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## Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

### Summary record of the 2nd meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 4 October 2021, at 3 p.m.

*Chair:* Ms. González López ..... (El Salvador)

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*The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.*

**Agenda item 59: Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories transmitted under Article 73 e of the Charter of the United Nations** ([A/76/23](#) and [A/76/63](#))

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**Agenda item 63: Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples** ([A/76/23](#), [A/76/68](#) and [A/76/388](#))

1. **Mr. Sabbagh** (Syrian Arab Republic), Rapporteur of the Special Committee on decolonization, introducing the report of the Special Committee on its work in 2021 ([A/76/23](#)), said that chapter I provided a general account of the Special Committee's activities during its 2021 session and its plans for future work. Chapters II to VII focused on specific themes, while chapters VIII to XII focused on the individual situations in the Non-Self-Governing Territories. Chapter XIII contained the Special Committee's recommendations to the General Assembly in the form of draft resolutions. Annex I contained the list of Special Committee documents for 2021 and annex II presented the report of the 2021 Caribbean regional seminar.

2. Amidst the travel and health restrictions imposed by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the Special Committee had made every effort to hold its 2021 annual session and regional seminar in person, reflecting its unwavering commitment to its mandate. The Caribbean regional seminar, after having to be postponed the previous year, had finally taken place in Dominica in August. Finally, he reiterated the Special Committee's appreciation for the dedication of the Government and people of Dominica to making the seminar a success.

3. **Ms. McGuire** (Grenada), speaking as the Chair of the Special Committee on decolonization, said that after having been forced by the COVID-19 pandemic to adjust its working methods and cancel its 2020 regional seminar, the Special Committee had resumed its session

fully in person in 2021, the first year of the Fourth International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism.

4. The Special Committee had engaged with eight Non-Self-Governing Territories and a substantial number of Member States and other participants in 2021. At the substantive session in June, bearing COVID-19 mitigation measures in mind, the Special Committee had consolidated its deliberations and convened fewer in-person meetings than originally scheduled, adopting 21 resolutions and 1 decision. It had also introduced a new working method at its 2021 session, negotiating draft resolutions after discussing the Territories in plenary meetings, then adopting the resolutions at a later stage.

5. For years, the number of Non-Self-Governing Territories had remained constant. The Special Committee continued to fulfil its mandate to advance the decolonization agenda, while adjusting responsively to the unique circumstances of each Territory. The Bureau had been in regular dialogue with the administering Powers and other stakeholders since 2013, and visiting missions were once again being dispatched on a regular basis.

6. As the Fourth International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism began, it was vital to remain committed to fulfilling responsibilities towards the peoples of the 17 Non-Self-Governing Territories until the complete eradication of colonialism was achieved. The Special Committee sincerely hoped that its recommendations would receive the broad support of the Fourth Committee.

**Agenda item 54: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East** ([A/76/13](#), [A/76/282](#), [A/76/289](#), [A/76/306](#) and [A/76/360](#))

*Statement by the Commissioner-General of UNRWA*

7. **Mr. Lazzarini** (Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA)) said that the vulnerability and need of Palestine refugees had reached record levels, amidst a deteriorating regional situation. For the first time in decades, four out of the five areas where the Agency operated were simultaneously in crisis. In the Gaza Strip, where the recent conflict had compounded human suffering, psychosocial trauma was acute, particularly among children, and poverty and unemployment remained widespread. In response, UNRWA was now providing food assistance to almost all Palestine refugees in Gaza. While he welcomed international support for the Agency's humanitarian and early recovery appeal and the easing by Israel of entry of construction materials, he feared that the

humanitarian situation would continue to deteriorate in the absence of a genuine political track to lifting the blockade on people, goods and trade, in line with United Nations resolutions.

8. In the occupied West Bank, tensions remained high; widespread violence and excessive use of force by Israeli security forces had resulted in more casualties than in any of the previous four years. In a climate of impunity, settler violence was on the rise, while many Palestine refugees faced the daily threat of forced displacement.

9. In Lebanon, more than half the population, including most of the 210,000 Palestine refugees in the country, now lived below the poverty line, and employment opportunities for Palestine refugees, previously scarce because of systemic marginalization, were almost non-existent, driving many to despair. Sit-ins and demonstrations in front of UNRWA premises, some resulting in material damage to facilities, had become commonplace. Against that dramatic backdrop, refugees were asking for more support at a time when the Agency was facing critical funding shortages.

10. In Syria, the economy continued to crumble, forcing over 90 per cent of Palestine refugees in the country to rely on UNRWA for their basic needs. Explosive remnants of war posed a serious security threat to children in particular. In addition, the impact of the global pandemic continued to devastate the region, whose level of vaccination remained low. The most vulnerable were the hardest hit by the pandemic's socioeconomic impact.

11. A deep sense of abandonment dominated the psyche of the Palestine refugee community, which had been displaced for more than 70 years. Palestine refugees hoped for an opportunity to live normal lives with dignity and looked to the Agency to increase its advocacy and support, fearing that it would be hampered by chronic financial challenges. Sustaining quality services was becoming impossible, given the disconnect between the growing reliance of Palestine refugees on UNRWA and decreased donor funding.

