get through the building to reach this chamber, so we apologize for the delay in starting.

Now I have to say it’s an honor for me also to be here moderating and to have an opportunity to meet someone who is my personal hero also. It’s often said that having token women or women in a token presence is not enough, and I completely agree with that. But Hanan Ashrawi has been an outstanding executive for a long time, and as a young political scientist, if I may be permitted a small personal note, seeing her on the news speaking for the Palestinian people was a political awakening for me. And I think being the fact that you are a woman actually made a huge difference in that sense. But, of course, Dr. Ashrawi is no token, is no mere symbol, is a driving force for equality, justice, and peace for the Palestinian people.

Now the issue of peace in that region, in the Middle East region and in the Israeli-Palestine conflict, is, of course, one of the most controversial of the many controversial issues discussed at the UN. And incidentally, so, too, is the issue of women’s rights and gender equality, which is what many of the audience are here to discuss this week and next week. And wonderfully, we have these two controversial issues combined today.

So just as a matter of process, I would make a plea or echo a plea that when we get to the interactive section of this morning’s discussion that people keep their interventions brief and include a question as opposed to a statement or a stand.

Dr. Ashrawi, you are known as a Palestinian pragmatist and a leader of moderation, of seeking a peaceful, reasonable solution that protects the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. You’ve also often been the one woman in a room full of men on both sides, and I can’t imagine how challenging that can have been or could have been at times. I think what we’d like to hear about would be your reflections on the political process right now, and also on what are the prospects for peaceful solutions, and what role can women play in bringing this about?

HANAN ASHRAWI: Thank you very much. Thank you, Ambassador Seck. Thank you, Anne Marie. It’s wonderful to be here with you again. I think I will dispense with my notes. [Ambassador Danon] told me, why don’t you prepare some notes so that you can start by giving a brief introduction, and he knows me. I rarely give brief introductions. Once I start talking, I somehow my academic clock starts ticking and I give a 50-minute lecture. So I am not going to do that. All right? You can ask about the state of the affairs and the so-called peace process if there is any, and I can tell you that isn’t any right now. But I will try to, like a good academic, also focus on your questions.

So the state of affairs right now in peacemaking is very difficult. Everybody keeps talking about the month of the two-state solution, we are committed to the two-state solution and so on, without doing much about it. And in the UN, of course, people have taken resolutions but they haven’t taken the steps to ensure the enforcement to ensure that the two-state solution is rescued. The 2012 resolution on accepting Palestine as a state, albeit a non-member state, was very significant in terms of the reinforcing this vision, ’67 boundaries, two-state solution, and that the Palestinian territory is not disputed but is occupied. And it has boundaries, it has a capital, and it has rights, foremost among them which is the right to self-determination.

Also, we are very appreciative of Security Council Resolution 2334, which rendered Israel [indiscernible] because even though we believe that there were many resolutions pertaining to the illegality of such activities, the illegality of annexation of Jerusalem, and so on, and of collective punitive measures, all these things are part of the body of the legacy, the legal body of the UN resolutions. But unfortunately, Israel somehow managed to act with full impunity and with a total cover, legal cover from any kind of accountability, which is what led to this where we are right now where we see before our very eyes the end of the two-state solution. Because Israel talks about it once in a while, but now the mask is off. They are not even talking about it. They are busy acting unilaterally and as I said with impunity to annex more land, and a massive intensive effort to escalate settlement activities and to complete the annexation of the West Bank. Area C, for example, are now almost totally ethnically cleansed. There are a few Palestinians left but there quite a few settlers moving into Area C and quite a few economic enterprises in Area C. And that is extremely serious, because while everybody talks about it, Israel is creating facts unilaterally that will destroy the many foundations of peace and the imperatives of the two-state solution.

So we are in serious trouble. Eight years were wasted by the Obama administration talking about no settlements, and then the Israelis said no, we don’t agree and settlements continued. Talking about initiating another peace initiative based on the same mistakes, by repeating the same mistakes over and over again, thinking that you would have a different result.

No, you cannot have—frankly speaking, you cannot have direct bilateral talks between Israeli and Palestine because this is not a simple border dispute between two equal states or sovereign countries. This is a situation of occupation with all the implications of the asymmetry of power in which Israel acts, as I said unilaterally based on power, based on control, based on its own sense of impunity and privilege and entitlement and so on, and having total control over our lives, our rights, our resources, our land, air space, the [indiscernible] or crossing points.

So in this situation you certainly cannot keep asking for direct bilateral talks. This contravenes the Fourth Geneva Convention, by the way, that says that people under occupation cannot be told to sign agreements with their occupiers, because that would be under duress and undue influence, of course.

So we’ve been asking, we’ve been saying any peace has to be on based on international law and legality, has to have third-party intervention, and we talked about multilateralism all the time from the beginning. I think the US thought that third-party engagement was a euphemism for US monopoly. We wanted—they divided labor between the US as the political sort of address, and the Europeans and Arabs have to sign the checks and deal with nation-building. And we said there can be no nation-building under occupation unless there is a genuine peace process that would devolve occupation and evolve statehood. If one of the two sides of the equation is not working, then you’re not going to get anywhere with that. That was a major flaw. There were many other flaws, but anyway, giving Israel a free hand was a major—a fatal flaw in that sense. So it bought more time, it engaged the prolongation of stalling.

We negotiated—I think I told you this last time, but I’ll repeat myself which is not very nice, but sometimes I like what I say—we have really engaged in negotiations endlessly. We have invented different ways of negotiations that nobody has even thought of. We had proximity talks, we had direct talks, we had indirect talks, we had bilateral talks, we had multilateral talks, we had exploratory talks, we even had epistolity talks, and we got nowhere. Because negotiations, as my late friend Clovis Maksoud said, is not a fishing expedition. It is not a shot in the dark. There has to be a system. You have to address and redress the power and balance, the asymmetry of power first, primarily, and then you have to ensure that there are criteria, there are terms of reference, that international law is respected, you have to make sure that you have clearly defined objectives, you have to make sure that your agreements are honored and implemented, you have to have a binding time frame, you have to have concrete steps for the devolution of occupation and evolution of statehood, you have to have a system of advocation and accountability for whoever violates—whoever refuses to implement it. None of these were available. So it was fine. There was a process, an abstraction, but there was no peace. There was no substance. There were no real foundations for them, and that’s why we are in trouble.

Because since 1991, we talked about moderation and beginning to legitimize the language of peace and the peaceful resolution to the conflict. Unfortunately, it cannot come only from one side. We were asked always to prove our seriousness of intent, to prove that we are really committed, to prove that we honor international law. We were even held responsible for the safety of our occupier, including the settlers of the army. Heaven forbid should an army soldier in Hebron or anywhere be attacked and immediately they’re labeled terrorists as posted everywhere. We’re all terrorists because we dare in a sense to challenge the occupation. So not only were we held responsible for the security and safety of our occupier, but we had no safety or security for us.

On the contrary, we were supposed to—we went on probation all the time to demonstrate that we deserved those rights that everybody else takes for granted, the right to self-determination, the right to live in freedom and dignity and peace on your own land, the right to exercise sovereignty. These rights were totally denied us, and we were subject under the guise of a process, an ongoing process that had no relationship to reality, that had really very little substance and credibility, that did not influence behavior on [indiscernible].

This is what happened. That’s why we are here now at a very critical stage. And I don’t want to talk about all the other components of this critical phase whatever reality—regional components, and we all know the difficulties of religion—we can talk about this later—or the global and the rise of populism, the rise of racism, Islamophobia, misogyny, everything else that goes against the grain of what the Palestinians are struggling for and the means by which we are struggling. Peaceful, nonviolent resistance, negotiated settlement based on multilateralism, international law, and respect for international humanitarian law.

So we are seeing a real degeneration globally, we are seeing power politics, we are seeing fragmentation, we are seeing proxy wars. I don’t have time to define the region you all know; we can talk about this later.

