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IN RECORDED VOTE, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL ADOPTS TEXT EXPRESSING GRAVE CONCERN

OVER DIFFICULTIES FACED BY PALESTINIAN WOMEN, GIRLS UNDER OCCUPATION

Council Also Dissolves International Research and Training Institute For the Advancement of Women, Taking Step towards Operationalizing 'UN Women'

Expressing deep concern about the grave situation of Palestinian women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, resulting from Israeli occupation, the Economic and Social Council adopted a text today urging continued international attention to promote and protect their human rights, as well as intensified measures to improve their difficult conditions.

By a recorded vote of 24 in favour to 3 against (Australia, Canada, United States), with 15 abstentions, the Council reaffirmed that occupation hindered Palestinian women's advancement, self-reliance and societal integration, and stressed the importance of increasing their decision-making in conflict prevention and resolution efforts. By other terms, the resolution called on Israel to facilitate the return of all refugees and displaced Palestinian women and children to their homes.

The resolution was one of three texts proposed for the Council's adoption by the Commission on the Status of Women, in its report on its fifty-fourth session, held on 13 March and 14 October 2009, and from 1 to 12 March 2010.

Ahead of the vote, Israel's delegate said the text "deliberately ignored" all challenges faced by Palestinian women, including domestic and gender-based violence, honour killings and Hamas' imposition of restrictions on their freedoms. An observer of Palestine said the draft reaffirmed the rights of Palestinian women living under 43 years of repression and he urged the Council to adopt the text.

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[Background](#)

The Economic and Social Council met today to continue its general segment, which will run through 22 July. It was expected to take action on several draft resolutions and discuss several other items on its agenda, including decolonization, regional cooperation, social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people, and issues related to gender equality and women's empowerment. In addition, it was expected to hold a panel discussion on "Opportunities for small island developing States".

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Continuing on behalf of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), Mr. NOUR presented the Secretary-General's note on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on living conditions of Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, and the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan (document [A/65/72-E/2010/13](#)). It covered developments through March 2010 and outlined events like the disproportionate use of force, property destruction and closure policies, which only intensified hardships for Palestinians.

Between 1 February 2009 and February 2010, 85 Palestinians had been killed, he said, most in context of Israeli air strikes in the Gaza Strip. Over 400 Palestinians had been displaced as a result of home demolitions. Restricting Palestinian movement were the more than 550 closures in the West Bank. Irregular supply of industrial fuel in Gaza had exacerbated the chronic shortage of electricity, while the ban on importing building materials had prevented the reconstruction of most of the 3,500 homes destroyed and 2,900 homes severely damaged during the last Israeli offensive of December 2008 and January 2009.

Israel had continued settlement activity in the West Bank, he said, while in the occupied Syrian Golan, Israel's decision to impose its laws had been deemed null and void by Security Council resolution 497 (1981). Syrians in that area suffered from a lack of employment within their communities and had no prospects for economic development. The Secretary-General stressed that clear parameters to end the occupation that had begun in 1967 and create a State of Palestine living side by side with Israel in peace and security were contained in the Road Map and Arab Peace Initiative.

General Discussion

AMMAR HIAZI, Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine, said foreign occupation was "unjustifiable, cruel and repressive", and it comprehensively debilitated a nation's potential at all levels. Over the past 43 years, Israel's military occupation of the Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the Syrian Golan had systematically devastated the societies and economies of those territories. Moreover, it had done that in "grave violation" of its obligations as an occupying Power under international humanitarian law.

The illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip, he stressed, was clear evidence of Israel's "perverse mentality", as it collectively punished the entire Palestinian population. That blockade had resulted in several adverse impacts, including increasing food insecurity, declining economy and income, and worsening conditions with regard to health, water, sanitation and sewage systems. Israel had also imposed its siege mentality on Palestinians in the West Bank, particularly in East Jerusalem, via its illegal colonization measures.

For the past six years, the occupying Power had employed "punitive and highly restrictive" permit system, treating Palestinians as strangers in their own land in order to maintain the "wall regime". That illegal regime had had devastating effects on the health sector, especially because of the unprecedented isolation Israel had imposed on East Jerusalem, he noted. However, despite all challenges, the Palestinian people and their leadership were forging ahead with their State-building efforts.

A comprehensive programme launched by Prime Minister Salam Fayyad in August 2009, called "Palestine: Ending the Occupation, Establishing the State", enjoyed the international community's strong support, he continued. Palestinians would, however, continue to look to the international community to make efforts to achieve a two-State solution for peace. In that regard, he called for the international community to act swiftly and collectively to compel Israel to cease its illegal policies and practices.

Also speaking on that issue, YUSRAKHAN (Indonesia) said it deserved the Council's continued serious consideration. The continuation of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories was not only a matter of legality, security and politics, but also had severe economic and social repercussions. Mobility restrictions and closure policies imposed by Israel had also negatively affected Palestinians, limiting their access to needed emergency humanitarian assistance.