12. Without a doubt, disruptions in the Agency's services might precipitate a humanitarian disaster that the region could ill afford. He had therefore made it a priority to continue delivering all mandated services to Palestine refugees and preserve the jobs of over 28,000 personnel. Despite growing need, he had maintained a zero-growth budget and austerity measures, in place since 2015, and introduced new cost-control measures in 2021. UNRWA had found creative ways to manage cash flow and pay salaries on time, including by

deferring non-critical vendor payments, at the risk of hurting the Agency's reputation.

13. Despite the millions of dollars UNRWA had saved as a result of austerity measures, any further cuts to the budget would severely compromise the Agency's ability to deliver its services and jeopardize its stabilizing role in the region. Moreover, long-term austerity undermined the quality of the services themselves, resulting in overcrowded classrooms, underserved poor communities, facilities in disrepair and limited medical care. Palestine refugees and the 28,000 UNRWA staff to whom the Agency was a lifeline experienced great distress over the threat to its continued operation.

14. The dedication demonstrated by UNRWA staff in addressing multiple crises simultaneously and adapting quickly to the exceptional circumstances created by the pandemic and other trials was commendable.

15. He remained committed to striving for the highest standards of governance, management, transparency and accountability, as he had undertaken to do upon joining the Agency. Over the previous year, the internal oversight body had been strengthened, the Ethics Office had been made independent, and an ombudsman had been put in place. Governance structures had been reviewed to allow for increased consultations with the members of the Advisory Commission and more transparent internal decision mechanisms.

16. The UNRWA education system, a source of deep pride, used host country curricula in line with best practices in refugee education, enhancing it by incorporating human rights, conflict resolution, tolerance and gender equality in all schools. According to a recent study authored by the World Bank and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Agency's education programme was the best value for money, and its students were outperforming their local counterparts by one year of learning. Many of its outstanding achievers had gone on to become eminent professionals across all fields.

17. However, the Agency's many notable achievements were under threat, with increasingly frequent and aggressive politically motivated attacks on its education system and UNRWA itself. The aim of those attacks was to delegitimize and defund the Agency and erode the rights of Palestine refugees. UNRWA had a zero-tolerance policy for hate speech, incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. However, the Agency operated in a highly divided and emotionally charged environment in which the risk of violation of United Nations purposes and values could not be eliminated altogether. In his experience, no comparable organization did as much as UNRWA to reduce such

violations and abide by United Nations principles governing humanitarian action in fulfilling its mandate. The Agency reviewed all host country textbooks to identify passages that were not in line with United Nations principles or values; personnel were then trained to address those passages critically so as to help students engage in independent thinking. Passages that praised violence in any context were not taught. Any guidance material produced by teachers in support of distance learning during the pandemic underwent a three-tier review to ensure it adhered to United Nations principles and values before being used.

18. The vital mandate of UNRWA must be shielded from political attacks if it was to continue to succeed. Weakening the Agency would not erase or wish away 5.7 million registered Palestine refugees, whose rights were enshrined in international law and United Nations resolutions. Defunding UNRWA would only risk provoking a humanitarian and regional security crisis. He called on Member States to help ensure the Agency's work was not politicized and to stand by UNRWA when it was.

19. In 2021, the Agency's financial situation remained dramatic and uncertain, with the funds for continued operation in November and December not yet available, and a shortfall of \$15 million for operation in October. While the return of the United States of America as partner and donor to UNRWA was welcome, the decrease in funding by other donors was regrettable. He would take every possible measure to manage the shortfall in order to protect services and jobs. However, without proper funding, it might become necessary to consider a reduction or suspension of services.

20. He appealed to Member States that had not yet contributed and that had not contributed to the level of previous years, to help the Agency sustain its services and develop a business model to make funding predictable, sustained and sufficient. In return, UNRWA would provide the services that allowed Palestine refugees to live a dignified life. Persistent underfunding could reverse the immense human development gains that had been made in the Palestine refugee population, imperilling the education of half a million children and halting the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out. As stability in the Middle East was in the interest of all, the mandate of UNRWA – a pillar of regional stability – was a shared international responsibility.

#### *Interactive dialogue*

21. **Mr. Erdan** (Israel) said that despite the pleas of UNRWA for more funding, its current model was completely unsustainable. After more than 70 years of

existence, the Agency's inability to alleviate the situation of Palestinians across the region demonstrated just how ineffectual it remained.

22. The Commissioner-General's depiction of the UNRWA educational system could not be farther from the truth. It was alarming, not to mention a dangerous precedent for suppression of free speech at the United Nations, that his delegation had been prevented from showing the Committee a photo of an UNRWA teacher's social media post glorifying Adolf Hitler – the most odious mass murderer in history.

23. Politics aside, the Commissioner-General knew full well that textbooks used in UNRWA schools referred to Jews as "Satan's helpers", glorified Palestinian terrorists for murdering Israeli civilians and contained maps from which the State of Israel had been erased.