And Palestine, again, is in deep trouble. The thing is I heard talks about how—let me just mention a friend of mine who was excluded from a position to which he was uniquely, uniquely qualified, Salam Fayyad, because he was guilty of being a Palestinian. And it seems to me and in parlance now and at the UN, you can easily say that being a Palestinian is anti-Israeli in itself, that it’s bad for Israel. If you are a Palestinian, it shows bias against Israel. Or if the UN attempts in any way to implement its own mandate and its own laws and regulations, then there is anti-Israeli and pro-Palestinian bias. I’ll tell you, the problem is not that the UN wants to implement its own mandate and act according to its own conscience and requirements, the problem is that Israel wants to act with impunity and wants to maintain its position as a country above the law. That’s the problem.

MODERATOR: If I can jump in here with a question about Salam Fayyad.

HANAN ASHRAWI: I warned you ahead of time.

MODERATOR: If I could jump in with a question. You and Salam Fayyad formed the Third Way, the parliamentary—

HANAN ASHRAWI: Block.

MODERATOR: —block. And I wanted to ask you about what are the constructive energies or dynamics for peace on either side at the moment as well as within the region. You did mention regional dynamics, and of course since the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011, there is a sense that Arab nationalism and Arab modernity is in turmoil, and it would be very interesting to know how that’s affected the Palestinian position. But even closer to home, perhaps you could explain a bit about the Third Way and what you’re trying to accomplish, or what are the other dynamics and forces that are contributing to a positive scenario, if any.

HANAN ASHRAWI: It certainly is more than a two-pronged question but … Look, the Third—just to be brief, the Third Way was a parliamentary block which we formed in one month, and we ran for elections in 2005, 2006 and we won two seats, Salam and I, just because we wanted to show that the Palestinian body politic is not polarized into Fatah and Hamas, that there is room for pluralism, multiplicity, diversity, and for a language of human rights, good governments, accountability, transparency, and a language of nation-building that is based on building such institutions, and also the linkage to social justice and peace-making and so on.

So it was a comprehensive, integrated approach in terms of our election. Obviously, it resonated with quite a few people because in one month we ended up getting two seats while there were three parties that had been working for 40, 50 years that got two seats. So it meant we actually resonated somewhere. But we [indiscernible] very hard to make this language prevalent right now because internally we face serious problems, as you know. And I am the last person to hide our problems. We have a serious issue of division as you know between Hamas and Fatah or the PLO, between Gaza and the West Bank. This is not entirely internal only because it has external ramifications.

There are regional powers that have taken sides and that reinforce the division, or the rift, which is very serious because it weakens the Palestinian cause as a whole and it strikes at the very integrity of our cause and the support for our cause. Quite often I keep telling people, don’t take sides. I don’t care what people believe in politically, provided you act in accordance with the law and you act in the best interest of Palestine, because they [indiscernible] cause is one regardless of how you deal with it. This is one.

But this rift is extremely serious and as I said, it takes us also outside to other countries that have vested interests in whether you support Hamas, do you support the Muslim Brotherhood, do you support a certain also polarized block within the region or not. This is one.

Two, we also have problems in the sense that our own political system is rapidly approaching the atrophied stage. We need to revitalize, we need to relegitimize, we need to have—re-democratize, let’s put it that way. Have serious elections to bring in the young people, to bring in more women, to empower women.

MODERATOR: But the last local elections were postponed.

HANAN ASHRAWI: They were postponed, now they are not. But the thing is they were postponed because of the division, because of the rift, because Hamas decided to delegitimize, to use its own courts to exclude certain lists that were Fatah. And then they accused Fatah of using their power in the West Bank to intimidate and so Hamas can’t either. So it was quite difficult and they were postponed because they were tainted in a sense.

Now, we took a decision, the government did, that there would be elections in May, but the problem is Hamas has refused them in Gaza. We’re trying now to urge Hamas to have elections. They should be persuaded regardless of who supports them and who funds them and so on. The legitimacy of any political party comes from its own people, from its own constituents, not from any external source. And holding onto power, by anybody, is detrimental to Palestinians at that cost. Now, the issue of Arab nationalism and alternative that show what’s happening in the region, Arab Spring. Look, like any transition, this is a very difficult and painful and unpredictable and quite often bloody transition.

It does destabilize. Any transition destabilizes the region. For the lack of reasons the sense that people who are able to mobilize in cyberspace and bring down existing regimes, but they were not organized on the ground to bring out the vote. There was no really organized civil society, no organized political parties in the sense, the only political party like, let’s say, in Egypt that was really organized were the Muslin Brotherhood. In Tunis, they have more civil society engagement, women and so on, that acted as a buffer zone to protect the pluralistic democratic system.

There was a recognition among Islamist parties, but you cannot prove it alone, and a sense of inclusion, a sense of responsibility. This is what we need, but in earlier Israel there was also external intervention and military intervention. Things collapsed. Look at Libya and what happened to Libya. Look at the most tragic, I think, example in our Arab world is Iraq because it is a country facing [indiscernible] a city and now is facing fragmentation, proxy wars. There are so many armies and so many funders and so on.

So this has not only distracted from, rightfully so, I mean. It diverted attention and funding and so on and political realities and that’s a human disaster. There are so many people who are civilians are paying the price. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, are being killed. This is a tragedy that definitely needs immediate and urgent and positive engagement and intervention. I don’t believe there are military solutions, contrary to certain conventional wisdoms here and there that there has to be a solution for Yemen, for Iraq, for Libya, for Syria, and for Palestine now. Palestine remains sort of standard course on the menu, let’s say, of the Arab world. Because in a sense it is a challenge to the integrity to the power, to the dignity of the Arab world as a whole, and it remains a challenge to the world. Do you have the political will and the power to implement your own laws and to protect the vulnerable and to bring about a just peace?

However, now, the funding and the support and some political support has decreased. Right now there are moves to try to put a bit more of our house in order between now and the meeting of the Arab Summit on the 29th in Jordan, which we hope would be quite productive and fruitful. Israel tried to use the rift in the Arab world by creating this sort of Sunni/Shiite divide and that it has real relations with moderates in the countries to fight the Shiite. All these are fabrications because we know the complexity of the Arab world. We know that it is never been polarized like this.

We know that within one country, different ethnicities and sex and so on that have coexisted for years, if not for centuries, for decades, and the issue is you cannot exploit this in order to make political gains through Palestine. And the issue of saying that the Arab peace initiative can stand on its head and Israel now wants to make peace with Arab countries before, addresses the Palestinian question and it’s trying to turn the Palestinian question into a domestic issue and Israel under control. Don’t worry about it. It’s not that even, you know, there is instability in the region. Look at all the other problems in the region. What we need is two things: to deal with security and economics, and Israel has repositioned itself to be an atlas for security and economics in the region.

By the way, talking about Sinai and Egypt, talking about the Gulf countries, and Iran, talking about all sorts of issues that Israel is exploiting to reposition itself to divert attention and to give itself license to continue with the occupation and the annexation. It’s very clear now. Anybody who has any illusions otherwise should understand Israel is open to talking about autonomy only for the Palestinians, peace with the Arabs, sovereignty over all of Palestine, for instance, the one-state solution. We will talk about this if you want because there are very dangerous permutations to that.

MODERATOR: I think there’s many people here who would be very interested to hear your thoughts actually on the future of the two-state solution and remarks by some important leaders on abandoning that solution, the two-state solution. It’s clear that your agenda for the Arab Summit in Jordan is to make sure that divisions within Arab states are not exploited at the expense of Palestine. And that’s a very clear strategic priority, to keep Palestine at the top of the agenda and solution to the conflict.

Before we move on to the future of the two-state solution and remarks by some leaders, you have mentioned a few times that there’s atrophy, a sense of atrophy in politics, a sense of a need for renewal and regeneration and you yourself have invested quite a lot in civil society building in Palestine. Can you speak a little bit about that? About what you’ve been doing and also, in particular, about how you are trying to cultivate a new generation of leaders?

