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**Situation in Occupied Territories Moving ‘From Bad to Worse’, Permanent Observer Tells Palestinian Rights Committee, Decrying Settlements, Home Demolitions**

**Presenting First Report on Occupation’s Costs Trade Official Describes Palestine’s Economy as ‘Captive Market’ for Israel**

Among other critical activities during the General Assembly’s seventy-first session, the State of Palestine would pursue efforts to enhance its status at the United Nations and demand that the international community end illegal settlement-building activities, its Permanent Observer told the Palestinian Rights Committee today.

Pledging to ensure that the Security Council, in particular, shouldered its responsibility to his people, Riyad Mansour recalled that President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority had outlined plans in that regard during the Assembly’s high-level debate.  “The situation on the ground is moving from bad to worse,” he told the Committee, known formally as the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.  It had gathered against the backdrop of Israel’s intensified settlement construction in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Recalling that the Security Council had been briefed on the matter last month, Mr. Mansour said the briefing had resulted in an unexpected open meeting, during which many speakers had emphasized the serious danger posed by continuing settlement construction.  In response, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel had publicly attacked members of the Council, referring to their demands for an end to the settlements as a form of ethnic cleansing.

Decrying that “abusive” language, he went on to describe the recent intensified demolition of homes in East Jerusalem, especially in Area C, as well as the extreme hardship endured by Palestinians living under siege in the Gaza Strip.  Hunger strikes by Palestinian prisoners, including those held under the inhumane practice of “administrative detention”, had also continued, he noted, adding that his delegation had documented such crimes in several letters to the Security Council and the Secretary-General, and had requested that they become official documents of the United Nations.

Since the beginning of the year, he continued, the State of Palestine had called on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibility vis-à-vis Israel’s illegal settlements.  It was insufficient for the Middle East Quartet to describe those crimes without laying out plans to end them.  In March, the State of Palestine had put forward a draft resolution on the settlements, which it had hoped would be forwarded to the Council.  If adopted, the text would send a strong message that the international community was “fed up” with the settlements and wanted their immediate cessation.

He said his delegation would continue to push for that draft resolution despite suggestions that it wait until the conclusion of the United States presidential election.  “We’ve been waiting for too long,” he added, emphasizing that “those who ask us to wait do not deliver” on their promises.

In that regard, he said, the Security Council would hold an Arria Formula meeting on Israeli settlement activities on 14 October, which, while insufficient, was a step in the right direction.  On 28 October, it would hold an open debate, during which Member States would hopefully focus on the illegal settlements.  “We are not going to allow the Security Council to run away from its responsibility to act,” he said, stressing that no meaningful doors could be opened to the political process without the immediate cessation of settlements.

Turning to other activities planned for the year, he said his delegation would continue to work with the International Criminal Court, which he hoped would soon move from its preliminary investigation of crimes committed against the Palestinian people to a formal investigation.  Noting that 2017 would mark 50 years since the start of Israel’s occupation — “far too long” for a supposedly temporary phenomenon — he said that his delegation also intended to submit to the General Assembly a draft resolution declaring 2017 the international year for ending the occupation.

Going forward, the delegation would also pursue enhanced status for the State of Palestine at the United Nations, he continued.  Recalling that his delegation had achieved observer State status in November 2012, he said it had since joined more than 40 international treaties and conventions.  It would now push for a resolution allowing the State of Palestine to sponsor and co-sponsor all General Assembly resolutions, he said, adding that the Committee should allow it to sit in alphabetical order among other delegations.

He concluded by saying that the State of Palestine was considering seeking the Chair of the “Group of 77” developing countries and China in 2019, and would shadow Ecuador as it assumed that position in 2017.  “Although we are moving slowly, we are moving surely,” he said, stressing his unwavering determination to attain independence for the State of Palestine and to save the two-State solution.

Also today, Rapporteur Carmelo Inguanez (Malta) presented the Committee’s draft report to the General Assembly, saying it covered developments on the ground as well as the Committee’s work since 7 October 2015.  In its conclusions and recommendations, the Committee stated that it would welcome revitalization of the peace negotiations, he added.

In relation to Gaza, the Committee would demand the lifting of the blockade on the enclave, he said, adding that it would also call on the international community to secure long-term funding, including for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).  The Committee would welcome the report of the United Nations Independent Commission of Inquiry on the 2014 Gaza conflict, and urge relevant authorities to work for an end to impunity.