24. Statements made by UNRWA officials were becoming increasingly political, justifying terror attacks and demonizing Israel while failing to hold Hamas, a designated terrorist organization, accountable. UNRWA refused to recognize the fact that Hamas regularly used the Agency's infrastructure, digging tunnels under UNRWA schools, and that the entity had effectively taken the Agency hostage.

25. Member States had no reason to continue contributing to UNRWA, which only perpetuated the conflict the Agency had been created to help alleviate. It was a major part of the problem, not the solution that countries believed it to be. The time had come for the international community to stand up to UNRWA, cut off funding to the deeply dysfunctional Agency and hold accountable UNRWA staff that praised terror. Only then would the Agency and the United Nations wake up and understand that collaborating with terrorists only perpetuated conflict. In particular, UNRWA should stop the hateful indoctrination of Palestinian children, stop turning a blind eye to the anti-Semitic lies espoused by its own employees and significantly enhance accountability and transparency. Until the Agency did so, any increase in funding would serve only to inflame the conflict.

26. **Mr. Pontiroli** (Observer for the European Union) said that the European Union genuinely appreciated the work of UNRWA, which provided vital services to millions of Palestine refugees in an extremely challenging context, thereby acting as a stabilizing force in the region. The Agency's contribution would remain crucial until a just, agreed and realistic solution in accordance with international law was found. As the largest contributor to UNRWA, the European Union would continue to support the Agency in all its fields of

operation, including in East Jerusalem. He welcomed the additional financial support from other donors, including the resumption of contributions by the United States, and called on all partners, including the Arab States of the Gulf, to increase their contributions to UNRWA.

27. **Mr. Hilale** (Morocco) said that his Government considered the question of Palestine to be among its top priorities as the central issue in the Middle East and the key to a lasting and comprehensive end to regional conflict. There was no alternative to a just peace on the basis of the internationally agreed two-State solution, leading to the establishment of an independent, sovereign and viable State of Palestine, within the borders of 4 June 1967 and with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel in peace and security. As President of the Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), His Majesty King Mohammed VI zealously defended the sanctity, territorial integrity and legal and historical status of Al-Quds Al-Sharif (Jerusalem), a symbol of coexistence among the followers of the monotheistic religions.

28. The Bayt Mal Al-Quds Al-Sharif Agency of OIC was carrying out health, education and social programmes to improve the living conditions of the residents of Al-Quds Al-Sharif and bolster their resilience. Finally, he stressed that UNRWA must be provided with the necessary resources to carry out its mandate to the best of its ability.

29. **Mr. Shaddad** (Jordan) said that UNRWA had made a commendable effort to cope with the financial and economic pressures it faced, against the backdrop of a changing economic landscape in donor countries, particularly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Jordan stood ready to continue coordinating with UNRWA in support of programmes that improved the living conditions of Palestine refugees in the Agency's five areas of operation. The decision by the United States to once again fund UNRWA was a laudable step that would significantly bolster the Agency's capacity to meet humanitarian, educational and health needs exacerbated by the pandemic. He hailed the efforts of Sweden to mobilize financial support for UNRWA, in partnership with Jordan. The two countries were in the process of organizing an international conference on UNRWA, slated for November 2021. Jordan called on all donors to help bridge the UNRWA budgetary shortfall for 2021 and to ensure sustainable financial support for 2022 and beyond. Lastly, the Agency must continue to fulfil its vital mandate from the Organization until a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was reached, on the basis of

the two-State solution and in accordance with international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

30. **Ms. Özgür** (Turkey) said that her country, a member of the Advisory Commission of UNRWA since the Agency's establishment, had a long history of support for and solidarity with Palestine refugees. The year 2020 had been challenging for all but had taken its greatest toll on the most vulnerable. As a force for good in the Middle East, UNRWA had been providing critical, life-saving services to the most marginalized and underprivileged in the region, recently developing innovative ways to deliver health care and education remotely in response to the pandemic.

31. The return of more than 500,000 girls and boys to UNRWA schools after many months had been a welcome development, as had the Agency's management reforms and strengthened accountability, transparency and governance. Her delegation looked forward to modernization plans to be presented later that year at the international conference on UNRWA.

32. Noting the Commissioner-General's observation that further budget cuts would seriously affect Palestine refugees and the core of the Agency's mandate, she would welcome more information on his expectations of Member States, which were responsible for adopting and extending that mandate in the General Assembly. Furthermore, she would like to know what the Commissioner-General's main priorities were with regard to the international donor conference for UNRWA to be held later that year.

33. **Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that her delegation rejected the ill-intentioned, deplorable and politically motivated attacks, amounting to inflammatory rhetoric and incitement, by those seeking to tarnish the reputation of UNRWA, undermine its mandate and, above all, negate the rights of Palestine refugees. The attacks on the UNRWA education programme, whose quality and effectiveness had been verified by independent official assessments, were intended to distract from the real cause of the protracted conflict, namely, the Israeli denial of the rights of the Palestinian people, including Palestine refugees, since the 1948 Nakbah. Those rights included the right of return and the right to receive just compensation, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) and international law. Contrary to the wishes of the Israeli representative, Palestinians would not be excluded from universal norms that applied to all human beings.