HANAN ASHRAWI: Thank you. And yes, I do believe that civil society is not just a safeguard for democracy but for the health and well-being of a nation as a whole. And we in Palestine, as you know, historically have had civil society institutions, nongovernmental organizations, homegrown authentic sort of organizations under occupation because we didn’t have a government and we didn’t have a central authority. So what we did was we used, we built our own civil society organizations, our own trade unions, our own—even though it was illegal under occupation to have elections even, and to organize in any way, shape, or form. We built our institutions, our universities as a means not just of resistance. They were a means of resistance and they still are, but also as a way of what we call in Arabic, [Arabic], of maintaining people on the land steadfastness. And to organize our lives to be able give support to each other.

We have neighborhood committees, we have popular committees, we had the, as I said, said trade unions, professional organizations, elected people. We had women’s organizations. I think you remember in the ’70s we had the first Declaration of Women’s Rights that was adopted. In the ’70s, we started the consciousness-raising sessions at that time, and we linked up with the international gender movement, women’s movement. So civil society to us is not just something that came after government developed. It was the basis of our existence and self-protection, self-organization, and resistance.

When the Palestinian National Authority was formed, there was a competition, very frankly. People felt that civil society organizations are competing with the political address for legitimacy, for funding, for influence, for constituencies on the ground. And in many ways, one reason why women were excluded from the PA at the beginning was the fact that the women were delegated to the role of social justice, and women’s organizations, and the deal with governments and so on, which are very significant, very important, but should not be an excuse to excuse women. Again, an anecdote with the [women] with Yasser Arafat, who kept saying I think Jimmy Carter wrote about this, he said, Jimmy Carter told him you need more women. He said, I have Hanan and she’s worth 10 men.

So I said, look, I don’t want to be a token, and I don’t want to be an excuse for excluding other women. So if you want me in any government, and this was an ongoing refrain between us, if you want me in any government, then you have to have with me several women. Five women at least, and then I’ll join, or otherwise you can have 10 women and no Hanan, which is fine. I like that. So it’s not—and then you know what happened? All the people started sitting down and vetting the women. What’s her history of struggle? Has she been in jail? What is her political struggle? What’s her reputation in society?

Every single question you could think of was used to address the women’s qualifications. I said, do you ask all these questions of the men? Or do they qualify just because they happen to be men? And you found out that the super women syndrome, the super women syndrome, became dominant. That to deserve a position, you have to demonstrate not equally that you have equal qualifications, that you are superior, that you can do everything. That you can tick all the boxes.

So we had to bring this down that, no, you have to have not only equal consideration, but you have to positive intervention in order to address and level the playing field, which has never been level, because, as you know, we have a long tradition and history of injustice and discrimination against women, whether through traditional means, the use of honor [indiscernible] against women, or whether through the abuse of religion to justify discrimination against women in concrete ways, or whether through inherited laws that we have that were changed. Like let’s say in Jordan and Egypt, the laws were updated, but the laws we have under occupation remain because we couldn’t change them. So now we need to change our legal system, particularly the penal code and the family law and so on, civil code. These are things that have to be addressed seriously.

To go back to …

MODERATOR: I was asking you about your civil society organizations, MIFTAH, the human rights work and transparency. And also, have you engaged women in those groups and promoted their leadership?

HANAN ASHRAWI: Yes, we do have wonderful—you’ll be amazed at the young generation, men and women, who are really not just qualified but they are enthusiastic, creative, energetic, and they represent the spirit of the youth that you’re willing to think in new ways outside the box. We are set in our ways. I keep saying our system is quite geriatric.

When I was elected to the PLO Executive, I certainly did not want to be in the PLO Executive. But I don’t know if [Imji Had] is here, but when men met all the different representatives of the political parties, they met in closed groups. We had a meeting of the PNC because six of the members had died of the Executive Committee out of 18, so they didn’t a quorum because our quorum was two thirds.

So they needed to replace them to. So they all met in closed, smoke-filled rooms, and they all decided on the candidates, and they came to the PNC meeting and they said, we have agreed on these names. And by default, that means we all have to say yes. So who mutinied? The women. They said, no. We want women in the Executive Committee, and we need elections and we want elections. So they intervened on two counts, elections and gender, and we had elections. And there were lots of names that were represented. But they came to me and they asked me to run as a candidate for all women, and then the young people who were a minority, and some reformers and so on and trade unions asked me to run. And they said they will vote for me.

So this is an offer I couldn’t refuse. So I did run, and I did win the seat, and it was a testimony, which shows you that when women decide to work and to challenge and to intervene, they will support each other. I said, this really in many ways debunks the myth that women don’t vote for other women or don’t support women. Because they did support women—thank you—against their own parties. You know, they [indiscernible].

MODERATOR: So if I could jump in there, you’ve been involved in many initiatives over the years to engage women across the lines of conflict. The woman I know about in particular via UNIFEM, the International Commission for a Just and Sustainable Israeli-Palestine Peace. Some members of that commission, including the former Foreign Minister of Iceland, was here—there you are—Ingibjörg Gísladóttir, were involved in that. And is there any discussion going on now across the borders? Or does that risk normalizing the situation? And perhaps you could explain why so, if the latter.

HANAN ASHRAWI: Yeah. The International Commission of Women was a landmark, actually, because we decided that before that, the predecessor was the Jerusalem [Women] in which you had—and we met in Brussels, I think, yes, in 1988, I think. And we formed the Jerusalem Link or women’s—I forgot the name now. Anyway, so it was made up of Israeli women and Palestinian women who shared the same objectives of ending the occupation, of ensuring that the peace was just, whatever peace we had was just, and that we have to challenge the political systems and challenge the occupation in order to.

And so before we started working together, we agreed on the agenda. We went back and we formed two separate organizations that would meet and coordinate on the agenda. And we were activists and so on, and we went out and demonstrated and faced the army. This was before the formation of the PA and so on. It was very difficult. I mean, you would demonstrate, you would get beaten up, you would get tear gassed, you would get arrested.

So we were, in a sense, and even before that, an activist coalition. And this is how we got our legitimacy. People didn’t talk about this as normalization. They talked about this as solidarity and started an activism. And it was highly regarded. The political discussion came later with the political women. The International Commission for Women was a result of our understanding that this is not a bilateral issue, that this was a multi-lateral issue, that this was a global issue, that Israel was created on Palestinian territory as a result of an international decision, and that they have to take their responsibility.

They cannot say, go back to direct bilateral negotiations. They cannot say, all right, you nice guys, the women of Palestine, the women of Israel, you can make peace. No, we can’t. We can’t, because when you are in Israel you have a strong literalistic, male-dominated society that values strength, power, militarization, control, and so on. And depravation of a whole nation of the right to self-determination. So we had to challenge the women that this mentality has to be challenged internally.

Anyway, the International Commission for Women had many really powerful international women, and women who had the same vision of peace. And gradually, somehow the international component was weakened. The big divide came, and I am being very frank with you guys, is when we—the Israeli government started delegitimizing any Israeli who asked for accountability for Israel. They started legislating. As you know, now they have laws that are extremely stringent. It’s become a really oppressive state against human rights organizations, B’Tselem, against Breaking the Silence, against any organization that seeks to challenge Israel. Now they are challenging BTS and they’re making it illegal.

So they made it illegal for Israelis to ask for accountability for Israel. The women, who were many of which were old friends and women we’ve worked with for years, came and asked us to change our platform. Because an essential component of our platform was accountability for Israel, that you cannot have an occupation that is unaccountable. You need legal intervention and accountability. And unfortunately, because of that, some women were intimidated, which was not, in my experience of women. This was a different phase. I don’t know why.

But they asked us to remove accountability from our platform, and we said no. We’ve been working on this for decades. Because the real activist dialogue, so to speak, of the ’70s was based on facing this, on challenging, on exposing the occupation and so on. In the ’80s, we began the political platform. To ask us to change it because the Israeli government is making it difficult, we said, this is the time for you to stand up and be counted. We took challenges. We took risks. We were, as I said, arrested and beaten and detained and so on. I don’t see why you have to be intimidated [indiscernible]. Because they weren’t used to this, that their own government would do this to them. This was one.

