

**International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People
(29th November; event on 10th December, 2020)
Video Telephone Conference**

Address by the Host Country, Austria

Madam Ghada Waly, Director General of the UN Office in Vienna,
Madam Khojesta Fana Ebrahimkhel, Permanent Representative of the Islamic
Republic of Afghanistan to the UN,
Ambassador Salah ad-Din Abd-ash-Shafi, Permanent Observer of the State of
Palestine to the United Nations in Vienna,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to address you on behalf of the Host Country of UNOV.

The year 2020 has been a challenging year for all of us. The COVID pandemic has affected us all and it is the reason why we still meet virtually and not face to face at the premises of the UN in Vienna today.

This year we also commemorate the assassination - 25 years ago - of an important peacebuilder, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin of Israel, who led the way on the Israeli side to the first-ever Israeli-Palestinian agreements and helped lay the foundation for the process towards the two states solution. Moreover, exactly a month ago, we lost an important peacebuilder on the Palestinian side: Saeb Erekat, former Chief Negotiator for the PLO, whom we remember as an avid negotiator and passionate advocate for the Palestinian cause. I would like to express my personal condolences on this occasion to his family and to the Palestinian people.

2020 was no exceptional year as peace between Israelis and Palestinians is still sorely missing. However, it was an exceptional year for the Middle East in a few other respects.

It started in January with the presentation of the long-announced US Peace Plan, which was seen by some as a chance for renewed momentum in the Middle East Peace Process and rejected by others.

In May, a new government formed in Israel. However, with the possibility of annexation steps by this new government, the Palestinian side ended all official co-operation with Israel. It took until August for Israel to suspend all annexation plans and until November for Palestinian-Israeli co-operation to finally resume and bring us back to normal. The rather frustrating “normal” of all those years since the last direct talks collapsed in 2014.

Meanwhile another kind of normal appeared in the Middle East, which keeps developing: The normalization between Israel and several Arab states. We are aware that many Palestinians felt disappointed. However, we see an opportunity in this development rather than challenge, and we certainly hope that it will eventually contribute to furthering the two states solution.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In early 2020 a new Austrian government was formed. Its program contains a clear commitment to the two states solution, as well as a to continuous support for the building of the future Palestinian state.

Many of the institutions necessary for a democratic viable state are already in place: executive, legislative and judiciary. Austria and the European Union helped building these institutions over the past decades, and remain fully committed to their further development - with a view to turning them into institutions of a sovereign independent Palestinian state, in the framework of a two states solution.

Excellencies,

It is of crucial importance to avoid any unilateral steps that lead us away from a negotiated two states solution that resolves all permanent status issues in order to end the conflict. We will continue to urge both parties to refrain from such actions. In this context, we follow with particular concern demolitions and displacements of Palestinian

citizens from their homes. We reiterate our principled opposition to Israel's settlement activities in contravention to international law. Furthermore, settlements constitute an obstacle to peace and erode the possibility to implement any two states solution.

We are also still very concerned about the situation in and around Gaza. We firmly condemn the rockets, mortars, incendiary balloons and other terrorist attacks from the Gaza strip targeting civilians in Israel. At the same time, living conditions in Gaza must be improved, humanitarian aid and relief must reach all who are in need. To ensure lasting results, however, a fundamental change of the situation in Gaza is crucial, including an end to the closure, while legitimate Israeli security interests need to be addressed thoroughly.

We continue to support efforts towards the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank under one single legitimate Palestinian Authority. In this context, we note that intra-Palestinian reconciliation seems to have made some progress over the past months. The EU and Austria support the holding of elections in Palestine and hope that a date will be set very soon. We call upon all Palestinian factions to commit unequivocally to democratic principles prior to elections.

Let me also use this opportunity to highlight the importance of UNRWA in providing Palestine refugees with the necessary protection and essential services. The work of UNRWA is also important for the stability of the region, and Austria and the EU will continue supporting it.

In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to reassure the Palestinian people of the wholehearted support of the Austrian government on their path towards self-determination in the form of a two states solution, with Palestine and Israel living side by side in security and in peace with each other and with all their neighbours.

Thank you.