34. Her delegation reiterated its deep appreciation for the tireless efforts of UNRWA staff, including thousands

of Palestine refugees facing their own hardships, to implement the Agency's mandate in volatile conditions and assist the more than 5.7 million Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA in its five fields of operation. The Agency had been widely recognized as a lifeline, providing opportunity and hope for a better, more just life.

35. The confluence of crises in the region made it more urgent than ever to give Palestine refugees hope and to stave off their fears of abandonment. Her delegation deeply appreciated the international community's steady and generous support for UNRWA and looked forward to the upcoming donor conference as an opportunity to mobilize needed funds for the Agency's operations, still almost solely reliant on voluntary contributions. International efforts thus remained critical to guarantee uninterrupted assistance to those in need, both to fulfil political and humanitarian responsibilities and to acknowledge the long record of UNRWA as an exemplary hybrid model for the delivery of humanitarian and development assistance in a complex conflict environment.

36. While recognizing that the COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated needs and constrained humanitarian resources everywhere, the State of Palestine would continue to make its strongest appeals for UNRWA funding to ensure the continuity of its assistance to Palestine refugees pending the attainment of a just solution to their plight, based on international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. Justly resolving the Palestine refugee question was central to achieving a fair and lasting solution to the conflict.

37. Despite the adoption of cost-cutting measures, the welcome resumption of funding by the United States and the rapid adaptation of the Agency's operational response to the pandemic and concurrent challenges, UNRWA continued to be hampered by a lack of sustained, predictable and sufficient funding. Regarding the extent to which developments on the ground hindered operations and imposed additional costs on the Agency, it would ultimately be necessary to contend with the broader reality that the absence of a solution and the continued deprivation of rights, along with cyclical waves of crisis, continually increased the need and exacerbated the demands it faced. She would welcome specific information on the effects of the situation on funding demands and deficits. While only a fair political solution could resolve the plight of Palestine refugees – a solution outside the Agency's purview – the context in which the Agency operated could not be ignored.

38. **Mr. Mills, Jr.** (United States of America) said that the United States had long been a global leader in providing humanitarian assistance and diplomatic engagement to support and advance the protection of vulnerable people, especially refugees and internally displaced persons. As such, it was very proud to once again be the largest donor, with \$318 million in contributions to the Agency's critical operations. His delegation encouraged donors that had not yet contributed or that had reduced their contributions to support the Agency's core services, particularly in view of the severe shortfall it faced, which could lead to the suspension of its programmes later that year. As a strong partner of the Agency, the United States was committed to helping it provide the most effective and efficient assistance possible, in line with the United Nations principles of neutrality, equity and non-discrimination. In that connection, his delegation would be interested to know what steps UNRWA was taking to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of its programmes while ensuring that those programmes were run in a manner consistent with humanitarian principles, including neutrality.

39. **Mr. Asokan** (India) said that despite the tremendous challenges associated with the global fight against COVID-19 and the ongoing financial crisis, UNRWA had managed to adapt the delivery of its vital services and humanitarian aid to Palestine refugees. The international community must devise a viable solution to the crisis through predictable and sustained funding. In response to the Agency's appeal for support, India had contributed to the core budget of UNRWA in addition to the ongoing development assistance it extended to Palestine. As part of its ongoing capacity-building programmes there, his Government provided scholarships to meritorious Palestinian students, including Palestine refugees. India appreciated the Agency's steps to ensure transparency and adherence to United Nations humanitarian standards, especially in its education system, and looked to further its partnership with UNRWA, an essential partner in the Palestinian nation-building process.

40. A durable solution required the establishment of a sovereign, independent and viable State of Palestine within secure and recognized borders, living peacefully side by side with Israel. His Government had consistently called for direct peace negotiations based on the internationally agreed framework to achieve a two-State solution. The international community must take concrete steps towards facilitating the resumption of those negotiations quickly.

41. **Mr. Chaudhary** (Pakistan) said that Palestine refugees had lived in a state of suspended exile for

longer than any other refugee group in the world. Since its establishment in 1949, the Agency had provided them with invaluable services, its role growing only more critical since the outbreak of COVID-19. Hundreds of thousands of students had been able to continue their studies via distance education, and delivery of medications, cash support and food had provided a lifeline for the most vulnerable refugees. Its presence had been especially indispensable in Gaza, which faced an acute humanitarian and economic crisis.

42. However, the Agency needed a sufficient and predictable funding stream in order to continue operating. Its budgetary shortfall made an increase in the international community's financial and political support imperative. The solution to the Palestine refugee issue was inextricably linked to that of the overall question of Palestine. Any one-sided solution imposed on Palestinians would fail. His delegation had consistently supported the two-State solution for realizing the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. As part of that long-standing support, Pakistan would continue to extend political and financial support to UNRWA, whose delivery of vital assistance to Palestine refugees was commendable.