And unfortunately, that dialogue no longer works. The activists’ dialogue, which is joint action on some, continues only on the basis of clear objectives, of standing up to the occupation, and so on. But any kind of just political discussion to create the impression that people are talking to each other and so on, it’s not a question of trust. It’s a question of occupation. It’s not a question of lack of information. On the contrary, we know the Israelis very well. I notice in the Madrid speech; I said, there is nothing you can hide from us. We’ve seen you at your best, and we have seen you at your worst. We as a people under occupation have seen the underbelly of Israeli society, and we know you. It’s not ignorance. We had to know.

But from a mentality of occupation, sort of white man’s burden, it’s very difficult for them to know us, because the Israeli government made it extremely difficult to have any kind of contact or to look at the repercussions of the occupation and what it’s doing. So that was a real warped vision there. The wall was not just an apartheid wall that’s physical. It became intellectual, mental, emotional, every aspect. And people could live behind the wall imprisoned, also. The Israelis, I think, are imprisoned behind this wall, not just the Palestinians on the other side, because they are sheltered from looking at reality. And therefore, they do not have the tools, the equipment to deal with this reality, and to challenge what is being done in their name to the Palestinian people.

So that’s why, now people say any endeavor that seeks to create and is leaving impression of normalization as though there can be equal coexistence between occupier and occupied is not acceptable. It’s not that we don’t believe you have to talk to the other. No, we do. We believe you have to challenge the other and educate the other. But you cannot be part of this endeavor to say, oh, all that’s needed is just to talk to each other and that there is parity. There is no parity. It’s like saying between somebody who is jailed and the jail keeper that they are talking to each other. That’s what we are telling them.

MODERATOR: Got it. Okay. Good. Second to last question, and then we’re going to open it to the floor. You referenced the rise of populism in your opening remarks.

HANAN ASHRAWI: Yes.

MODERATOR: And, of course, it’s a specific kind of populism that we’re seeing everywhere. It has a racist dimension. It’s ethno-nationalism. We’re seeing it in long-standing democracies as well as less democratic contexts, and certainly in your region.

I’m going to ask a CSW-type of question, and I should stress that Dr. Ashrawi is not here representing Palestinian Authority at the CSW. She is here actually as the—a member of the Civil Society Advisory Board to UN Women.

And so this is the question UN Women needs the answer to as well, which is, why is it that this wave of ethno-populism, it’s certainly ethno-nationalism, it’s not the first time this has ever happened, but this wave contains a streak of the most raw and naked misogyny that was inconceivable, actually, 10 years ago. And how is that suddenly legitimate? Well, it isn’t, of course. But how is this happening? And what should be feminist tactics for addressing this?

So this is my second last question, and then a quick one at the end about what should the UN do.

HANAN ASHRAWI: Okay. Now you guys sit down for the next three hours. Look, of course, populism, ethno-nationalism, or if you want, hyper-nationalism and the whole formulation of a national identity and national states and so on, I don’t want to get into political philosophy now, but in a sense, they are the same mentality that generates misogyny. Because a mentality that discriminates and oppresses is going to discriminate not just on the basis of religion, ethnicity, and so on, but also on the basis of gender, of class, and so on. So it’s the same mentality that generates the same attitude.

Now in response to threats, let’s talk about Europe in this and response to threats and a sense of fear and a sense of insecurity. Lots of political leaders tried to generate more fear and insecurity and exploit it in order to put themselves in power and to present themselves as the saviors of society. And you know that happened during—in Italy during Mussolini. You know that happened in Germany. You know that whenever you try to create internal divisions and fear of the other intentions and you create a sense of entitlement and exceptionalism within society and outside society, then you create the stack of populism that panders to the lowest common denominator and exploits the fear and insecurity of the good guys, and so on.

Now the sense of racism is also greater than that. And in Israel, we always talked about the system as being military, racist. Now it’s become more hyper-nationalist and more messianic in many ways, because the absolutist ideology has superimposed itself also on the Israeli body politic. And this is extremely serious because you bring God into the picture and you give yourself the benefit of divine right and divine dispensation that there is no solution. And you can easily dehumanize the other.

And in the States, again, they looked at the crowd. They look at people who felt victimized. And in many ways, the parties that were supposed to serve the working-class, the [brand] people, the oppressed, and so on, did not. And they were seen as being elitist. So that agenda did not develop in a way to respond to the needs of people like the democratic party; I don’t want to get into that either. But it turned out they were accused of being elitists themselves, and political correctness became charge, and so on.

But to go back to the issue of raw naked misogyny, because when you give yourself license to assign value to any group of people, particularly if you feel threatened and you’re outside their club, the elite club, then of course those people who are outside will be glad to disenfranchise, to feel marginalized and so on, are going to go towards the people who guarantee them safety, security, and prosperity, and so on, regardless of the language. And when you bring down the language to the language that caters to your fears and generates those fears, then of course you are bringing down the whole level of social political discourse.

And once you do that, I mean there is a correlated, a definite outcome would be. Not just outcome but an integral part of this type of perception of language will be the clear attacks on women, because you view women as being not just weaker but as being beneath the more powerful. And so the attacks on women and misogyny also based themselves on a long-standing hidden traditional disregard for women.

MODERATOR: And so feminist strategies? Yeah?

HANAN ASHRAWI: And I think—look, I don’t think that you should leave it up to the women to liberate themselves. I think women and enlightened men, and men who understand the real meaning of masculinity, have to be the real allies of women, because the mentality of discrimination and oppression and so on is the same. It will discriminate against men and women regardless. But the mentality of enlightenment, of understanding that it is in the interest of society as a whole to guarantee equal rights to women, that this kind of approach will empower all of society. You cannot be strong at the expense of the weak. You cannot be strong at the expense of excluding the other. You cannot fragment society and think that it will be strong. It certainly will be weaker.

So I think we need not just women’s organizations and women’s approach—of course we need that. But we need also enlightened men to become genuine allies, to become genuine advocates, and not just defenders, but the people—sorry, I did the undoable—of being the corrective force, let’s say, within society. And of course understanding that it is a right for women to be equal. It is not a condescending gift; this is what my father told us, and he wrote about this before he got married and had five daughters. He said women have the right to be equal by right and not as a condescending gift by the men. And so he said when—later on he said whenever when I try to do things that were very untraditional in our society, he said look, we never put limits to your abilities or your behavior or whatever. We trusted you. So don’t accept any limits by others about society. That’s how you empower. You need men who would empower women as well, but also you need women’s solidarity. So I have had the benefit of the support of enlightened confident men, I have had the benefit of women mutinying and rebelling and standing together in solidarity to help. I’ve also had the benefit of a wonderful family, husband, and daughters who were—

MODERATOR: He’s here.

HANAN ASHRAWI: Yes. He’s here. Emil and my two daughters, Amal and Zeina, who are fantastic. They called it my power base when I was in the middle of negotiations because they felt that negotiations were much more difficult than demonstrations and going to prison or being beaten up by the army. And it certainly is a difficult task. And I was a one-woman—no, there was another woman with me in the leadership committee and negotiations, and another woman on the negotiating team, so were the only delegation of Palestinians who had women in the Madrid talks and Washington talks, and we’re very proud of that.

So as I say, it’s true that women cannot make peace by themselves, and they cannot be left to undo the damage done by the men. And I can tell you, most conflicts, if not all of them, are done by men; they are man-made. And I always say man-made, but of course it’s up to the women to prevent a different language, but it’s also up to the men who understand that man-made conflicts can be resolved on the basis of legality and by political means, not by God anyway.

MODERATOR: Great. So solidarity, mutiny, and I think also we need defectors from easy patriarchy. We need men who stand in solidarity and put feminist values and women’s equality as equal goals—

HANAN ASHRAWI: Challenge the patriarchy.

MODERATOR: And challenge the patriarchy.

Now just the very last question—then we’ll open—is about the UN’s position has always been to defend the two-state solution; it still is. We’re in the UN now. Are there any last messages for the UN and its priorities now? Briefly, of course.

HANAN ASHRAWI: I like your sense of humor. Now you’ve been at it for so many years, you haven’t found the answer yet?

