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Statement by
H.E. Ms. Khojesta Fana EBRAHIMKHEL
On behalf of the
Chair of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights
of the Palestinian People
at the Special Meeting in observance of the
International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People
8 December 2020

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Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, allow me to express the Committee's deepest condolences to the Palestinian people for the passing of Saeb Erekat, the Secretary-General of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Chief Negotiator in the Middle East Peace Process, who dedicated his entire life to achieve peace and the realization of the inalienable rights of his people, including to self-determination and independence. That goal has long been the same goal of our Committee, established 45 years ago, on 10 November 1975.

This year, as we gather to observe the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, we are living in unprecedented times. The COVID-19 pandemic is raging throughout the world causing loss of life and

unprecedented economic disruption. The situation is particularly dire in the Occupied Palestine Territory, including East Jerusalem, where cases are on the rise, as are social distress and economic hardship, affecting in particular Palestinian women and children, and where the Palestinian people are already bearing the consequences of more than a half-century of foreign occupation.

This is also the year the United Nations marks the 75th anniversary of the signing of our Charter, reminding us that the history of our Organization is inherently linked to reaching a just solution of the Palestinian question. Yet, today, there is no cause for celebration.

The 53-year-old illegal Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory persists and is now compounded by threats of *de jure* annexation, while the Palestinian people continue to be denied their inalienable rights, including to self-determination.

The vision of General Assembly resolution 181 (II), adopted seventy-three years ago, on 29 November 1947 – the partition of Mandate Palestine into two sovereign, adjoining States – remains unfulfilled. The Palestinian people still have not realized freedom and do not enjoy living in peace in their sovereign, independent State, and Israel's ongoing illegal settlement of the Occupied Palestinian Territory is daily undermining that vision of two-States and endangering the prospects for peace through a just and durable solution of the question of Palestine.

In the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, Palestinians endure the daily infringement of their human rights. Freedom of movement is severely restricted; excessive use of force is regularly used against the civilian population, while children experience trauma and are held illegally

for months in Israeli detention centres. Settlement expansion continues unabated and with impunity, in defiance of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 2334 (2016). Seizure of property and demolition of homes and structures have reached unprecedented numbers. According to the Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs, 869 Palestinians have been rendered homeless this year through property destruction by Israel, the largest numbers since 2016.

As in the case of the Bedouin village of Humsa Al Bqai'a in the West Bank, where at least 73 inhabitants, including 41 children, were displaced, and more than 75 structures were destroyed, leaving families dispossessed, and their livelihood destroyed. Thousands of Palestinian families are living with the threat of eviction or demolition of their homes and forced transfer. Moreover, entire communities face the daily threat of extremist Israeli settlers who intimidate and attack them with impunity.

It must be clear that settlements are illegal under international law and their construction and planning must be fully stopped, including – among other - the plans recently announced regarding “Givat Hamatos” that, if built, would block territorial contiguity between East Jerusalem and Bethlehem – the main Palestinian metropolitan area.

Israeli settlements represent a serious obstacle to peace and, alongside the separation Wall built illegally in the occupied territory, serve as the most visible sign of the entrenchment of the occupation and *de facto* annexation of Palestinian lands. As recently called for by the overwhelming majority of Security Council members, Israel must cease for once and for all its plans to proceed to a *de jure* annexation.

In the Gaza Strip, Palestinians are living the thirteenth year of an illegal Israeli blockade, which continues to isolate and impoverish them; during this pandemic the blockade has continued to deprive them of adequate access to humanitarian and socio-economic support. The Committee calls on the parties to exercise maximum restraint to alleviate recent heightened tensions between Israel and Palestinian groups in Gaza, including Hamas.

In order to ensure that Palestinians, including the Palestine refugees, live with dignity, the Committee calls on Member States to urgently address the UNRWA's funding shortfall, which reached a staggering US\$ 115 million in November, threatening the continuity of vital programmes for the benefit of 5.7 million Palestine refugees, including a half million school children, in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the region. The Committee urges the international community to act swiftly and provide the necessary and predictable resources for UNRWA to meet refugee needs and prevent serious risks to regional stability.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Committee stands firm with the Palestinians people in their pursuit of their inalienable rights and a life of peace, justice, equality and dignity. Our common goal remains achieving a just and lasting solution of two States living side by side in peace and security within the pre-1967 borders, and with East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine.

In order to achieve this goal, the Committee supports the call made by the President of the State of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas, for an international peace conference under the auspices of an expanded Middle East Quartet that would allow regional players to contribute to the advancement of the peace process.

The Committee also stresses the importance of the role to be played by this General Assembly and by the Security Council in promoting a peaceful solution and urges respect for the obligations in this regard.

The Committee welcomes renewed Palestinian reconciliation efforts and plans for elections, as well as the recent announcement by the Palestinian Government of its intention to resume cooperation with Israel, based on respect of its agreements with the Palestinians. Recent bilateral agreements aimed at normalizing relations between Israel and some countries in the region cannot by-pass the fact that the Palestine question must be resolved if we are to reach a just and lasting peace and security in the Middle East.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The year 2020 has put us all to the test. The current pandemic confronted us with an invisible enemy, forcing us to reassess our values, priorities, longstanding political and economic dogmas. At the same time, we are again reminded that the most challenging obstacle can turn to an opportunity to act boldly.

That is why we are here today: to remind everyone that change is possible and that the Palestinian people need more than solidarity, they need determined and bold action, based on the longstanding principles enshrined in the UN Charter, international law and UN resolutions. We are at a time where Palestinian rights and the international consensus deserve and need more support than ever. The entire international community, including our partners in the region, must contribute to a just, lasting solution that will turn this International Day of Solidarity into the celebration of the realization of the long overdue freedom for the Palestinian people and Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Thank you.