43. **Mr. Lazzarini** (Commissioner-General of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)) said that while the Agency's income had remained constant since 2013, there had been multiple crises throughout the region in the intervening years. UNRWA had been unable to address Palestine refugees' increased expectations of the Agency despite their significantly greater need. That mismatch between actual income and what UNRWA was expected to deliver had forced the Agency into a constant quest for funds and left it uncertain about its ability to continue delivering critical and essential services in the region. The resulting state of affairs was unnerving for Palestine refugees, host countries and friends and supporters of UNRWA. An international conference being organized by Jordan and Sweden was aimed at addressing the gap between the services expected of the Agency and its income. At the conference, UNRWA would present its vision of service delivery suited to current circumstances and taking advantage of digital transformations, thereby promoting ownership, endorsement and multi-year commitments by Member States in order to enable the Agency to run its programmes more predictably. A predictable UNRWA focused on its human development mandate and humanitarian operations was precisely what the region needed.

44. He reiterated the Agency's commitment to the highest United Nations standards. Few, if any, United

Nations agencies had been subjected to as much scrutiny or invested as much in ensuring that staff upheld United Nations principles. To that end, multiple measures had been put in place to mitigate the kinds of risks typically encountered in the region. Teachers received help in addressing potentially questionable material contained in textbooks, and workshops and inspections of UNRWA premises had been organized to ensure that United Nations premises were used only and solely for United Nations purposes.

45. Resources were crucial in a region where so many depended on the Agency as a lifeline, including its staff. In that regard, the return of the United States as a strategic partner of the Agency would enable UNRWA to cope better with issues of common interest. Modernization of services, would be addressed at another stage of a longer-term process following the international donor conference. The Agency would continue to strive to deliver the highest quality services possible, focusing on its human development mandate until a just and lasting political solution allowed UNRWA to hand over its services.

*Statement by the Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA*

46. **Ms. Manav** (Turkey), delivering a statement on behalf of the Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA, introduced the report of the Working Group (A/76/306). The financial shortfall of \$100 million faced by the Agency in 2021 had been exacerbated by the challenges posed by COVID-19. Finding adequate financial resources would be especially daunting at a time of significant global economic downturn. The General Assembly and the international community were responsible for ensuring that the Agency could fulfil its mandate and maintain its services at an acceptable level.

47. The Working Group urged all Governments to increase their contributions to the Agency, particularly to its programme budget, and to sustain them over several years. Contributions should reflect appropriate international burden-sharing and be swiftly disbursed, keeping pace with the growing needs of the Palestine refugee population and taking into account the effects of inflation and other cost factors.

48. Noting the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the operations of UNRWA (A/71/849) and all resolutions relating to Agency financing intended to address recurring budget deficits and support the Agency's vital work, the Working Group commended UNRWA for its efforts to increase efficiency while maintaining the quality of its

services to Palestine refugees, as well as for the measures it had taken to increase its transparency by reporting to the International Aid Transparency Initiative. The Working Group encouraged the Agency to continue implementing those measures and making efforts to that end. It urged all Governments to provide unearmarked multi-year funding where possible, make sustained and predictable contributions to UNRWA in line with the recommendations made at the World Humanitarian Summit, and disburse their contributions early in the year when feasible. The Working Group invited all Member States to consider those recommendations when assessing possible UNRWA funding in 2021 and beyond. The Agency had made progress in containing its costs, and the Working Group encouraged Member States to accompany those measures with adequate funding for UNRWA.

**Agenda item 55: Israeli practices and settlement activities affecting the rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs of the occupied territories**  
([A/76/304](#); [A/76/336](#); [A/76/333](#) and [A/76/360](#))

49. **Mr. Pieris** (Sri Lanka), speaking as Chair of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, and introducing the report of the Special Committee ([A/76/360](#)), said that the travel restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic had prevented the Special Committee from conducting its annual consultations with Member States in Geneva and its annual mission to the region. The information contained in the report was therefore based on online briefings and consultations with Member States, United Nations agencies and civil society representatives, as well as information compiled from documentation and other materials submitted to the Special Committee throughout the year. The report provided updates on several human rights concerns, including the escalation of hostilities in Gaza in May 2021, the humanitarian situation in and the blockade of Gaza, the plight of Palestine refugees, the situation of Palestinian detainees and the impact of COVID-19 on access to education, health care, water and sanitation.

50. The appalling escalation of hostilities between Israel, Hamas and Palestinian armed groups in May 2021 had killed and injured civilians and caused substantial damage to civilian assets and infrastructure in Gaza. The impact of the continuous military aggression on the minds of children was deeply distressing. The Special Committee called on Israel to carry out a fair and transparent investigation into violations of international humanitarian law perpetrated in the course of Israeli military operations and

escalations of hostilities, so as to hold accountable the perpetrators thereof.

51. The Special Committee remained gravely concerned about the systematic violations of human rights in Gaza, the dire humanitarian situation and the visibly collapsing infrastructure. Food insecurity affected 72 per cent of the population in early 2021, the unemployment rate had reached 46.6 per cent, and 95 per cent of the population lacked access to clean water. Furthermore, the escalation of hostilities had had a devastating impact on the situation of health, water and sanitation, exacerbated, in turn, by a heightening energy crisis.