Look, I started by saying we appreciate all the resolutions, we appreciate 2334, we appreciate all the institutions and organizations that have been supportive of women, we appreciate this committee and the division and so on. But without the political will to pursue these things, without the insistence on implementation, resolutions get filed away and they collect dust, and actions and behavior will go in a different way.

The question of accountability is crucial to us. So I will tell you what we tell ourselves as Palestinians, without pontificating too much. One should not be intimidated by pressure, by blackmail, by threats. I know there are many governments who are worried about themselves and about their interests. I know there are many organizations that are worried that they will lose funding.

Look, nobody is more worried than the Palestinians because we don’t have any money anyway, since we’ve not had control over our resources or our land or anything, including your human resource. And we are being threatened by Congress. Not that they support us, but they keep telling, if you go to the ICC, that’s a nuclear weapon. That’s the end of it. You will get no money from Congress, you will be declared terrorist organizations. I said, we’re already declared terrorist organizations. And the funding that the Americans give us are funds that go to some infrastructure here and there, but primarily to security because they want our security to be subcontractors for the Israelis because the Israeli security is [permanent].

So now Congress is saying they’re quite willing to withhold funds from us, except for the security because they want to keep the peace. They don’t want Israeli security to be there. That’s the thing. But the UN, I’m beginning to feel is subject to intimidation sometimes, not just in terms of financial support, not just what happened to UNESCO and so on. And there are people in high places who are worried that they might lose the American contribution, and there are Americans who are threatening to reduce, remove their contributions. I think such a global organization should not be subject to blackmail and threats and intimidation and pressure at all. And there are people who should step up and who should really take decisions that we have to liberate this organization from such threats.

To the charges, you should not be on the defensive. You cannot be accused of being anti-Israeli if you are pro-peace and pro-justice. This kind of language is becoming prevalent. If you support the Palestinians, you’re against Israel. Or if you are for your own laws and justice and resolutions and so on, then you are against Israel. The problem is Israeli behavior; it is not the institution. It is not the fact that the UN wants to enforce or wants to respect its mandate. And we haven’t seen a single resolution as well as agreements [indiscernible] being implemented. Why not?

So it seems to me, I’ll tell you as I’m telling the Europeans, you need to reenergize, you need to feel empowered yourself, you need to feel your power, and you need to act upon it. Because there is power there. And all this intimidation and all these threats, this is unacceptable in such a global organization. And I said to you, if you get the Palestinians to the point where we have nothing to lose, desperate people do desperate things. On the contrary, it’s important to stand with the victims and to continue to speak truth to power—that’s your job—and to expose violations and to pull for interpretation and redress. And it takes courage I know in these days, especially with the government now with not just the populism but also self-appointed righteousness that I see emerging. I’m sure you’ve heard this language. It has to be addressed. And there is room for commitment to principles and values that have governed the behavior of this organization or that are the basis of this organization since its inception. What’s peacemaking and peace building? We’re supposed to be peacemakers. Why are you exclude it? Why is it that when it comes to Palestine that peace is left up to one country? Or that the occupation is allowed to continue without any intervention?

These are things that I think to many people would be very basic. But those who know the complexities of the work here and the position of different governments and countries understand how difficult it is. But still I think one has to show respect for the, not just the mandate, but the standing and the credibility and the integrity of this institution. And follow-up is very important. We’ve been asking, sorry, 2334 was taken, we need follow-up on that. Also, individual countries who talk about the two-state solution and so on should recognize the Palestinian state. Isn’t that [indiscernible]. It’s not it’s up to your conscious. Look, I believe in the two-state solution, so I can go home and do nothing because I believe in peace and justice. Well, you have to do something about it because the two-state solution is not only disappearing, but you are seeing the emergence of an apartheid state.

In an apartheid state there is a war crime. You are seeing an ongoing commitment—commission of war crimes in the settlements and the expansion, settlement expansion, and the annexation of Jerusalem, and the killing of civilians. I mean, the Gaza tragedy has not been resolved yet. And I worry that every time an Israeli leader is in Kabul he will use an attack on Gaza to get out of it or to divert attention. This has become very common among leaders. I don’t want to say whom, but sort of a distract and divert. Distract attention, divert the course of the discourse. Okay. And that’s happening.

Thank you.

MODERATOR: Well, thank you so much for your candid responses and insights. By no means distract, but perhaps divert, we are going to now divert to questions from all of you. I do not represent the UN, and therefore I am a little bit wobbly on protocol. So if I could just start by saying what the South Africans say, which is all protocols observed, and please forgive me if I fail to adequately recognize anyone. But I would like to—actually, there’s one protocol I have to observe, which is to call on the Minister for Women and Gender Equality from Venezuela, who has requested the first question. Is that you, Madam? I didn’t know. Okay. Please go ahead.

BLANCA EEKHOUT, VENEZUELAN MINISTER FOR WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY: First of all, I would like to thank Dr. Hanan Ashrawi. It is a pleasure for us that you’re here today and your legacy and the legacy of **Yasser Arafat**. I would also like to salute Ambassador Fode and welcome him. It is very important for us, for Venezuela, this fight—at this battle for peace in Palestine. And to all ambassadors here today, we understand that peace is only possible with development and the end of occupation. Venezuela is committed under the legacy of President Chavez and ratified by President Armando on the commitments for the independence of the Palestinian people. For the independence of the Palestinian people.

We have taken strong stances with the operation. We broke relations with Israel to defend the right to life of the Palestinian people. So we haven’t taken, we haven’t restrained ourselves in the defense for—to life of the Palestinian people. The necessity for a war, a multi-poor and pluri-centric war where … multiplayer-centric world, it’s the only way of guaranteeing peace. We believe that it’s important for the United Nations to hold accountable those responsible for the crimes against the Palestinian people. We demand for the liberation of children that have been captured for fighting for their rights and liberation of Palestine. Women will only achieve their emancipation equality and equality if there is no occupation. Venezuela is committed to the fight of Palestinian women, which is the fight of all women across the world.

Long live Palestine.

MODERATOR: I think we’ll take a couple of points and comments and questions. Two, ideally, and then we will ask for a response. Ambassador Mansour, did you want to?

RIYAD MANSOUR, PALESTINIAN REPRESENTATIVE: Thank you very much. I want to just to say that how honored we are to have Dr. Hanan Ashrawi with us and to thank her so much for her presentation and eloquent way in which she responded to your questions.

Let me say on behalf of the delegation of the State of Palestine at the United Nations that we are grateful to the Committee, to the Chairman, and to all of my colleagues who are members of the Committee and the Bureau who are with us. To the ministers who are with us, I believe in addition to the Minister from Venezuela, we have a Minister from Pakistan. We are grateful for having them with us today.

Let me just say that it was legislated in the General Assembly to authorize the Committee in collaboration with countries, agencies, civil society, and so on and so forth, to organize as many activities in all corners of the globe. During this year, which is the year in which we will commemorate 50 years since the beginning of occupation in June, with a view of ending that occupation.

So I just want to say that this event is one of those events, as we continue the march of highlighting the struggle of the Palestinian people and the ruthlessness of the Israeli occupation against our people. So this is one event. Many events before it took place and many events after it will take place, because this year only it will not be the 50 years of the occupation, but in November, it will be 100 years since the adoption of the infamous Balfour Declaration. We are trying very hard to have a very famous individual, Professor **Walid Khalidi** hopefully in November 2 to fill the General Assembly hole to tell us things about the Balfour Declaration.

We are trying very hard, and Nawaf is here, Ambassador of Lebanon, we are working in order to make that a reality. And of course, we will have a large conference, hopefully in the General Assembly Hall as well in June marking the fiftieth anniversary of occupation. So I hope that all of you will be with us and others, and we are grateful for all those who are very active countries, civil societies, and officials to help us to withstand the onslaught against our people.

The second issue that I wanted to raise with you that Hanan referred to the fact that a very respectable Palestinian individual was denied a very important and complicated post by the UN simply because he is a Palestinian. And as we speak today, there is another very respectable professional, Dr. Rima Khalaf, who was pressured by you know who in order to withdraw a professional report about the reality over the Palestinian people and their occupation with resemblance of apartheid. And she was pressured to remove that report, and she resigned as we speak. She made a press conference. I just want to tell you that we salute her and salute her courage. And we do not accept blackmail to try not to allow the UN to bring independent, professional thinking and research to address issues like that.

When John Dugard reported about 10 years ago about elements of apartheid in the Israeli society, he was not forced to resign or to be removed from office. Unfortunately, 10 years later, we see this reality in which Rima Khalaf, a very brave Jordanian minister or ex-minister who was carrying her job in a very impeccable way, was forced to do this thing. And I just want to share with you that I was consulting with my colleagues, Arab investors, to have an emergency meeting this afternoon in order to lead with the situation and to resist. We will not accept the blackmail in dealing with politics of the United Nations. I just wanted to share that with you.

And again, I don’t want to have a dark cloud over this very important meeting. Dr. Hanan Ashrawi is a superstar among the Palestinian people, and she represents the best of us.

Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Ambassador. And, Ambassador, would you go ahead?

JERRY MATTHEWS MATJILA, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF SOUTH AFRICA: Chair, thanks so much. [indiscernible] will observe, as a South African [indiscernible] will observe.

Ambassador, thanks very much for convening this. Hanan Ashrawi, it is such a great pleasure always to listen to you and the way you articulate and the way you happily brave on the path in course.

Two questions, Chair. [indiscernible], can you just briefly just tell us about, what is it you believe the Palestinian prisoners are at? Prisoners, what is happening in that area?

The second question is, there used to be a peace camp in Israel. Why isn’t there a peace camp? Thanks very much.

HANAN ASHRAWI: Okay. I would like for us to start by thanking the Venezuelan minister. I’m sorry, I need to know your name.

BLANCA EEKHOUT: Blanca Eekhout.

HANAN ASHRAWI: Okay. Minister Blanca Eekhout, I thank you for your statements of solidarity. We have always understood that Venezuela is not just in solidarity with Palestine, but in actually close identification with the Palestinian cause. And they have taken very strong and decisive positions on that in support of justice and against the occupation and the injustice done to Palestine. You also raise the issue of women’s equality, that it cannot be fully possible unless the occupation ends.

This is something rather crucial, and those of you who are in with CSW now and even with the UN Women, we always blame also a large part of suffering and violence and discrimination as being an offshoot of the occupation. Because when you’re living under such a repressive system that deprives you of all your rights, and a violent system of constant aggression, then the violence finds its way into society. When you have ways of discrimination and dehumanizing people and devaluing their lives and rights, also that in many ways affects women primarily. And it also has implications for the behavior of men.

When the men feel disempowered and they feel vulnerable, and they cannot protect their families and their communities, and they have tremendous anger and resentment, it also takes itself out, expresses itself against the women. So if you want to deal with women’s rights in Palestine, yes, you have to deal with the enslavement of the whole people. But you cannot postpone the women’s struggle until we are free. That was our position that the struggle for self-determination, freedom, dignity, equality goes together whether at the national level or at the general level on the issues of social injustice.

So I thank you for raising this question.

Riyad, thank you very much for your very kind words. I’m very embarrassed. But you said something that—let me add just we are—not celebrating—we are commemorating 100, 70, 50. A hundred years since the infamous Balfour Declaration, yes. Seventy years of the partition, and it’s the UN that took the decision to partition Palestine. And 50 years since the occupation. And I think we can also say we are approaching zero time for the two-state solution. So yes, this year is significant and its significance should be expressed in decisive action and engagement.

And I’d like to thank all the people who are engaged in carrying out activities and in taking concrete steps to ensure that this injustice does not continue, and that there are counter forces that are going to stand and face this injustice.

We were absolutely indignant what happened to Salam Fayyad because we felt you’re depriving the UN also of people who are qualified, who are excluded by virtue of their nationality. That’s all. And this is unacceptable. This is unjust, because you’re not only excluding the Palestinians, you’re also telling the UN that you cannot avail yourself of such qualified people because, what, Palestinians are subhuman? Palestinians have to be devalued also at the UN? This is just unconscionable really.

But now what happened with Rima, I have known Rima Khalaf for years and years and years. An indefatigable fighter for justice and human rights, and a very brave woman. Those of you who have read the Arab Human Development Report, you knew that Rima was behind—she was a big UN VP. And a woman of foresight and courage and highly respected throughout the Arab world, actually throughout the world. This kind of intimidation and blackmail should not be acceptable at all in such an organization. You asked me what the UN can do. The UN cannot be part of a discriminatory oppressive system. It cannot allow individuals countries to blackmail the UN, and again to punish individuals for having the courage to speak out. I mean, what are you going to do when Jimmy Carter said peace, not apartheid? Everybody is calling it apartheid. Even Israelis are calling it apartheid. And the South Africans told us when we had delegations that this is worse than apartheid in the words of Ilan Pappe, this is a displacement-replacement paradigm where you are attempting to eradicate a whole people; their culture, their history, their rights, and so on, and replace them with another. And this is a situation where you do have ethnic cleansing.

Now, the problem is not to be upset because a word was used, like ethnic cleansing or apartheid. The question is to be really upset because this is being practiced. You don’t object to a description, you object to the act. And we have the responsibility and the right to call the act by its name. We are not going to cleanse the language because we don’t want to upset Israel or [indiscernible].

So for me, I really, really would like to send a message to Rima not to resign. I think people who are forcing her to resign should leave that office. But she is the one in the right and she is a courageous woman and not just women but the men who understand what it takes to stand up to this, this form of censorship and intimidation should stand up with Rima, really, all of us. This is not just censorship, this is blackmail, this is intimidation. This is an attempt at silencing critics of Israel really. And it is an apartheid situation and there is ethnic cleansing be carried whether in Jerusalem or in [other cities] throughout Palestine. There is discrimination and Israel is legislating, not just for discrimination but for also targeting its own organizations who want to speak out, including breaking the silence and human rights organizations.

Now, South Africa is a country that we love dearly. Doesn’t date back to Mandela, even before. I remember when I was a student in ’69, we had the General Union of Palestine Students meetings and we—ANC and they said when you are free, when Palestine is free, you mustn’t forget us in our struggle against apartheid. And I remember when Mandela was, at least an early ’90s, we met, we used to meet regularly. He was man of history, man of courage and dignity. And he’s the one who said that no one is free until Palestine is free. Our dignity is closely linked to Palestine. So I thank you for this historical relationship and for this courage.

Palestinian prisoners. Look, since 1967, Israel has imprisoned over 800,000 Palestinians since the beginning of occupation, more than 800,000. So it’s very hard to find Palestinians of the appropriate age who have not been to jail. That’s why we called ourselves prison graduates. And it is—as many people say why do you support prisoners? Because Palestinians nationalists go to jail, that’s where we go. Very few people haven’t been to jail, because Palestinians are not easily tamed and to Israel, if you resist the occupation by whatever means, then you are liable to go in. Of course they use administrative detention against many people because administrative detention, which is a leftover of British colonial days does not require evidence, does not require pressing charges, does not require trials. All you need to do, as one military governor told me when he imprisoned a friend of mine, a physics professor, that we think he was thinking of doing something. With such concrete evidence, you know?

This man lost four years of his life in a horrible Israeli prison. Renewable every six months. This is the kind of charge you can have. Britain, when it withdrew from Palestine, they repealed administrative punitive measures including house demolitions, including collective punitive measures, and so on, including deportation, and including administrative detention. But Israel kept them and kept many emergency laws dating back from the British mandatory period in order to discriminate against the Palestinians and to maintain the system of colonialism. I’m sure many people don’t know that. And they use it also to exercise censorship against their own press. People should look into the legal system. It’s not just contemporary legislation that it discriminatory and oppressive. It is the use of the colonial legacy against us.

So right now we have over 7,500 prisoners. At one time or another, they vary, they come from. At one time we had 11,000, but every day Israel enters the occupied territories, the occupied Palestine, they come in the what is called Areas A where they’re not supposed to come anyway, but they come every day, every night. They arrest people that were there, anywhere from 10 to 30 people a night. They carry out raids, they abduct them, they take them in prisons in Israel, which is illegal again.