Indonesia, along with other members of the international community, had for years urged Israel to respect international law as the only way to attain peace in the Middle East. It was hoped that the proximity talks which had begun on 9 May would lead to direct negotiations in the near future, leading to an independent and sovereign Palestinian State. "There is a long way to go, but we must keep hope alive and continue to encourage and support the efforts of the parties," he said.

However, the settlement question remained the "most formidable hurdle on the road to peace". Calling for Israel to stop all settlement constructions, he stressed that it could prove its commitment by halting all demolitions, evictions, and expansion, as well as dismantling settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and East Jerusalem. Lastly, he reiterated his country's absolute commitment to an independent, viable and democratic Palestine.

DENIS ZDOROV (Belarus), speaking on regional cooperation, said his Government attached importance on the regional commissions, which assisted States in coping with the aftermath of the economic crisis. Belarus supported interaction with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), which helped to create strong business environments, establish financing instruments for innovative projects and streamline trade measures. He trusted that the Commission would continue to afford such assistance to States to strengthen national competitiveness. In that context, he pointed out that transitional and middle-income economies deserved special attention. In such efforts, beneficiary States should play the defining role.

JORGE VALERO BRICEÑO (Venezuela), speaking about the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation, said that in the last few months, Israel's campaign to "torpedo the peace process" had been fuelled by new actions. Israel's leaders had refused to heed international opinion, which demanded the immediate and unconditional end to the blockade in the Gaza Strip. Israel had perpetrated State terrorism, such as against a ship in the so-called "Freedom Flotilla", carrying humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip, but the Security Council had not appointed an independent committee to determine the authors of that crime. Such impunity must end, as it jeopardized the maintenance of international peace and security, and undermined the sovereign equality of Member States.

Moreover, such impunity had hampered Palestinian's access to the most basic economic and social rights, he said. The results of Israel's "genocide and aggression" were heartrending, with Palestinians' situation now constituting a humanitarian disaster. The ban on fuel imports had restricted the operation of Gaza's only power station, while the ban on the import of building materials had halted reconstruction of homes. According to the World Health Organization, nearly half of Gaza's health centres had been affected or destroyed during the "Operation Cast Lead". Voicing concern at the lack of progress in the peace process, he said Israel's "genocide" continued with the harassment of Palestinians. In the West Bank, Israel had demolished houses and built settlements, part of a systematic policy to destroy territorial contiguity. He called for an end to the blockade on the Gaza Strip and urged that resolute action be taken for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East and that a free Palestinian State be established.

RODOLFO ELISEO BENÍTEZ VERSÓN (Cuba) aligned with statement made by the Permanent Observer for Palestine. Regarding decolonization issues, his country had co-sponsored the resolution that would be introduced later in the day, "support to Non-Self-Governing Territories by the specialized agencies and international institutions associated with the United Nations". He recalled that the Council had adopted similar resolutions in the past. Those Territories faced particular obstacles in implementing measures towards sustainable development; therefore, support from the international community was essential.

While some progress had been made, much remained to be done, he said. Cuba regretted that several United Nations agencies had come forward with specific facts with regard to the programmes they carried out to the benefit of Non-Self-Governing Territories. Given that, he called upon those agencies to carry out plans of that nature without further delay. Reaffirming his country's firm commitment to the cause of decolonization, he stressed that the resolution on support to Non-Self-Governing Territories was an "invaluable tool" for the Special Committee on Decolonization.

SHULAMIT YONADAM DOMCH (Israel) expressed disappointment that today's forum had been exploited for discussion of a political agenda item. During the Council's substantive sessions, thematic issues were discussed, but the only country singled out for discrimination was Israel, through agenda item 11. If the Council wished to address a specific country issue, it was obliged to do so in an even-handed manner; however, the report before it contained misleading and one-sided content, deliberately ignoring the implications of Hamas' terrorist control of Gaza.

Despite that, Israel continued to ensure that Palestinian civilians in Gaza received adequate daily humanitarian provisions, she said. In the first three months of 2010 alone, some 94,500 tons of supplies had been delivered to Gaza, while a new joint task force between Israel and the Palestinian Authority would advance coordinated projects in that area. Further, the global community, including the Quartet, had welcomed Israel's policy to allow more goods in to the Gaza Strip as long as they were not weapons or material for war-like purposes. "All such facts would be noted by a balanced report," she said.

Moreover, the Palestinian economy in the West Bank had continued to grow at a rate of nearly 8 per cent, she said, meriting attention that such growth had been encouraged by the removal of various checkpoints, which directly had correlated to the improving security situation in that area. The hours of checkpoint operations, including the Allenby Bridge, had been expanded as part of dialogue between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The report also failed to mention the daily coordination between the two sides on issues related to public health, sanitation and the environment.

Related fields of cooperation included the joint creation of energy infrastructure and joint agricultural projects advanced through Israel's international development organization, she explained. Joint forums addressed women's empowerment pertinent to both Israelis and Palestinians. Such work stood in stark contrast to the selective information conveyed in the report.

BASHAR JA'AFAR ([Syria](#)) said the report by Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) had shed light on the situation of Palestinians in Gaza and Syrians living in the occupied Syrian Golan. Among the crimes committed by Israel, the economic blockade imposed on more than 1.5 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip had led to a severe shortage of basic needs and halted humanitarian aid to the area. The "Freedom Flotilla" incident had led to the "murder" of nine innocent civilians, whose goal had been to bring humanitarian assistance to civilians languishing under occupation.

In the Syrian Golan, where occupation had continued since 1967, he urged Israel to wake up and remember that the global community considered it an illegal occupying Power. "Occupation is nothing but a crime" he said, noting that territorial annexation was an even graver crime that required immediate accountability. The Israeli Knesset had decided to conduct a referendum to the effect that any agreement resulting in withdrawal from East Jerusalem and Syrian Golan must enjoy 80 per cent support among Israelis. The idea that the country desired peace was nothing but political posturing.

He was baffled that States only paid lip service to human rights in international forums. In negotiating draft resolutions on foreign occupation, they opposed references to the suffering of those living under such occupation, particularly Israeli occupation. That the Council could not implement resolutions related to the occupation of Arab territories did not take away from the weight of those texts. He expressed hope that the Council would adopt by consensus the draft resolution to be submitted under the agenda item.

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AHMAD RAJABI ([Iran](#)) said Israel's occupation of Palestine was the "most flagrant violation of inalienable human rights". In that regard, the need for Palestinians to freely exercise their rights to self-determination should be addressed as a main priority, he said.

Highlighting challenges faced by civilians in the Gaza Strip as a result of "atrocious crimes" by the Israeli regime, he noted that more than 1.5 million people in the territory were starved, massacred and subjected to collective punishment. In undertaking such activities, the occupying Power had "practically eliminated a whole population" in front of the entire international community. With that in mind, he stressed that emphasis must be on practical steps to make human rights in occupied territories a reality.

Speaking in exercise of the right of reply, the representative of the Permanent Observer Mission for [Palestine](#) addressed Israel's "false" accusations. Debate on the item was repeated due to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory. Through debate, the international community had reaffirmed its commitment to international law and the rights established therein. It stood with Palestinians' right to dignity and prosperity. Claiming that the debate was one-sided only was an assault on the global community, which had tried repeatedly to uphold the principles for which the United Nations stood.

He said it was misleading to suggest that the occupying Power was keen to facilitate the entry of humanitarian assistance to Palestinians, as it had closed Gaza crossings for almost three years, denying food, petrol and building materials to Palestinians. Israel was obliged to facilitate the entry of humanitarian assistance. It would be highly positive if Israel could show goodwill by ceasing its aggression, illegal exploitation of Palestinian resources and demolishing of homes, notably in East Jerusalem, and by lifting the blockade on Gaza.

Introduction of Draft Resolution

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Ahead of the vote, [Israel](#)'s representative expressed her country's dismay at the Council's consideration of the draft resolution. Rather than broadly addressing the countless burning issues related to women, the Council was forced to consider the annual resolution on the situation of Palestinian women presented by a group of Member States, therefore "ignoring the needs of countless other women, none of whom have powerful political blocs to lobby on their behalf".

The resolution, she said, contained misleading and one-sided content as it "deliberately ignored" all challenges faced by Palestinian women. Such challenges included domestic and gender-based violence, overt discrimination, female genital mutilation and honour killings, as well as Hamas' imposition of restrictions on their freedoms. Moreover, the resolution failed to note the substantial economic growth that had widely benefited Palestinian women.

The resolution simply served to scapegoat Israel, and by doing so, the Council diminished its own credibility. It also reinforced the belief that "certain countries only care about the plight of women if it can be used as a political weapon". She called for direct negotiations between her country and the Palestinians to move the peace process towards two States living side by side in peace and security, urging countries to vote against the resolution.

Next, the representative of the [Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine](#) said the draft resolution reaffirmed the rights of Palestinian women living under 43 years of repression and humiliation. He urged the Council to vote strongly in favour of the text, which also reaffirmed the principles of protecting women under occupation. Emphasizing that a United Nations Member State continued to violate Palestinian women's rights, he specifically asked the members of the Group of 77 developing countries and China to vote in favour of the draft text.

The Council then adopted the [draft resolution](#) on Palestinian women by a recorded vote of 24 in favour to 3 against (United States, Canada, Australia), with 15 abstentions.

Speaking in explanation of vote after the vote, the representative of [Australia](#) said his delegation was deeply concerned for those living in the Palestinian Territory, and had made strong shows of support for achieving an enduring peace based on a two-State solution. Therefore, it must refrain from any action that undermined the trust and support of the peace process. Australia was contributing to the development of Palestinians by helping the Palestinian Authority meet the Territory's recovery needs and the needs of the people, including of course women.

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