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Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

Summary record of the 408th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 30 August 2022, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Gertze (Vice-Chair) (Namibia)

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In the absence of Mr. Niang (Senegal), Mr. Gertze (Namibia), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

1. *The agenda was adopted.*

The situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and developments in the political process

2. **Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, continued to deteriorate. In letters to the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Secretary-General, her delegation had detailed the escalating intensity of the violations and human rights abuses perpetrated by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people. In recent weeks, the Israeli military had carried out yet another criminal assault on the civilian population in Gaza, killing 49 Palestinians, including 4 women and 17 children, and leaving many families devastated while exacerbating the dire humanitarian conditions caused by the illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip.

3. Daily raids continued in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. To date, 85 Palestinian men, women and children had been killed in 2022, with many other injured or maimed in the violence perpetrated by the Israeli occupying forces and extremist settlers. Over 4,500 Palestinians were currently being detained and imprisoned in Israeli jails, including hundreds who were being held without charge. Many of the political prisoners, including children, were enduring physical and psychological mistreatment amounting to torture.

4. Palestinian land and property continued to be seized and destroyed and families forcibly displaced, especially in and around East Jerusalem and Hebron (Al-Khalil). The construction of settlements and so-called outposts and military installations persisted under the colonial occupation and apartheid regime imposed by Israel. At the same time, provocations, incitement and incursions continued at holy sites in occupied East Jerusalem, in particular the Aqsa Mosque and Haram al-Sharif, where the occupying Power was violating the historic and legal status quo and disrespecting the custodianship of Jordan over the site, risking a dangerous religious confrontation. The situation was further inflamed by Israeli officials and members of the Knesset, who had boasted of the recent breach of Haram al-Sharif by Jewish extremists. Attacks

on Palestinian civil society had also intensified, as Israel continued to restrict and expel human rights monitors. Israeli soldiers had raided the premises of seven humanitarian and human rights organizations, six of which had been designated as terrorist organizations, destroying property, seizing files and interrogating and threatening staff. States should demand that Israel cease its harassment, intimidation and assaults against Palestinian civil society and rescind the terrorist designations against those organizations.

5. Her delegation was grateful to the Committee for its long-standing support of Palestinian civil society and urged States to uphold their responsibility to protect the Palestinian people until their subjugation was brought to an end. The international community should hold Israel accountable for its crimes and use the non-violent tools at its disposal to pressure Israel to comply with international law and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Security Council.

6. There could be no justification for continuing to deny the State of Palestine admission as a full State Member of the United Nations. Her Government had therefore decided to move forward with its application, which had been submitted in 2011. It sought the support of the Committee, which had played a historic role in seeking justice for the Palestinian people and supporting their inalienable rights, including the rights to self-determination and independence. Admitting the State of Palestine as a full Member of the United Nations was imperative to preserving the two-State solution until a viable political process could be undertaken to end the occupation. It would also reinforce the international community's recognition of the pre-1967 borders, in accordance with Security Council resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#), as well as its position to reject and prohibit the acquisition of territory by force. Her delegation appealed to the United States of America, as a member of the Security Council, to refrain from obstructing the State's membership and to preserve the two-State solution until it could be achieved. In the meantime, her delegation would continue to pursue all legitimate means to hold Israel accountable for its crimes, protect the Palestinian people and seek the humanitarian assistance needed to alleviate their hardships under occupation and in exile. The international community was encouraged to provide political and financial support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to guarantee the well-being and dignity of Palestine refugees until a just solution to their plight was found on the basis of General Assembly resolution [194 \(III\)](#).

Briefing by the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East Representative Office, New York, on recent developments

7. **Ms. Gunnarsdottir** (Director, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) Representative Office, New York) said that UNRWA provided 5.7 million Palestinian refugees with humanitarian services, including primary and vocational education, primary health care, relief and social services, infrastructure and camp improvement, microfinance and emergency response.

8. The security situation in Gaza remained highly volatile. When hostilities broke out, UNRWA schools were the only place for displaced persons to seek shelter. Staff must therefore always have food and other necessities available and be prepared to change roles and convert schools into shelters overnight. The increasing prices of commodities had increased reliance on UNRWA aid, with 80 per cent of the population living below the national poverty line. At the same time, the price increases and currency devaluation continued to impact the Agency's ability to respond to the increased need; the cost of its quarterly food basket had increased by 42 per cent since the end of 2021.

9. The situation in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, also remained highly volatile. Conditions in the refugee camps had worsened significantly in 2022, with nearly all conflict-related indicators suggesting record levels of violence. The Agency's operations had been severely impeded by restricted access, road closures and incidents of tear gassing.

