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Committee on the Inalienable Rights
of the Palestinian People
340th Meeting (AM)

ONLY CONCRETE INTERVENTION TO PREVENT ISRAEL FROM BLOCKING TWO-STATE SOLUTION

WILL PRESERVE PROSPECTS FOR PEACE, PALESTINIAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE TOLD

Palestine Liberation Organization Member Says Palestinian Statehood 'Not a Luxury', but Requirement for Peace, Stability, Prosperity throughout Region

Without serious, concrete intervention by year's end to stop Israel's policies and strategies to systematically and deliberately destroy the two-State solution, prospects for peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians would be ruined, a top Palestinian peace negotiator today told the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.

"The implications of such a situation are drastic, not just for Palestinians, but for the whole region and for the whole world," said Hanan Ashrawi, member of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and of the Palestinian Legislative Council.

Israel's profitable occupation of the Palestinian homeland had continued unchecked and with full impunity, she said. Last year alone, the number of Jewish settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, particularly in and around Jerusalem, had doubled, financed by increasing levels of Israeli Government aid. Jerusalem was fast transforming into a captive city, besieged by a separation wall and very stringent military checkpoints intended to economically and physically strangle the Palestinians. Muslims and Christians were barred from holy sites, while, through daily expulsions and confiscation of residence and work permits, the city was being ethnically cleansed of non-Jews.

"I don't think we've seen such draconian laws anywhere else in the world to complete the expulsion of people who have been living there for centuries," she said, adding that Israel's Supreme Court was complicit in the ongoing theft of Palestinian land and resources, and the environmental degradation of the West Bank.

In its report to donors at the 21 March meeting in Brussels of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for Palestinian assistance, Israel had been "extremely disingenuous", she said, pointing to its claims that the Palestinians were not able to support their own State because of their continued reliance on outside help and that the Palestinian Authority was not sufficiently stable to meet the standards of a well-functioning State.

Moreover, she noted, this week, Israel had cut ties with the United Nations Human Rights Council after that body created a special panel to investigate Jewish settlements in the West Bank, and said it would bar the United Nations team from entering the area. "I don't see why a fact-finding mission to Palestine is seen as something that is hostile," she added.

The Netanyahu Administration had insisted that the Palestinians explicitly recognize Israel as a Jewish State as a precondition for negotiations, she said. The Administration had also changed the terms of reference for peace talks established in the 1990s, insisting that the status of Jerusalem, the right of return of refugees, settlements and other pertinent issues were no longer on the table, leaving virtually nothing for the Palestinian State, she said.

"I think we have engaged in the greatest variety of negotiations in the history of peacemaking," she said, pointing to bilateral, regional, multilateral and, most recently, "exploratory" talks. "And all of them led nowhere."

Israel's unilateral stance was unacceptable, she said. "Palestinian statehood is not a luxury, it is not something we are demanding outside of international law," she said. "It's an essential requirement for peace, stability and prosperity throughout the region."

The international community should be helping the Palestinians achieve their goal of establishing a pluralistic, inclusive State with a system of good governance and the rule of law, she said. "You have the responsibility here to make sure Palestine is recognized as an equal member, that all violations are being checked and that Israel is being held accountable," she said.

But instead of backing the Palestinians' appeal last September for full United Nations membership, the United States and some other nations had criticized the move as "unilateral" and had exerted tremendous effort to prevent its passage in the Security Council. That would not stop the Palestinians, however, from pushing for membership in the Organization and other international bodies.

While in recent speeches the United States President had hailed the right to freedom and human dignity of citizens throughout the Arab world, he had excluded the same right for Palestinians. "All those values that have guided the Arab awakening are the values that the Palestinian people have adopted for some time," she said. She called on the Obama Administration to be a fair, even-handed peacemaker now. "We cannot wait for the [United States] elections to end. Reality cannot be put on hold. Israeli measures on the ground are destroying the chances for peace as we speak," she said.