I would like to mention some of my colleagues from the legislative council who are still in prison, who were abducted like **Marwan Barghouti** was taken from Ramallah and he was falsely charged and tried in Tel Aviv, which is illegal. And he was tried there and he was given three life sentences plus some other time when everybody knows he was not guilty of committing any act of violence. They somehow found ways of giving him, because he was guilty of organizing, yes, he was organizing the youth and he was very active in resistance and so on. And he is a credible leader in Palestine.

So it is an ongoing hemorrhage here, an ongoing pain and injustice, the Palestinian prisoners’ issue. And now they’re telling us if you support the prisoners, if you in any way support their families and so on that you are guilty of terrorism, aiding and abetting, and guilty of incitement.

Now, yesterday they accused the PLO Ministry of Finance, which is called the National Fund, the Palestinian National Fund. They are charging it as being a terrorist organization because it helps the families of prisoners. So now the PLO is the only terrorist organization with no funds. The Palestine National Fund has existed long before Israel has existed, I think. But still, now it is, I don’t know if they passed the bill or if it is presented. I bet that it was—it was presented by Naftali Bennett? Lieberman. Oof. They are very creative when it comes to finding ways. I don’t know how convoluted they can be here.

Now, the peace camp in Israel has been intimidated and silenced in many ways. And it has been pushed to the limits, and they call them extremists in Israel. There the lunatic fringe, they say. They are extremists if you talk about this. If you notice gradually, if you follow Israeli elections, part of the elections discourse on campaign rhetoric had very little to do with peace. It had a lot to do with housing, without linking housing to the settlements, for example. The cost of cottage cheese; we’re not talking about the economic benefits of the occupation. People to speak out freely in Israel these days find tremendous obstacles, legal and otherwise, and labeling, and so on. The whole terrain and political terrain in Israel has shifted to the right, and to the extreme right. More extreme and more extreme where things that were unheard of and could not be articulated in civilized society are now quite of the traditional acceptable discourse, public discourse about Palestinians and so on, about the land. Even legislating for annexation, for legalizing retroactively settlement outposts on Palestinian private property, and for giving Israeli settlers the green light to go and grab more land. This is legislated. This is incredible. Nowhere in the world would you do that, would you have that.

So the peace camp, unfortunately, is relatively silent. There are very few but very brave voices who are talking about a just peace. Not about peace in terms of pacification, how to tame the Palestinians under occupation. There are many people who talk about peace. Like let’s annex all of the West Bank or let’s annex [indiscernible] or area, and let’s give the Palestinians their own local rights under Israeli. They call this a peace proposal. They think that they’re talking about peace, but those who talk about a just peace, a few of those who act are even fewer, but they are subject to extremely stringent measures of persecution. We tell them, they get the Palestinian treatment when they talk about a just peace.

But there are people I’d like to knowledge, for example, the Committee Against House Demolitions, Rabbis for Human Rights, Uri Avnery, who has been constantly since—he’s in his 90s now, who is a great voice for peace. And many others. I mean, those who go out and demonstrate in the rain and the wind and [indiscernible], and so on in solidarity, they pay the price. But they are not a political power that has organized a challenge.

Now the language of extremism, and so on, has found its way into the centrists parties that they’re vying with Likud to become a watered-down Likud version. Lapid, for example, is sounding like Netanyahu more and more. The Labor Party, they turned around and called themselves the Zionist camp. And they’re beginning to justify some of the Likud’s policies.

Meretz, Zehava Gal-On, bless her, is one of the courageous women in Israel who has not changed because she was intimidated or threatened like her predecessor, Yossi Beilin. But before that we had Shulamit Aloni, the late Shulamit Aloni, who was one of the brave voices. I’m sure some of you of my generation know Shulamit, but she was a great woman, and she’s the one who called for accountability for Israeli soldiers who were committing war crimes.

So we have them. They haven’t disappeared. But as a block, as a political movement, no, they’re not there. And many of the so-called centrist parties have shifted to the right and have adopted the Likud’s sort of apologist attitude. You have a few, but they themselves are being targeted as well.

MODERATOR: Thank you so much. We have time for another round of questions. It would be so great if you could keep your questions terribly short. So we need to cooperate a little bit on this. Okay. So there’s a gentleman who’s been waiting a long time, a lady with auburn hair. Yes. So why don’t you go ahead first? And very short. And then Sarah, if I have time.

STEVE ROZMAN: Thank you. How much does it hurt Palestinian interests that neighboring Sunni governments are accommodating Israel because of the challenge from Iran?

MODERATOR: Kindly introduce yourself, please, before you ask a question.

STEVE ROZMAN: Oh yes. Steve Rozman from the Institute for the Study of Modern Day Slavery at Tougaloo College, Jackson, Mississippi.

MODERATOR: Lady with auburn hair? That was beautifully concise, so short.

ROMA STIBBERLY: Okay. I’m [Roma Stibberly] and I would like to ask—

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Thank you very much. I’m so proud to have, to feel that Dr. Hanan Ashrawi is with us today. She has always been—she was always being our model as Palestinian women, and we know how much she works to empower Palestinian women. I wanted to say that as a beginning. And I feel a little bit very upset today to hear the news about Rima Khalaf and the ESCWA report. And I want just to quote from the report, the solution, as it was said in the report, is the implementation of international law, the application of principles of nondiscrimination, and the rights to self-determination and achieving justice, all of them issues and principles that are to shine in the United Nations system.

So, Dr. Hanan, do you have any concrete suggestion for the United Nations now on this specific issue? If we don’t make the occupying authority pay the price for its occupation, I don’t think we can come to a situation where we can bring in a just and durable solution to the conflict. So what is your concrete suggestion? In this case, we’re seeing at the CSW where we are discussing the economic empowerment of women, ESCWA comes with this very important report on our region and on Palestine specifically and the territory, and we see the report being taken away, although it has been developed by Richard Falk, the Special Rapporteur on the occupied territory and Professor Virginia Tilley.

So please, can we have a specific concrete suggestion that now we in the CSW and the United Nations and the report is being withdrawn by the United Nations? Thank you very much.

MODERATOR: Thank you. The lady who is knitting for peace.

ROMA STIBBERLY: Thank you. I’m [Roma Stibberly]. I have, yes, I have a question. And that is, we have the example of the women in Liberia. Yesterday I was at an event at the Sri Lanka mission, and the woman from Colombia discussed the role of women in bringing about peace. In Sri Lanka itself, the women are very active in reconciliation. It seems to me that we have to talk about solutions, and not about what happened, or what is, but what can be. And why not get a—women from Palestine and from Israel and maybe from a third country and show women’s power that you can do it?

MODERATOR: Thank you. Madame Minister, I am so sorry, I didn’t see you earlier. Go ahead, please.

KHAWAR MUMTAZ: Thank you. I’m speaking on behalf of Pakistan. My name is Khawar Mumtaz. I chair the National Commission on the Status the Women. This has been an extremely enlightening session, and we would like to thank Dr. Hanan Ashrawi for her candid appraisal of the UN and what its role should be in terms of peace. And we would like to, through her, salute all those women in Palestine, men, and especially children who have to suffer the oppression and occupation over the years.

This is an issue that Pakistan has always supported and will continue to support, but as a woman and as an activist, I really want to understand how women are organizing for towards ending peace and for towards ending the conflict and working towards peace. Because I know, and I’m sure that women are organizing. They’re not only victims, they’re also active in towards peace. So we would like some sort of light thrown on that. With that, just another word of admiration for Dr. Ashrawi.

MODERATOR: Thank you. Thank you so much. And I think the last question to you, sir. I’m so sorry, everyone else.

NEVILLE GERTZE, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF NAMIBIA: Thank you very much, Moderator. And from my side, I also wish to thank the Dr. Hanan Ashrawi for the wonderful presentation and keeping us up to date with the latest developments.

My name is Neville Gertze. I am the Permanent Representative of Namibia to the UN. And you can tell that we share the same name with the moderator. That’s probably why I don’t have really more questions because she has asked such brilliant questions already.