10. In Lebanon, which was facing multiple crises, inflation exceeded 80 per cent, and bread and fuel shortages were expected to continue. The rising cost of living, including for transport and telecommunications, was expected to limit refugees' ability to access UNRWA services. The levels of poverty, unemployment and desperation among Palestinian refugees was outpacing the Agency's ability to provide services. More than ever, UNRWA provided a lifeline for refugees in Lebanon, whose access to public services was limited owing to their legal status.

11. In the Syrian Arab Republic, 83 per cent of Palestinian refugees were living on less than \$2 per person per day, including the cash assistance provided by UNRWA, and 40 per cent remained in protracted displacement. Funding was needed to provide emergency cash and food assistance, rehabilitate UNRWA facilities and resume services at the Yarmouk and Ein el Tal refugee camps. For the families that had returned to those camps, UNRWA was providing mobile

health clinics and transport to the nearest UNRWA school.

12. She urged Member States to support the renewal of the Agency's mandate when it came under consideration at the forthcoming session of the General Assembly. Such support would send a strong message to Palestinian refugees, who felt that the international community had abandoned them.

13. With regard to the Agency's financial situation, for the third year in a row UNRWA was facing a cash-flow shortage that would impact its ability to pay staff salaries as it reached the end of the year. It had carried over debt totalling \$62 million in 2022 and \$75 million in 2021, and a funding gap of over \$100 million was anticipated in the programme budget for 2022. The lack of funds would impact the education of over 500,000 children and the livelihoods of 28,000 staff members and their dependents. It would also risk increasing volatility in a region where the predictability of UNRWA services contributed significantly to stability. She therefore called on Member States to increase their financial contributions, fulfil existing pledges without delay and, where possible, provide additional funds to support UNRWA through the end of 2022. She also asked Member States to consider options to provide more sustainable funding for the Agency, which relied almost entirely on voluntary contributions.

14. Although the situation on the ground for Palestinian refugees and the Agency's financial outlook were primarily bleak, there were also a number of successful examples of human development. Former UNRWA students were working on projects related to coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccines, a cure for pancreatic cancer and engineering at the United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration. An UNRWA information technology hub in Gaza employed 120 young men and women, providing information technology solutions to United Nations agencies worldwide. Despite the challenges they faced, UNRWA staff members remained dedicated to providing services to Palestinian refugees. During the pandemic, the Agency had quickly and efficiently transitioned to distance learning and telemedicine. In addition, the principals of two vocational training centres, in Gaza and Lebanon, aspired to incorporate solar energy into the curriculum in order to provide employment opportunities for students and a much-needed solution for the regions concerned. Nevertheless, such ideas required additional funding, which she hoped Member States would consider providing.

15. **The Chair** said that the briefings presented to the Committee illustrated the deplorable situation faced by

the Palestinian people. In the current climate, resources earmarked for relief efforts to support them were at risk of being diverted in order to alleviate the suffering caused by numerous other conflict situations around the world. The international community must urgently mobilize the necessary political and financial support for UNRWA, whose work on behalf of Palestinian refugees was a pillar of peace and stability in the region and should continue until a just and equitable resolution was reached. In addition, the Committee should continue working with other Member States to ensure that the Agency's mandate was renewed.

16. **Mr. Pieris** (Sri Lanka) said that, as Head of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, he had visited Jordan in July 2022 and had witnessed first-hand the situations described by the Director. The blockade of the Gaza Strip impacted every aspect of Palestinian life, including health and well-being, education, employment, freedom of movement, basic services and the environment. The humanitarian catastrophe was maintained and perpetuated by deliberate policies and practices that were designed to control a trapped population. The international community must therefore shift its focus from humanitarian emergencies to the root causes of the catastrophe and seek to end the blockade and border closures.

17. Despite its dire financial situation, UNRWA continued to exceed expectations. Its work was sustained by a dedicated staff, many of whom had benefited directly from the Agency's relief programme. To continue fulfilling its critical role for Palestinian refugees and regional stability, UNRWA urgently required sustained, predictable funding; health and education services, in particular, could not be maintained with ad hoc or emergency funding. The international community should therefore spare no effort to provide the Agency with the necessary resources.

18. **Mr. Nasir** (Indonesia) said that UNRWA urgently required financial and political support, as many Palestinians in the region depended on the Agency for their survival. His delegation reaffirmed its full support for UNRWA and called on Member States to increase and follow through with their financial commitments to the Agency. He commended UNRWA for its professionalism and dedication, while emphasizing the need to maintain accountability and effectiveness. The importance of the Agency's work notwithstanding, the international community must focus on the primary goal of establishing a lasting peace. Without clear and concrete progress in achieving the two-State solution,

the Palestinian people would continue to face violence and displacement and be denied their rights, living in a situation that could be equated to apartheid. His Government reiterated its support to the Palestinian people and called for concrete action to be taken to stop Israel from carrying out illegal policies and practices that threatened lives and undermined the future of the peace process.