As the Netanyahu Administration had announced this year that it would create irreversible conditions on the ground, Palestinian empowerment was left with no choice but to proceed internally, she said. The Palestinians were not interested in endless talks that would only give Israel legal cover to expand settlements and annex Jerusalem. "We are interested in a peaceful resolution. We will seek to achieve that through peaceful means, including internal empowerment," she said. Free and fair elections were the only way to achieve national reconciliation between the Fatah and Hamas political parties, she said, pointing to efforts towards that goal.

Following the briefing, Committee Chair Abdou Salam Diallo (Senegal) expressed his support for the aims of the Quartet and his hope that they would make strides by year's end. It was important to ask the Security Council to speak out firmly against Israeli settlements. Events organized within the Committee over the past two years had made it possible to mobilize support for Palestinian statehood, he said. In that vein, another seminar organized by the Committee would take place in Paris from 29 to 30 May. For his part, he remained deeply concerned about the financial crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which had been wrought by the Israeli Government. He asked donors to honour their commitments to the Territory and to provide supplementary aid where possible. He also announced that during its 16 March session, the General Assembly had accepted Ecuador's request to become a Committee member. Mr. Diallo said he was convinced Ecuador would play an active role in implementing the Committee's mandate.

Discussion

Opening the exchange, the representative of Iraq noted that the Palestinian situation was one of the main topics to be discussed at the Arab League Summit under way in his country. He asked Ms. Ashrawi how that Summit could help contribute to bringing about a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Noting his awareness of a campaign to persecute Christians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, he suggested that a religiously diverse delegation might have a role to play in speaking about the conflict throughout the region. Lastly, he noted that, in 2011, Iraq had been able to contribute financial support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for the first time since 2003.

The representative of Turkey expressed strong support for the "rightful" struggle of the Palestinians. At a time when the region was going through a transformation, it was particularly important to remember that struggle. The aspirations of the Palestinians could not "go unanswered any longer", he said, adding that his delegation supported efforts of the Palestinian leadership and condemned the ongoing Israeli settlement policy, which was an impediment to the peace process.

The representative of Venezuela said that Ms. Ashrawi had offered a "clear-eyed", but nonetheless "painful", description of the current situation. She asked Ms. Ashrawi how the Palestinian leadership viewed itself in the context of the continued Israeli occupation.

Responding to comments about resistance to the Israeli occupation, Ms. Ashrawi pointed to the case of Hana Shalabi, a Palestinian woman being held under "administrative detention" who had been on a hunger strike for more than a month and whose life was now in jeopardy. All such detainment was, in fact, unjust, she stressed. Responding to the representative of Iraq, she said that, at the last meeting of the follow-up committee, there had been a request for a safety net of \$100 million in response to significant "economic blackmail" by the United States and other parties. That safety net would be very useful. In addition, there should be concerted Arab support for the Palestinian's "next move" — to go to the United Nations General Assembly.

Many did not understand why the Palestine Liberation Organization had not followed up immediately on the matter of the General Assembly, she said. There was, in fact, a decision on that issue; it was only a matter of timing. In addition, she felt strongly that there was no conflict between going the route of the United Nations and continuing to work under the auspices of the Quartet. "We have tried every single way," she said, adding that she hoped that the current Arab League Summit would adopt that same plan. Additionally, the Arab Peace Initiative could be brought to bear to help end the occupation. "This is not an open-ended opportunity," she warned in that regard, given the many changes currently taking place in the Middle East, that chance would not be available for long.

Responding to the representative of Iraq, she pointed to an erroneous article that had been published describing a campaign against Christians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The article had framed Israel as the only place in the Middle East where Christians were protected, she said, adding that "this cannot be further from the truth". All Palestinians were persecuted equally by Israel under the occupation, she stressed. "This is one way of maligning the Arab world as a whole," and perpetuating the "myth" that Israel was the only tolerant country in the region. Nonetheless, the suggestion of a diverse delegation was a good one.

