



Statement

by

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to the United Nations**

**at the
General Assembly**

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Madame President,

Next June, Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip will mark its fiftieth anniversary. We believe that is high time for us all to stop and thoroughly reflect on what has been the outcome of this occupation, on our failure to put an end to it, and on what ought to be done to live up to our obligations under the Charter of the United Nations to allow the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination.

First, one cannot but be struck by the continuing systematic and deliberate expansion of Israeli settlements in the Occupied West Bank, particularly in and around East Jerusalem, since 1967. As a matter of fact, in the past fifty years the Israeli government has established 131 settlements in the West Bank, excluding East Jerusalem. In total, there are now almost 800,000 Israeli settlers on Palestinian lands, 406,300 in the West Bank and over 350,000 in East Jerusalem. Here, it is worth noting that the number of settlers has tripled since the peace process began, and it is now estimated this number could reach 1 million by the end of the decade, according to the Applied Research Institute of Jerusalem (ARIJ).

Needless to remind that all these settlements are in flagrant violation of International Law, for article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention explicitly prohibits an Occupying Power from transferring any part of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies. Moreover, article 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court defines such acts as "war crimes". And numerous UN Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 446 (1979), 452 (1979) and 465 (1980), stressed that these settlements are illegal and constitute a "serious obstruction" to peace. Of course, Israeli attempts to "legalize" so-called "outposts" - that is the settlements that have been established since the 1990's without government approval and are considered illegal according to Israeli law - are also all in blatant breach of international law. The number of such "outposts", excluding East Jerusalem has reached 97, and their locations, appear as strategic frontlines to expand settlement's area of control. Hence, the very serious danger which they represent.

Turning to East Jerusalem now, we need to note that since it was illegally "annexed" in 1967, the Israel's primary goal has been to create a de facto demographic and geographic situation in order to frustrate any future attempts to challenge Israeli alleged "sovereignty" over the city. To achieve this goal, the Israeli government has been seeking to alter the historical identity of many landmarks and quarters of the city, along with taking actions to increase the number of Jews, and reduce the number of Palestinians living in the city, such as by imposing broad restrictions on construction inside Palestinian neighborhoods, yet allowing Jewish settlers to move into the heart of these neighborhoods and live there while expelling Palestinians from their homes and demolishing them.

Madame President,

In June 2002, the Israeli government began to construct a "Wall" to encircle the West Bank. Once completed, the length of this Wall is projected to be more than twice the length of Israel's border with the West Bank, as it snakes deep inside the West Bank to encompass many Israeli settlements on the western side. In fact, 85% of the Wall runs inside the West Bank including East Jerusalem, rather than along the Green Line.

The ICJ (International Court of Justice) Advisory Opinion of 9 July 2004 was crystal clear in stating that the construction of this Wall was “an attempt to annex the territory contrary to international law,” and that “the de facto annexation of land interferes with the territorial sovereignty and consequently with the rights of Palestinians to self determination.”

When finished, the Wall, along with Israeli settlements, Israeli-only highways, closed military zones, and “nature reserves” are projected to cover 46% of the occupied West Bank, effectively annexing them to Israel.

Madame President,

Fifty years of Israeli occupation are also witness to numerous other illegal policies and human rights violations, including, inter alia, the demolition of Palestinian homes and other civilian structures; the confiscation of Palestinian land and the forced eviction and displacement of Palestinian families; the discriminatory allocation of water and provision of access to land and natural resources; and restrictions on movement.

On these policies and violations, the facts and figures speak for themselves:

According to ICAHD (the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions) 48,488 Palestinian homes and civilian structures have been demolished by Israel since 1967, either as a form of “punitive” measure or as “collateral damage” in military incursions such as in the attacks on Gaza, or still because Israel has refused to grant building permits to Palestinians, who are then forced to build “illegally” (on their own land!) and face demolition.

Since 1967, Israeli authorities have confiscated 1,018,127 dunums of land, which represents 20% of the West Bank area, including East Jerusalem. It is worth noting in this regard, that on 15 April 2015, the Supreme Court of Israel reaffirmed the application of the so-called “Absentees’ Property Law”, which allows the continued confiscation of property in East Jerusalem whose owners reside in other parts of the West Bank or in Gaza.

Madame President,

Most of Palestine’s natural resources are located in Area C, which constitutes over 60 percent of the West Bank. And according to the World Bank, \$3.4 Billion is the estimated boost to the economy every year if Palestinians were able to freely and fully exploit their natural resources in this area. Maybe then, the Palestinian Authority will no longer need to rely on humanitarian and development aid from international partners.

As to water, Israel controls 100% of the Jordan River Basin and 80% of water reserves in the West Bank, accounting for over 25% percent of its water consumption. And since it laid hand on the water resources of the West Bank in 1967, thousands of Palestinians have been prevented from developing their water infrastructures and have become water-dependent on Israel. It is very telling here to note that while on average each Israeli settler in the West Bank has access to 240-300 liters of water per day, Palestinians in the West Bank have access to only 73 liters; the WHO (World Health Organization) minimum standard being 100 liters.

Madame President,

Movement is restricted in the West Bank by almost 600 permanent checkpoints, roadblocks and earth mounds, let alone the hundreds of “flying checkpoints.” And how not to mention here the “Bypass” road network defined by OCHA as “a network of roads that are primarily for Israeli use and which connect Israeli settlements and other infrastructure to each other and to Israel. Palestinian vehicular access into these roads is either restricted or prevented and ultimately diverted. Consequently, these roads have become barriers.” No wonder then why some NGOs have qualified these roads as “apartheid roads”. And let us note that approximately 41,525 acres of Palestinian land have been confiscated in order to sustain this network of 1,661 km of “apartheid” roads.

Madame President,

Since 1967, an estimated 750,000 Palestinians, that is up to 20% of the Palestinian population, had at some point been detained by Israeli authorities, including over 95,000 children, of which 59,000 are likely to have been subjected to some form of physical violence.

Acts of terrorism and violence by Israeli settlers, including harassment and intimidation against Palestinian civilians, have also escalated in recent years. However, when it comes to such settlers’ acts, “impunity” prevails as only 1.9% of complaints submitted by Palestinians against settlers’ attacks have resulted in any form of conviction.

Madame President,

We must now admit that our condemnations, for fifty years in this assembly, of all these illegal acts, even when expressed “in the strongest terms” as we say in our diplomatic jargon, have all failed to put an end to the continued Israeli occupation of the State of Palestine. It is high time that we move in the United Nations beyond such mere condemnations in this assembly. It is the UN Security Council that should shoulder its responsibilities by enforcing its own resolutions relating to the illegality of settlement activities and by calling for concrete measures to put an end to the occupation of the State of Palestine according to a clear and binding timeframe.

Madame President,

To turn this into a reality, I would like to ask you, in conclusion, to reflect on the following words of great wisdom, uttered by a great man, Bishop Desmond Tutu:

“If apartheid ended, so can the occupation. But the moral force and international pressure will have to be just as determined.”

Let me repeat once again:

“If apartheid ended, so can the occupation. But the moral force and international pressure will have to be just as determined.”

Thank you.