52. In 2021, Israel had continued its practice of evictions, home demolitions and forcible transfer of Palestinians, in violation of its international legal obligations. The Special Committee was particularly concerned by the situation of the Bedouin and herder communities in the Jordan Valley and those located in areas designated by Israel as closed military zones, as those communities faced increased risk of forcible transfer.

53. Expansion of illegal settlements in the West Bank had continued apace during the reporting period. The illegal Evyatar outpost on private Palestinian land near the West Bank city of Nablus, in contravention of both Israeli and international law, was particularly distressing. Its illegal construction had instigated weekly demonstrations by Palestinians protesting the unlawful acquisition of their land. The demonstrations had been met with disproportionate force by Israeli security forces, killing at least seven Palestinians and injuring dozens.

54. Equally alarming was the increase in violent attacks by Israeli settlers on Palestinians and their property since January 2021. Despite the obligation of Israel, as occupying Power, under international law to protect Palestinians and their property from violent attacks, Israeli authorities either stood idly by as such attacks were perpetrated or aided and abetted them.

55. Turning to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the rights of Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, he noted that violations relating to the occupation had weakened the public health system and thus contributed to the uncontrolled spread of the pandemic. No COVID-19 testing centres had been opened in East Jerusalem beyond the separation wall, and the number of tests available to the Palestinian population was insufficient. As at 31 August, only 16 per cent of Palestinians eligible for vaccination had received two doses of a vaccine. The Special Committee called on Israel to comply with its international legal

obligation to ensure that the Palestinian population in the Occupied Palestinian Territory was vaccinated.

56. As a result of Israeli policies, the vast majority of the 2 million residents of Gaza was effectively banned from receiving an exit permit for medical referrals, with even fewer being granted such permits due to COVID-19-imposed restrictions. During the hostilities in May 2021, entry and exit points were completely closed, leading to further delays in access to health care. Under the exceptional circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic, specific attention must be given to vulnerable groups, and strict preventive measures must be adopted. Conditions in Israeli detention facilities were very poor and had deteriorated further during the pandemic.

57. It was imperative for Israeli authorities to take all measures, including alternative detention arrangements where necessary, to prevent COVID-19 outbreaks among detainees, including by considering alternative detention arrangements. Moreover, vulnerable prisoners, including older persons and those with chronic conditions, should be given priority in such arrangements.

58. According to reports received by the Special Committee, the humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the occupied Syrian Golan continued to deteriorate dramatically. The Special Committee called upon the Government of Israel to end its occupation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the Occupied Syrian Golan, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 497 (1981); to systematically investigate all cases of excessive use of force that had led to death or serious injury and hold the perpetrators accountable; to halt any plans to annex parts of the West Bank; and to desist immediately from the illegal practice of demolition. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Israel must also grant Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory access to medical treatment, with a focus on urgent needs in Gaza due to the deteriorating conditions caused by the escalation in hostilities, the blockade and provide COVID-19 vaccines to Palestinians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Gaza, as well as to Syrians in the occupied Syrian Golan.

59. Lastly, the Special Committee called on the international community to use its influence to bring an end to the Israeli occupation of the occupied territories, to support UNRWA and to address the pattern of non-cooperation by Israel with the United Nations, in particular with regard to the implementation of United Nations resolutions.

60. **Ms. Brands Kehris** (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights), introducing the reports of the Secretary-General under the current agenda item, said that the report of the Secretary-General on Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem (A/76/333) covered the period from 1 June 2020 to 31 May 2021. The report illustrated the deterioration of the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory stemming from Israeli policies and practices and addressed the escalation in hostilities between Israel and Palestinian armed groups in May 2021, during which international humanitarian law had been violated by all parties. Palestinian armed groups had launched rockets indiscriminately towards Israel, and Israel had conducted intense airstrikes and shelling from land and sea, resulting in extensive civilian deaths and injuries and large-scale destruction of civilian objects and infrastructure in Gaza. Given the lack of information on the military objectives targeted, questions remained as to whether the attacks had respected the principles of distinction and proportionality under international humanitarian law.

61. Excessive use of force by Israeli security forces against Palestinians, including in the context of demonstrations and search and arrest operations in the West Bank, had increased significantly during the reporting period. A lack of accountability for international human rights and international humanitarian law violations by Israeli security forces had remained pervasive. Restrictions by Israel on the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association remained a serious concern, as did the practice of administrative detention without charge or trial and the arbitrary arrest and ill-treatment of children in detention. Despite some reported investigative measures, there were serious concerns that no genuine accountability had been afforded by Israeli authorities regarding credible allegations of torture and ill-treatment. The report also noted the continuation of practices that might amount to collective punishment, a practice expressly prohibited by international humanitarian law. Israeli authorities had continued to restrict freedom of movement across the Occupied Palestinian Territory, profoundly affecting the daily life of Palestinians as well as the enjoyment of such fundamental human rights as the right to work, to health and education and to an adequate standard of living.

62. The report of the Secretary-General on Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan (A/76/336) covered the period from 1 June 2020 to 31 May 2021. The report provided an update on the

continued settlement expansion and its impact on the human rights of Palestinian people. During the reporting period, demolitions and settler violence had reached their highest levels since the United Nations had begun keeping public records of them. Advancement of settlements continued, with a slight increase in tenders and construction starts, despite some slowing in the advancement or approval of plans for new settlements. Settlers had established 12 new outposts in the West Bank, where settler violence against Palestinians had intensified, as had its severity. Despite reported steps taken by the Israeli authorities, deficiencies in the justice system for holding settlers accountable for violence against Palestinians sustained a climate of impunity, which could encourage attacks to continue. In many cases, Israeli security forces had intervened with unnecessary and/or disproportionate force against Palestinians in the aftermath of settler attacks or during demonstrations against settlement expansion and outposts, killing and injuring Palestinian civilians.

63. The demolition and confiscation of Palestinian structures in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, had increased by 59 percent compared to the previous period, reaching an all-time high since the United Nations had begun keeping public records in 2009. In occupied East Jerusalem, Palestinians had been forced to demolish their own structures following demolition orders, to avoid fines and bearing the costs of demolition. At least 218 Palestinian households in East Jerusalem were at risk of forced eviction due to cases filed in Israeli courts, primarily by Israeli settler organizations.

64. Palestinian communities across Area C, in East Jerusalem and in Hebron H2 remained at risk of forcible transfer, demolition and confiscation, with Bedouin and herder communities at higher risk. Palestinian herding communities located in or near Israeli declared military firing zones and settler outposts in Area C, comprising approximately 18 per cent of the West Bank and 30 per cent of Area C, lived in a coercive environment and were among the most vulnerable in the West Bank. During the reporting period, 276 Palestinian-owned structures, including 141 donor-funded structures, had been demolished in firing zones, displacing 500 Palestinians. Settler outpost farms, whose activity inside and along the edges of the firing zones was facilitated by Israel, were a source of violence and intimidation of Palestinians.

65. The report of the Secretary-General on the occupied Syrian Golan (A/76/304) summarized the responses received to a request for information about any steps taken or envisaged concerning the implementation of General Assembly resolution 75/99.

Responses had been received from the Permanent Missions of Cuba, Ireland and the Syrian Arab Republic.

#### *Interactive dialogue*

66. **Mr. Erdan** (Israel) said that time and again, Member States were forced to endure the absurd farce of double standards that was the Special Committee, whose one-sided claims were indisputable proof of the body's deep-seated politicization and bias. Its baseless, recycled claims incited hatred instead of promoting dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians. Israel wholeheartedly objected to the continued operation of the Special Committee, whose very existence worked against the Organization's fundamental values. As the Special Committee's name clearly stated, its sole purpose was to systematically attack the only vibrant democracy in the Middle East. The fact that the Special Committee used United Nations resources to exclusively fund propaganda against a fellow Member State was both unprecedented and disgraceful. The Special Committee attributed every Palestinian hardship to Israel and Israel alone, ignoring the real human rights violators: Hamas, which subjected the population of Gaza to violence and terror, and the Palestinian Authority, which murdered journalists in cold blood. 80 per cent of Palestinians wanted President Mahmoud Abbas to resign.

67. By scapegoating Israel, those truly responsible were evading accountability. Based solely on unverified allegations, the Special Committee's report focused only on Israel, falsely blaming it for hindering access to humanitarian aid, while failing to mention that Hamas held the citizens of Gaza captive and that it had repurposed humanitarian aid to fund its terror apparatus. The report contained a distorted characterization of the treatment of Palestinian terrorists in Israeli jails, while the Palestinian Authority's crackdown on dissenters among its own citizens and its brutal murder of political dissidents went unmentioned.

68. Ultimately, the Special Committee had no need to include certain facts, given that it existed only to demonize Israel. The Special Committee's operation was a gross misuse of United Nations resources and time that could be used for far more constructive purposes. Unlike the authors of the report, his country was genuinely interested in peace and stability and had just celebrated the one-year anniversary of the historic Abraham Accords with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Morocco. Together, those countries had chosen peace, progress and prosperity, looking to change how Jews and Arabs perceived one another and to build a better future.

69. He called on Member States to terminate the Special Committee, which served only to perpetuate the bias against Israel in the Organization and actively distance all sides from a substantive dialogue. The Middle East was undergoing a transformation, and a great deal had already been achieved in the effort not only to look towards the future but to actively shape it and make it a better place for all parties involved.

70. **Mr. Shaddad** (Jordan) said that his delegation reaffirmed the importance of continued efforts to consolidate the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip. Furthermore, international support for the reconstruction of Gaza should be promoted, and steps should be taken to relaunch negotiations leading to the establishment of an independent Palestinian State within the borders of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

71. In view of the historic role of the King of Jordan as custodian of the Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, Jordan would continue to protect those holy sites. Any endeavour to change their historical and legal status, especially the Aqsa Mosque/Haram al-Sharif, would be steadfastly opposed.