The Committee would also welcome measures by the Human Rights Council to accelerate implementation of its resolution, which called for the creation of a database of all actors conducting business in areas under Israeli military occupation.  It would encourage other organizations and States to adopt and implement policies guaranteeing adherence to international conventions, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention, in connection with illegal settlements in occupied areas.

Additionally, he said, the Committee would suggest that its 2017 programme of international meetings and conferences focus on achieving the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and examining ways in which to achieve the two-State solution.  It would encourage civil society partners to work with their Governments and parliamentarians in order to gain their full support.

He said the Committee would recommend continuation of the annual capacity-building programme for Palestinian Government staff, and the special information programme of the Department of Public Information, which had made an important contribution to informing media.

Finally, the Committee would request that the General Assembly proclaim 2017 the “International Year to End the Israeli Occupation”, he said, adding that the draft report would be updated to reflect any new developments before its submission to the Assembly on 5 October.

The Committee then approved the draft report after perusing each section.

In relation to Chapter VI, Syria’s representative made a reservation regarding paragraph 92, saying some sentences were irrelevant to the current discussion.

The Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine and the representatives of Lebanon and Jordan took note of the reservation, while stressing nonetheless that the Committee would retain the agreed language from previous years.

Also briefing the Committee was Mahmoud Elkhafif, Coordinator of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development’s (UNCTAD) Assistance to the Palestinian People Unit and Senior Economic Affairs Officer within the Conference’s Division on Globalization and Development Strategies.  Presenting a report titled “UNCTAD assistance to the Palestinian people:  Developments in the economy of the Occupied Palestinian Territory”, he said it sought to document, for the first time, the economic cost of the Israeli occupation.  The full report would be presented to the General Assembly in the coming months.

Describing recent economic developments, he said that in 2015 the occupied Palestinian territories had seen no serious recovery from the 2014 recession.  While the economy had grown by 3.5 percentage points, such humble growth did not accurately reflect the situation, and additional indicators painted a fuller picture.  Unemployment stood at 28 per cent in the occupied territories and was even higher among youth.  Two thirds of Palestinians there were affected by food insecurity and millions were in need of humanitarian assistance.

Meanwhile, the Palestinian economy remained a “captive market” for Israel, creating a forced dependency, he said.  The leakage of Palestinian public funds into the Israeli treasury continued with $600 million to $700 million having leaked in 2015 alone.  Infant mortality in Gaza was alarmingly high, with about 50 deaths for every 1,000 infants.  The list of prohibited “dual use” materials — including construction materials and machinery — continued to grow, negatively impacting a number of Palestinian industries.

He went on to state that households in Gaza received just four to six hours of drinking water every few days.  Sewage was being discharged into the sea, due to a lack of electricity, and the health-care system was suffering.  Noting that Gaza’s full recovery would be impossible without a lifting of the blockade, he described additional costs of the occupation resulting from the systematic destruction of the Palestinians’ productive base, loss of water and other natural resources, economic fragmentation and loss of funds from international markets, as well as economic isolation.

“This just scratches the surface of the cost of the occupation,” he said, emphasizing the need — as outlined by the General Assembly in resolutions [69/20](https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/5ba47a5c6cef541b802563e000493b8c/f49c08f6cf97362c85257daf00721657?OpenDocument) and [70/12](https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/5ba47a5c6cef541b802563e000493b8c/f2ea91b32bb0309985257f11005e27fa?OpenDocument) — for the systematic documentation of such costs.  While the report represented a historic milestone, costs should be calculated annually in an evidence-based manner, which would require additional budgetary resources.

The Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine underlined the need to maximize the benefits of the report.  “We see the results of institutionalism,” he said, noting that the Committee would continue to consult with UNCTAD for regular reporting.

Nicaragua’s representative said the State of Palestine had every right to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.  “We have the responsibility to ensure that Palestine becomes an independent State,” she emphasized.

Cuba’s representative said it was critical that UNCTAD continue to provide regular information on the economic costs of the occupation.

In response to comments, Mr. Elkhafif drew attention to the link between the costs of occupation and the 2030 Agenda, stressing that reversing the occupation was the first step towards the latter’s implementation.

Turning to other business, Committee Chair Fodé Seck (Senegal) informed Member States that the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Government, conducted by the Division for Palestinian Rights, would begin on 17 October, and that a special meeting in observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People would be held on 29 November.  In addition, the Committee would inaugurate an exhibition to mark the International Day.

The Committee will reconvene on 15 November to consider resolutions relating to the question of Palestine.