Recognition of Palestine needed wide support, be it international or bilateral, she said, thanking the delegate from Turkey for his support. Turning to the comment by Venezuela's representative, she said the Palestine Liberation Organization did not want to be transformed into an administrative body under the occupation. "We believe that we have to continue to take back the power of the Authority," she said, thereby ensuring that power remained on Palestinian land. There was a deliberate effort by Israel to create "self-exile", as well as "brain drain", by creating very difficult living circumstances in the Territory.

Addressing the "boycotts, divestment and sanctions" movement, she said it was gaining some traction and she recalled that such initiatives had been very effective in South Africa during the struggle against apartheid. But Israel had enacted measures against such boycotts. For its part, the Palestine Liberation Organization was a system of governance that was there to serve the Palestinian people. "It is not a sacred body, but it is there to do a job." It was seen as a seminal government, or "a way of getting to statehood and to freedom". Palestinians, therefore, would not stand for Israel transforming that body into a solely administrative presence. "We will continue to try to serve the Palestinian cause," she said; if at any point Israel was seen as abusing the body, a decision would be taken with regard to whether or not to dissolve it.

The representative of Indonesia said that the cause of the Palestinian people represented both the "call of history" and the "right thing to do". He urged an immediate halt to actions that undermined the credible negotiations. Indonesia strongly believed that the move to pursue statehood at the United Nations was not in conflict with the Quartet negotiations, but, in fact, supported them. Indonesia would continue to assist the movement through its Palestinian capacity-building programme.

The representative of Ecuador, the newest member of the Committee, said that the principle element at stake in Palestine was justice. It was an honour and pleasure for Ecuador to be confirmed as a member of the Committee, he said, promising to uphold the rights of Palestine, which Ecuador "deeply cherished".

The representative of Morocco stated that his country was against both the occupation and the “aggressive” Israeli policies. Morocco was now the Arab member of the Security Council for a period of two years, he said, adding that it would be “at your disposal” to help see Palestine become a State that sat on equal footing with other Member States of the United Nations.

The representative of Nicaragua recalled that her country, as a Security Council member in the 1980s, had taken part in the convening of negotiations on Palestine. “It is time for us to get to the heart of the matter,” which, she said, was the denial of Israel and its chief ally to allow the Palestinians to rightfully establish their own State. They had taken “every avenue” to achieve that goal; despite the latest steps taken in negotiations in Jordan and the work of the Quartet, the same situation remained. She suggested that Israel be held accountable for its actions, including in the Security Council and other United Nations bodies.

The representative of Pakistan echoed those sentiments.

Ms. Ashwari, expressing appreciation for the statements and for the work undertaken in support of the Palestinian cause, said she was not opposed to negotiations as a means to a solution, but that the current process was “without substance or relationship to reality”, and was not productive. That was why Palestinian leadership was also pursuing other avenues to end the suffering and find a just and viable peace. She appreciated Indonesia’s capacity-building support, as well as Ecuador’s willingness to work within the Committee’s context.

“It’s not just a question of being Arab, it’s a question of humanity,” she said, agreeing with the representative of Morocco and thanking him for his delegation’s efforts in “activating” the work of the Committee. “This is our joint struggle,” she said. She also appreciated the work of Venezuela, both within and outside of the Committee. “What we need is political will,” she said, agreeing that Israel should be held accountable for its violations.

Taking the floor, Riyad Mansour, the Permanent Observer of Palestine, thanked the Committee for its significant help in advancing his people’s cause. It was the only Committee of its kind in the United Nations, he stressed. In addition, he said he was extremely proud to see Ms. Ashrawi as the first woman to hold a leadership position within the Palestinian Liberation Organization, and he thanked her for her comprehensive address.

Before concluding, Mr. Diallo informed the Committee that Ms. Ashrawi’s presentation, which had been broadcast online, would also be available for viewing via the United Nations video archives.

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