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Illegal Israeli actions in Occupied East Jerusalem and the  
rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Security Council  
Seventy-fifth year

## Identical letters dated 13 March 2020 from the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council

As the situation on the ground, regrettably, continues to deteriorate, I am compelled to write in follow-up to the critical matters and concerns raised in our recent letters following the announcement of the United States Administration's plan for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Since then, the situation in Occupied Palestine, including East Jerusalem, has been seriously aggravated, as Israel, the occupying Power, escalates the pace of its illegal annexation and colonization schemes and its aggressions and inflammatory rhetoric against the Palestinian people. This has led to increased tensions, recurrent violence endangering Palestinian civilian lives and further loss of Palestinian land to this illegal occupation.

Following a series of Israeli announcements last month of provocative and unlawful plans to construct more than 17,500 settlement units throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, particularly in areas in and around Occupied East Jerusalem and Bethlehem, on 27 February, Israel approved plans for yet another 1,739 settlement units. Most of that construction is planned in settlements deep in the Occupied West Bank. It is clear that, as the international community is focused on efforts and cooperation to confront the spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19), Israel is exploiting the situation to expedite its long-planned de facto annexation of Palestinian land, in grave breach of international law and further shredding the contiguity of our territory, the two-State solution on the pre-1967 borders and the prospects for peace.

Moreover, on 9 March, as part of their ongoing threats to carry out the notorious "E-1" settlement project, Israeli officials brazenly announced the construction of a new "Palestinian-only" apartheid road near the illegal settlement of "Maale Adumim". That road would connect with the existing apartheid road between the Palestinian villages of Anata and Za'ayyim that was built by the occupying Power in 2019 and would ultimately prevent Palestinian access from the southern part of the West Bank to Jericho and the Jordan Valley to the east. All of this entails the seizure of large swathes of Palestinian land and would obviously facilitate Israeli colonization



plans for the area. This is being done in absolute contempt of the constant international calls to cease such actions and the warnings that, if implemented, these measures would gravely undermine the territorial contiguity of Palestine.

As stated by the Israeli non-governmental organization Peace Now in relation to this reckless and illegal move: “The planned road would allow Israel to cut the West Bank in half, build up E1 and the West Bank barrier, and shut down the possibility of developing a viable Palestinian state. The only roads Israel paved for Palestinians in its 52 years of control over the Territories were designed to allow Israel to build settlements or barriers that block existing Palestinian routes. There is no desire here to improve Palestinian transport, only to expand the settlements.”

Such measures are yet further evidence of the occupying Power’s agenda to entrench its occupation and obstruct the physical viability of the two-State formula. Moreover, this intention has been explicitly expressed countless times, including on 19 February by Israeli Minister Bezalel Smotrich, who provocatively stated: “As you know we oppose the idea of a Palestinian state and we will fight with all our power against its establishment. As you know there is no such thing as Palestinian people so that there can be a Palestinian state. Not today, not tomorrow, not in this or that border, not by this name and not by other names.”

Similarly, on 27 February, his colleague Naftali Bennett wrote on his Facebook page: “No to a Palestinian state of any kind (including ‘demilitarized’). Yes to construction and imposing sovereignty!” On 3 March, the Israeli Prime Minister then repeated his pledge to annex all Israeli settlements and the Jordan Valley in front of a cheering crowd of supporters of his right-wing agenda, further stoking incitement and extremist fervour in this regard. In this regard, it is relevant to note that, in a survey of young Jewish Israelis aged 18–24 published by the Israeli daily newspaper *Haaretz* on 1 March, it is reported that 40.2 per cent of them support the annexation of all of the West Bank, and 29.6 per cent of them support a peace deal based on a two-State solution.

Such inflammatory rhetoric and pursuit of annexationist measures – flagrantly challenging international law and the international community – have been non-stop and markedly escalated in recent weeks. No doubt, Israeli officials have only been further emboldened following the presentation of the United States plan and ongoing steps by the current United States Administration appearing to assist Israel in stripping Palestinians of their rights and identity, such as in a recent State Department report that has removed the reference to Palestinians in Occupied East Jerusalem, instead referring to them as “Arab residents” of the city.

Moreover, such escalating rhetoric and aggression against the Palestinian people has led to heightened tensions and violence, with extremist Israeli settlers calling for the full and immediate annexation of the West Bank and escalating their daily terrorist attacks against defenceless Palestinian civilians across the Occupied West Bank, including in East Jerusalem. Such attacks continue to be carried out under the protection of Israeli occupation forces and, in many cases, with their support all over the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

In recent days, Israeli settlers have repeatedly raided Jabal Al-Urmah near Nablus in the Occupied West Bank in an attempt to forcibly seize the area, with the active participation of the Israeli army. Palestinians in Bayta, Nablus Governorate, have organized peaceful, civilian sit-ins aimed at protecting their land and stopping the settlers from taking over the hilltop. In doing so, they have been met with repeated assaults from Israeli forces that were equipped with around 40 military vehicles and two bulldozers and with violent attacks by Israeli settlers.

The latest victim of such violence by the occupation was a young Palestinian boy, Mohammed Hamayel, age 15, who was shot in the head and killed by Israeli live

fire at Jabal Al-Urmah. At least 16 other Palestinians were injured in the attacks. During a similar incident in the same village on 28 February, Israeli occupation forces injured over 100 Palestinians, including children.