72. Unilateral measures, including settlement activity, confiscation of property and demolition of homes must cease immediately, as they undermined the chances of achieving the two-State solution. The occupying Power was legally bound under international law to protect the rights of Palestinians to their homes in the Shaykh Jarrah and Silwan neighbourhoods. A lasting and comprehensive peace would require ending the occupation of the Syrian Golan, in accordance with internationally recognized resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. The position of the international community on the Syrian Golan was articulated in Security Council resolution [497 \(1981\)](#), which rejected the decision of Israel to annex the occupied Golan and impose its laws and rule on the territory.

73. **Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that the reports before the Committee, taken together, reflected the harsh reality of millions of Palestinian children, women and men deprived of the fundamental rights to self-determination and to life. Nevertheless, the representative of one delegation insisted that such inhumane treatment be accepted as a reality for which no solution could be found, accusing her Government of using the Committee to complain instead of as a legitimate tool to mobilize international awareness and seek justice. That delegation claimed the Committee was biased and anti-Israeli, conveniently ignoring that the reported accounts of the occupying Power's behaviour and that of Israeli settlers – flagrant violations of international law and United Nations

resolutions – were thoroughly documented by United Nations entities, international human rights and humanitarian organizations and Palestinian and Israeli human rights organizations. It was not possible that every entity reporting on Israeli violations, even Israeli organizations, was biased and unfair, but that was precisely the claim being advanced. The aim of such persistent rhetoric was to delegitimize the work of the Special Committee and to intimidate its members and anyone else who would support its efforts. The occupying Power should instead reflect on the reality it had created in the Occupied Palestinian Territory by imposing racist laws and measures that privileged one people over another, amounting to the war crime of apartheid. Ending the occupation and realizing a just solution to the question of Palestine would obviate the need for further reports and engagement, which only continued in the absence of a just peace.

74. She wondered what alternatives the Palestinian people would have left if not allowed to avail itself of legitimate diplomatic tools in the struggle to exercise its human rights. It was unclear how acknowledging the facts would undermine the quest for peace and respect for the human rights of all, instead of contributing to it. She urged delegations to disregard the slander and instead focus on the substance of the situation. The reports, while sobering, provided only a glimpse of the widespread daily assaults and indignities endured by Palestinian civilians under Israeli occupation, the actual extent of the humanitarian suffering and socioeconomic deprivation inflicted by the occupying Power and its colonial settlers being much greater.

75. Her delegation would continue to exercise its legitimate right to call for accountability; it refused to be cowed into accepting the dehumanization of her people or apologizing for seeking justice and the realization of its inalienable rights through multilateral forums, including the Special Committee.

76. As Israel continued to disregard the law despite international calls for compliance, it was clear that only international action could end the cycle of impunity. In that connection, she enquired whether any steps had been taken by States or organizations to give effect to international legal obligations, including those set forth in Security Council resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#), which called on States to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the Territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied by Israel since 1967. She also wondered whether any action had been taken to ensure that States did not support, facilitate or engage in the human rights abuses being perpetrated by Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. If not, what were some of the primary steps

recommended for consideration by States and organizations to promote accountability and compliance with international law, with a view to bringing an end to the illegal occupation and achieving a just, lasting and peaceful solution?

77. **Ms. Brands Kehris** (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights) said that the Security Council had repeatedly endorsed resolutions concerning the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza since the occupation began, on the basis of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 12 August 1949, which applied fully to Israel as occupying Power. In its resolutions, the Council had highlighted that the expansion of settlements was a serious violation of the absolute prohibition on transferring parts of its civilian population into occupied territory.

78. In 2019 and 2020, third States had taken steps to respond to publicly announced plans by Israel to annex occupied Palestinian territories. In May 2021, Ireland had become the first member State of the European Union to declare that Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory amounted to illegal, de facto annexation.

79. With regard to recommendations to strengthen accountability, the High Commissioner for Human Rights had submitted a report to the Human Rights Council, noting that third States must use the influence they possess to ensure respect for international humanitarian law. Lastly, according to Security Council resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#), the status quo was not sustainable, and significant steps were urgently needed to stabilize the situation and reverse negative trends. The High Commissioner had stressed that the steps taken by the international community remained insufficient to achieve that goal, in particular, focusing on efforts to tackle impunity, itself an essential question.

**Requests for hearing** ([A/C.4/76/2](#), [A/C.4/76/3](#), [A/C.4/76/4](#), [A/C.4/76/5](#), [A/C.4/76/6](#), [A/C.4/76/7](#), [A/C.4/76/8](#) and [A/C.4/76/9](#))

80. **The Chair** drew attention to the 142 requests for hearing under agenda item 59 that she had received, one relating to American Samoa ([A/C.4/76/2](#)), one relating to Bermuda ([A/C.4/76/3](#)), one relating to the British Virgin Islands ([A/C.4/76/4](#)), four relating to French Polynesia ([A/C.4/76/5](#)), six relating to Guam ([A/C.4/76/6](#)), two relating to Turks and Caicos ([A/C.4/76/7](#)), one relating to the United States Virgin Islands ([A/C.4/76/8](#)) and 126 relating to Western Sahara ([A/C.4/76/9](#)). and took it that the Committee wished to grant those requests.

81. *It was so decided.*

*The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.*