19. **Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that Committee members could play an important role in appealing for the strongest possible political support in the General Assembly to renew the Agency's mandate. Given the recurring funding crisis, perhaps it was time to consider different funding solutions. In 2017, based on the report of the Secretary-General on the operations of UNRWA (A/71/849), a proposal had been made to increase the allocation from the United Nations regular budget to fund the Agency's essential operating costs. Although it had received strong support from members of the Committee, the initiative had been suspended owing to the difficult political climate at the time.

20. **Ms. Fernández Palacios** (Cuba) said that the international community must act swiftly and determinedly to end Israeli military incursions, particularly in the Gaza Strip, which had claimed the lives of hundreds of Palestinians, including children. Her delegation reiterated the importance of prioritizing the Palestinian question within the United Nations system in a broader context that extended beyond formal debates dedicated exclusively to that issue. At the same time, the international community must take a stand when warranted by the severity of the situation. Her delegation reiterated its support to grant the State of Palestine full membership in the United Nations and called on the Security Council and the General Assembly to take appropriate action in that regard.

21. The dire financial situation facing UNRWA gave cause for concern. The Agency continued to accomplish remarkable work with few resources and bring hope to millions of Palestinian refugees, despite a failed attempt to bring about its demise, orchestrated by its biggest donor. The international community must now make every possible effort to ensure that the Agency's work continued, beginning by renewing its mandate at the forthcoming session of the General Assembly. At the same time, Member States must demonstrate greater political will to guarantee predictable and sustainable financing.

22. **Mr. Othman** (Malaysia) said that his delegation would continue to highlight the human rights violations perpetrated by Israel against the Palestinian people,

including its apartheid policies, and would continue to urge all Member States to respect and implement Security Council resolution 2334 (2016). At the same time, it unequivocally supported full membership for the State of Palestine in the United Nations. The Palestinian people must be allowed to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination in an independent State, on the basis of the pre-1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital. His Government also reaffirmed its support for the work of UNRWA, including through its predictable and long-term financial contributions to the Agency.

23. **Ms. Özgür** (Türkiye) said that the recent escalation of violence had once again demonstrated the unsustainable nature of the status quo. Her Government strongly condemned the air strikes carried out by Israel on Gaza on 5 August, which had resulted in the loss of civilian lives, including children. It also condemned the raids against the Aqsa Mosque, which constituted a clear violation of the sanctity of Haram al-Sharif. In August, during an official visit by President Abbas, President Erdoğan had reiterated the country's solidarity with the Palestinian people and its strong support for their cause. Her delegation continued to advocate for the two-State solution and fully supported full membership for the State of Palestine in the United Nations.

24. As a member of the UNRWA Advisory Commission and Chair of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA, Türkiye was a strong supporter of the Agency's mandate and would support its renewal. The international community had a responsibility to match strong political support for UNRWA with sufficient, sustained and predictable funding. Given the Agency's budget shortfall of over \$100 million, her delegation strongly encouraged all States to fulfil their financial pledges.

25. **Ms. Gui Dan** (China) said that the conflict in Gaza had led to hundreds of civilian casualties and extensive infrastructure damage, once again pushing the situation to the brink of war. Her Government commended those States that had participated in brokering a ceasefire. The United Arab Emirates, China and other Security Council members had called for an emergency meeting on the situation in Gaza, held on 8 August, at which member States had called on all parties concerned to observe the ceasefire and urgently restore calm. During the conflict, UNRWA and other humanitarian agencies had overcome numerous difficulties to carry out active humanitarian operations, providing emergency relief and aid to the people in Gaza. In recent years, the Agency had repeatedly warned of its funding crisis, evidence of the worsening situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the decline in the international community's

attention and investment. The Agency required full political support and adequate, predictable and sustainable funding.

26. Efforts must be made to resolve the Palestinian question for the long term based on the two-State solution. Her Government called on Israel to cease settlement activities immediately in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, fulfil its humanitarian obligations and work towards achieving the two-State solution. Countries with significant influence should take an objective and impartial stand and make concrete efforts to advance the peace process. Her delegation hoped that the Committee would act proactively and with a greater sense of urgency. The two sides should resume negotiations on all final status issues, including those concerning Palestinian refugees. Her Government would continue to work with the international community to practice true multilateralism, restore the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and advocate a comprehensive and just solution for lasting peace in the Middle East.

27. **Mr. Mabhongo** (South Africa) said that UNRWA had made many notable achievements in extreme conditions, but the Agency's financial situation was untenable and risked reversing those hard-fought gains. His delegation called on the States members of the Committee to advocate for the renewal of the Agency's mandate. The human development success stories shared by the UNRWA Director demonstrated the potential of an independent State of Palestine. The Committee should work together to provide sustainable financing for the Agency and champion that cause in the broader United Nations system.

28. The situation on the ground in the State of Palestine clearly resembled the system of apartheid experienced in South Africa. His Government therefore stood in solidarity with the Palestinian people. In the previous week, the Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation had visited the State of Palestine for a strategic dialogue. The continued escalation of violence against the Palestinian people increasingly diminished the possibility of a two-State solution. A political solution based on internationally agreed parameters and international law was needed. The Committee's role must extend beyond making statements to summoning the political will necessary in order to develop collective strategies to advance the two-State solution.

29. **Mr. Elhomosany** (Egypt) said that Egypt had helped to establish the ceasefire and would continue to ensure that it was maintained and the situation on the ground improved through its projects in Gaza. His

delegation recognized the need for sustainable financing for UNRWA and stressed the importance of renewing the Agency's mandate in its entirety. The Committee should explore options to mobilize support for the renewal, in coordination with the delegation from the State of Palestine.

30. **Ms. Aliaa Ali** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that her country spared no effort to stand beside the Palestinian people in their struggle to exercise all their legitimate rights, particularly the right to establish a sovereign State on their territory with Jerusalem as its capital. Palestinian refugees must also have the right to return home, pursuant to international law and the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, particularly General Assembly resolution 194 (III). At the same time, the State of Palestine must be granted full membership in the United Nations. The Syrian Arab Republic had hosted Palestinian refugees for decades. However, measures imposed against the country had decreased its capacity to respond to the needs of Palestinian refugees as well as its citizens. Terrorist attacks had demolished the country's infrastructure and important sectors, as well as Palestinian camps. The international community had a collective responsibility to protect the inalienable rights of Palestinian refugees and preserve the mandate of UNRWA, particularly when attacks against the Agency were meant to undermine those rights.

31. **Mr. Jardali** (Lebanon) said that the mandate of UNRWA must be maintained in its entirety, as the Agency was vital to stability in the region and provided a lifeline for Palestinian refugees, including those in Lebanon. His delegation also called for sustainable, predictable resources to support the Agency's budget.

32. **Ms. Gunnarsdottir** (Director, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) Representative Office, New York) said that the discussion had reflected a deep understanding of the seriousness of the financial situation of UNRWA, as well as the situation on the ground. She thanked the delegations for their strong support, which would be essential during the debate on the Agency's mandate in the General Assembly.

Consideration of the draft report of the Committee to the General Assembly (A/77/35)

33. **The Chair** recalled that the draft report of the Committee had been circulated by the secretariat prior to the meeting.

34. *The draft report was adopted.*

35. **The Chair** requested all Governments and organizations to cooperate with and support the

Committee in carrying out its tasks, including the implementation of the recommendations contained in the report, and to support the Palestinian people in the realization of their right to self-determination. The two-State solution, in which Israel and Palestine lived side-by-side peacefully and the State of Palestine emerged sovereign and independent based on pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, was the only viable option for a just and peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine.

36. In accordance with the established practice, the adopted report would be transmitted to the Secretary-General for submission to the General Assembly.

Update on the activities of the Committee

37. **The Chair** said that since its previous meeting, held in July 2022, the Committee had carried out a number of activities with the support of the Division for Palestinian Rights. On 20 July, with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Committee had held the annual International Conference on the Question of Jerusalem, on the theme "Palestinian youth in East Jerusalem under occupation". The Conference had been live streamed on United Nations Web TV and social media platforms.

38. The Chair of the Committee had spoken at the Communication Strategy Workshop, held in Amman on 25 and 26 July. Twenty-one government officials from the State of Palestine had attended, seeking to gain the skills necessary to develop strategic communication tools that would improve the Government's engagement with its target audience. The Chair had also met with the Director of the Negotiations Coordination Bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Jordan, to discuss the country's support for UNRWA, and the Acting United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Jordan, to provide an update on the Committee's activities.

39. On 4 August, the Bureau had met with the Permanent Representative of Albania. On 25 August, it had met with the Secretary-General to express its deep concern that the international community had shifted focus away from the question of Palestine amid other pressing global issues and conflicts. The erosion of the two-State solution was also a concern, as Israel continued to expand settlements, seize and demolish Palestinian homes and structures and transfer its population to the Occupied Palestinian Territory with the stated intent of changing its demography. The Secretary-General had assured the Bureau that the question of Palestine and the Middle East peace process remained a priority on the United Nations agenda and

had commended the Committee for its principled positions and advocacy in support of Palestinian rights.

40. The commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People would take place on 29 November, followed by a plenary meeting of the General Assembly on the question of Palestine on 30 November, at which four resolutions would be under discussion.

The meeting rose at 11.35 a.m.