At the same time, the Bethlehem area, which is the epicentre of Palestine's COVID-19 outbreak and under strict measures of quarantine, has been targeted by Israeli settlers, who have exploited the cordoning-off of the area, uprooting at least 1,200 olive and vine trees as part of their ongoing environmental terrorism. When news of suspected cases of COVID-19 at a hotel in Bethlehem appeared, Israeli social media users applauded the news with provocative comments and incitement against the Palestinian people, including such statements as: "amazing, I wish it kills them all", "finally, good news" and "I wish success to corona".

This utter disregard for Palestinian lives is, without doubt, the result of years of systematic dehumanization of the Palestinian people by the Israeli occupation authorities, from the Prime Minister on down. It has created a culture of incitement and hate prevalent among supporters and enablers of the Israeli occupation, especially among extremists.

Here, I must also bring to your attention a report published on 6 March in the Israeli daily newspaper *Haaretz*, which revealed harrowing testimony by Israeli army snipers who were involved in army violence unleashed against peaceful Palestinian protesters demanding an end to the Israeli blockade during the "Great Return March" in Gaza. Such violence has resulted in the killing of over 300 Palestinian protesters, with tens of thousands more injured or maimed for life.

In the report, one of the soldiers is quoted as he boasts about the numbers of knees of Palestinians that he shot: "From the point of view of hits, I have the most. In my battalion they would say: 'Look, here comes the killer.' When I came back from the field, they would ask, 'Well, how many today?' You have to understand that before we showed up, knees were the hardest thing to rack up. There was a story about one sniper who had 11 knees all told, and people thought no one could outdo him. And then I brought in seven-eight knees in one day. Within a few hours, I almost broke his record."

He then brags about breaking the "knee record" during a demonstration that took place on the day that the United States Embassy in Jerusalem was inaugurated, 14 May 2018: "On that day, our pair had the largest number of hits, 42 in all. My locator wasn't supposed to shoot, but I gave him a break, because we were getting close to the end of our stint, and he didn't have knees. In the end you want to leave with the feeling that you did something, that you weren't a sniper during exercises only. So, after I had a few hits, I suggested to him that we switch. He got around 28 knees there, I'd say."

He goes on to say: "After some time there, in a debriefing, I said: 'Let me just once take down a kid of 16, even 14, but not with a bullet in the leg – let me blow his head open in front of his whole family and his whole village. Let him spurt blood. And then maybe for a month I won't have to take off another 20 knees'."

Such shocking and repulsive rhetoric is further damning evidence of war crimes committed in cold blood against Palestinian civilians and of their constant and total dehumanization by this illegal, barbaric occupation. These crimes will continue unabated, as they have over decades, unless the international community, with the Security Council at the forefront, moves beyond declarations of regret and concern to decisive action, including measures of accountability. There must be a cost to the defiance of international law. This is a moral and legal imperative.

Urgent efforts must be taken to bring about the achievement of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, without which the basic rights of Palestinians will continue to be trampled on and their lives constantly endangered.

Palestinian statehood and the chances for peace must be salvaged, and annexation deterred with immediate action.

In this regard, we draw attention to a letter, published by *The Guardian* on 27 February 2020, by 50 former European ministers stressing that: “Peace to Prosperity is not a roadmap to a viable two-state solution, nor to any other legitimate solution to the conflict. The plan envisages a formalisation of the current reality in the occupied Palestinian territory, in which two peoples are living side by side without equal rights. Such an outcome has characteristics similar to apartheid – a term we don’t use lightly.” Such cautionary words are most striking and important, but they require concerted, collective follow-up and action by the international community to be given meaning and to contribute to upholding international law, salvaging the prospects for peace.

As stated by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, Michael Lynk: “Criticism without consequences guarantees that settlement expansion and annexation will continue. I call upon the international community to review its extensive menu of sanctions and countermeasures to stem this march towards further illegality. Settlement products should not enter the international marketplace. Agreements, existing and proposed, with Israel should be reviewed. The current investigations at the International Criminal Court should be supported.”

Lastly, at this critical juncture, we must also appeal to the international community for continued vital humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people. We urge, in particular, support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to continue uninterrupted its indispensable assistance to Palestine refugees. According to a report issued on 28 February, UNRWA stands before an unprecedented financial crisis and, up to now, there are no funds for emergency programmes in Gaza and the West Bank, despite an unanticipated additional need of \$10 million to fund the immediate response by UNRWA to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Agency could soon be forced to cancel programmes and services, with a dire impact on humanitarian conditions and stability in the refugee community. This can be urgently averted only with the support of the international community.

The present letter is in follow-up to our 682 letters regarding the ongoing crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, which constitutes the territory of the State of Palestine. These letters, dated from 29 September 2000 (A/55/432-S/2000/921) to 26 February 2020 (A/ES-10/835-S/2020/152), constitute a basic record of the crimes being committed by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people since September 2000. For all of these war crimes, acts of State terrorism and systematic human rights violations being committed against the Palestinian people, Israel, the occupying Power, must be held accountable and the perpetrators must be brought to justice.

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the present letter distributed as a document of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 5, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Riyad **Mansour**  
Minister

Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations