

**International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People  
(29<sup>th</sup> November 2021)  
Video Telephone Conference**

**Statement by Austria**

Distinguished Guests,

Ms. Ghada Waly, Director General of the UN Office in Vienna,

Ambassador Salah Abdel Shafi, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations in Vienna,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honor to address you in my capacity as the representative of the host country to the United Nations in Vienna. As in 2020, we are still all struggling with the COVID pandemic, which keeps posing challenges to everyone. I am therefore addressing you remotely today, but I do look forward to meeting you in person again at a future occasion.

Unfortunately, earlier this year, in May, after weeks of palpably rising tensions especially in East Jerusalem, we had to witness a violent escalation by the terrorist organisation Hamas whose operatives fired over 4.300 rockets from Gaza against Israel, targeting civilian areas indiscriminately. Israeli return of fire in self-defence had an even more devastating effect on Gaza. Each civilian life lost, each injury suffered was one too many. We mourn the many innocent victims on both sides, especially women and children. Israelis and Palestinians alike have an equal right to live in peace and security.

While we have a cease-fire now, which the UN, Egypt and others tirelessly and commendably work to strengthen and enhance, the situation in and around Gaza remains of great concern. We welcome steps that Israel has taken to ease some restrictions on Gaza and we call for the further lifting of restrictions to allow for early recovery and reconstruction efforts, basic service delivery as well as for unimpeded humanitarian access to Gaza.

We continue to support efforts towards the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank under one single legitimate Palestinian Authority. The renewal of democratic legitimacy of the Palestinian leadership is still pending, as a set of three elections foreseen in May, July and August were postponed indefinitely earlier this year. A new date should be set for free and fair elections across all of the Palestinian territory, including in East Jerusalem, in accordance with the Oslo accords. We call upon all Palestinian factions to commit unequivocally to democratic principles including non-violence and rule of law.

Ladies and gentlemen,

You will all agree with me that restoring a political horizon towards a two-state solution, which we believe is without a viable alternative, is paramount.

In this regard, since May, we have seen some positive signs, such as the first high-level meetings since many years between President Mahmud Abbas and members of the new Israeli government. We hope for more such meetings, for productive outcomes and most of all for the rebuilding of a modicum of confidence with a view to a return to direct negotiations. We also note positively that both Israelis and Palestinians brought constructive measures to the recent meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee in Oslo, which was also recognised by the Middle East Quartet Envoys meeting shortly thereafter.

On the other hand, we have witnessed rising tensions, rising levels of violence and rising numbers of victims. We condemn acts of terrorism, including the recent attack on Israeli civilians in East Jerusalem. We also follow with particular concern demolitions of houses and other buildings, displacements of Palestinians from their homes, especially in and around East Jerusalem, as well as violence by Israeli settlers against Palestinians and their property. I would like to reiterate here Austria's principled position on Israel's settlement activities: Settlements in occupied territories contravene international law. Furthermore, they constitute an obstacle to peace and erode the possibility to implement any two states solution.

As this day is about solidarity with the Palestinian people not only in Palestine, let me also emphasize the indispensable role of UNRWA in providing Palestine refugees with necessary protection and essential services. In this context, we warmly welcome the EU-UNRWA Joint Declaration 2021 – 2024, signed on 17 November. Also bilaterally, Austria will continue its support. Last year, we have entered into a multi-annual agreement on one of UNRWA's programmes in order to enhance predictability and long-term financial planning.

In conclusion, Excellencies,

I would like to reassure the Palestinian people of the continued support of the Austrian government on their path towards self-determination in the framework of a two states solution, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign, and viable State of Palestine living side by side in security and in peace with each other and with all their neighbours.

Thank you.