I just wanted to point out that the—Dr. Ashrawi probably knows that the central tenet of the Namibian foreign policy is that our independence is incomplete until we see that Palestine and the Western Sahara have also been given the right to self-determination.

When I hear the word apartheid, you will understand that it engenders a lot of anger and hatred and memories of really bad times that we have gone through. And when you talk about the wall, and that it is a physical image of I think a structure of apartheid that is being imposed on you, I remember the times when we had our people out in the cold. And I’m wondering, what is it that you are doing to deal with the Palestinians in the diaspora? How are we organizing them? How are we supporting them to harness also their capacity to support the process? I thank you very much.

HANAN ASHRAWI: I will try to answer briefly. There are quite a few questions. How much does it hurt Palestinians? I address the issue of the Sunni states. This is Steve, I think? Yes. The fact that Israel is starting to create an impression that it has this alliance with the Sunni moderate states as opposed to Iran and so on, and I said that’s a rather simplistic polarization because there are sorts of complexities in the region that should not be turned into a simple division of saying that Israel is on the side of some Arab countries and, therefore, it has ties with some of them as opposed to others. There is an issue of Arab consensus and it will never change until it is resolved, hopefully. And I think it is our responsibility, also, to work on our relations with the Arab world and to improve our relations with the Arab world because without the Arab world Palestine is vulnerable and exposed, whether has to do with politics and political positions or activism of the international arena and diplomacy or whether it is with financial support and other forms of support. Yes, regardless of some differences here and there, Palestine remains a nation of consensus and we do not take sides within the Arab world or on issues that affect one Arab country or the other. We support the Arab consensus itself.

When it comes to [indiscernible], you asked about what is to be done? It’s very painful. I don’t know if I have the answer. I mean, CSW certainly, the Commission has to take a position on this and has to uphold the conclusions of Richard Falk and Virginia Tilley, because these are two people who know the facts and who are speaking out and who are proposing solutions. And you read part of this, the conclusions and recommendations, which are real. That’s it. It cannot be simpler. You end the occupation when you end the apartheid situation. Any occupation, any situation of injustice goes without accountability, especially things that it can continue without having to pay a price for the occupation. Then of course it will continue. I don’t think any occupier or any colonial power has ever been motivated by a guilty conscience or by an awakening sense of justice and ethics and morality. There have to be instruments and institutions that would intervene and hold it accountable, and this is the role of the UN, and it is the role also of individual countries and we talked about the EU.

We started asking the EU to label settlement products in the 1980s. It took them close to 40 years to decide to label them, to respect their own people’s right to be ethical consumers. Or ethical investors. Or to know the sources of what they’re buying. So the right to know, this is something that is true of any democracy. And Israel, again, waxed hysterical and ballistic when it came to the fact that its settlement products were being labeled. But the only times Israel moved in any way was when it knew there was a price to be paid. And I think now perhaps we can start by asking the CSW and other UN organizations everywhere to take positions and to stand up and to ask that the report be reinstated because there is nothing wrong with it. You have to prove, if you want to withdraw report, you have to prove that it’s erroneous. And it’s not. Or it incites to violence or it is racist, or whatever. But a report like that, that describes the situation and gives complete suggestions for a solution must be reinstated. And I believe also that Rima must be asked to return to her resignation. This is the only way to do that, and is not going to happen by itself unless we mobilize and unless our voices are heard and unless we act in defense of people who dare to tell the truth.

Again, the truth will be withheld and will be disguised and there would be censorship and people will be intimidated. Because if it happened to Rima and to Virginia Tilley and to Richard Falk and others, it could happen everywhere, then people are silenced. And it doesn’t matter if the US or other countries will not support or pay their dues to the UN or other organizations. I think respecting your own mandate and your own laws is much more important. And having, again, a good conscience is what’s more important. I don’t know how concretely I can give you example.

What about women? I told you, women were the first. This is from—I forgot the minister. Yes, women were the first to mobilize and to talk about peace and to work on the joint peace agenda, to challenge this man-made situation. Don’t call it a conflict. It’s a situation of occupied/unoccupied. And we can talk to each other as women, but we have to challenge the occupation. This is the real issue. And having a Palestinian-Israeli dialogue, it started in the ’70s and the ’80s there was a dialogue. And the women were the first to break this and say, no, we were saying how the occupation is lethal to the Palestinians. And the women’s organization and Peace Now and some were saying how the occupation restores the modern fiber of Israel. So the women have to look at it from their perspectives, but there has to be a common sense of justice and values to work together. You cannot accommodate the occupation and say, okay, now I want my token Palestinian counterpart in dialogue. That’s why we said we won’t normalize in the sense we won’t say everything is fine provided we talk to each other.

There has to be some objective that you’re working for and some joint visions and some joint actions. It’s not just the men who are responsible for this. There are whole societies that are being drawn into this. You have whole cross-section of settlers. Now, when we started the peace process and the women were the ones who started peace process in 1991, we were very vocal in that, there were over 100,000 settlers in the West Bank. Now you have over 700,000 settlers. The peace process has ended up being a cover for expansionism and for taking over the whole West Bank.

So women’s power, yes, but women’s power to speak, to stand up to injustice, to speak truth to power. That’s what we need. Not to try to create a false impression that we are talking and everything is fine. They have to challenge their own system. They have to challenge the occupation. We have challenged the occupation. We continue to do so. And there are many brave women who are doing that, but you cannot have peace with the occupation. It’s not going to happen. Unless you believe that the Palestinians are going to either suffer from collective amnesia or they are going to be—their spirit will be broken and they will succumb to the status of enslavement in the 21st century. This cannot happen. It has to stop.

As far as we have to work for peace. Okay. No, we are not only victims, and I don’t like the mentality of victimization, because when you see yourself only as victim, then you give yourself license to do unto others what was done unto you, which we don’t believe in. We have been proactive. It’s not, as I said, the mobilizing to end the conflict. When we describe what is happening it’s because the truth has been absent for so long. It’s because the Palestinian narrative has been silenced and has been censored and because most people hear only the doctored language of Israel. Mainstream media has led to greater ignorance so I’m challenging this to say let’s—asking people to unlearn some of the preconceptions, misconceptions, and so on that Israel has managed to create over all these years. We really have to have the courage to address the truth. That’s why we have to spell it out. That’s how we continue to advocate and speak out honestly and courageously. And I expect nothing less from people in this room, and I believe that the Palestinians are not victims only. The Palestinians have been very proactive.

I’ll end with this. I don’t think there’s any nation that has made this tremendously painful concession and compromise of accepting another country on 78% of their land. All of Palestine was Palestinian, right? And when Israel was created on 54% of Palestine by the partition plan, it was seen as an act of tremendous injustice. When we went to the negotiations, we went even beyond that and we said, okay, that 22% that Israel occupied in ’67 should be the Palestinian State. And that would not come as a result of just concessions. It came as a result of a long and painstaking and painful debate and discussion within the Palestinian body politic. And it’s not easy, and there are many Palestinians who are still smarting, who say why did you do that? Because we want to create the situation where there are two countries that are equal and living side-by-side.

And I still believe that Israel’s legitimacy depends on our acceptance of Israel, because it was created on our land, and we are the aggrieved party. But we made this essential compromise, and it has to be recognized as such. And it wasn’t easy. And this is our contribution to peace. And we accepted and negotiated political settlement based on international law. What else can the Palestinians give? This is our commitment to peace. And women were the first to articulate a nonviolent solution, a nonviolent resistance, and to be part of neighborhood and popular committees and nation-building and so on.

But then we cannot act on behalf of the whole world and stand up to the occupation and build our state and end injustice all by ourselves when both our hands are tied behind our backs. And we don’t have freedom of movement, freedom of expression, even the security of knowing that your home will not be removed or that you will not be prevented from speaking out anymore.

So anyway, we still are committed to the two-state solution. This is a commitment that the Palestinian people, the PNC is still committed to for national attention. But we have to be careful that our language and political agenda does not become absolutely irrelevant by the facts on the ground that are being created by Israel.

Thank you.

FODE SECK: No conclusion. That concludes the meeting. Thank you all.