

“Possible repercussions of the collapse of the international order on the Palestinian issue in light of statements made by Mr. Antonio Guterres in the opening of the 73rd session of the UN General Assembly

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Introduction:

In opening remarks at the UN General Assembly’s 73rd session, Secretary General Antonio Guterres said: Palestinians and Israelis are still locked in endless conflict, with the two-state solution more and more distant.” He continued, “Today world order is increasingly chaotic...the rule of law is being undermined” and “Trust is at a breaking point; trust in national inspirations, trust among states; trust in the rules-based global order.” Discussion revolved around how this statement and possible collapse of a global order impacts the Palestinian cause and their quest for independence and statehood. The discussion particularly revolved around the shrinking space for Palestinian civil society to act in the protection of human and civil rights and the growing Israeli influence on US policies vis-à-vis the Palestinians, and ways of circumventing these obstacles in order to preserve our national goals and sound civil society in the process.

General Discussion:

The participants discussed the current global situation in light of what is being called “Trumpism” in reference to US President Donald Trump’s policies of exclusion and populism. His “me-first” approach is one of power politics, racism, Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, which rejects any kind of global rule of law. Trump has continued to undermine the global system based on international human rights, humanitarian law and multilateral approaches for problem-solving, including attacking the UN and its institutions.

In terms of the impact of this approach on Palestine, the US administration has adopted the most extreme and racist politics of the Israeli government and has further enhanced impunity for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his coalition by fully aligning itself with the occupation. As a result, the Palestinians have been excluded from protection and the peace process is near collapse. The question posed by the participants is: how do Palestinians navigate their way in such dangerous waters.

The participants discussed how the situation today is witness to a broad breakdown of trust in the world between citizens and people in power. The rise of populism is a threat to human rights and world order where minorities pay the highest price. In terms of Palestine and its civil society, the challenge is even more prevalent today, with a global pushback against words such as ‘occupation’ and claims that the Fourth Geneva Convention does not apply to the occupied territories. Also, since Palestine is at the forefront of this lack of accountability for Israel, the fear is that this will spread to other parts of the world.

The participants pointed out that civil society has always been a safety net for Palestine and the backbone of its cause. Under direct occupation, civil society was the only means of maintaining democracy and nation-building. Today, we Palestinians must maintain the resilience of our civil society and be extremely responsible and vigilant when it comes to the protection civil rights, especially after the establishment of a political system that has created a clash between the two.

The attendees broached the subject of Israeli threats to funding Palestinian NGOs and cautioned about the possible government amendments to the NGO draft law and the already shrinking space of civil society, doubled with attacks by Zionist-based watch groups such as the NGO and UN monitor, which target funding to Palestinian NGOs. In this regard, the participants also referred to the recent Human Rights Watch report on the Palestinians territories and Israel, which, among other issues, criticized Palestinian performance and cited violations of human rights. They said that although the points in this report must be addressed, the Palestinians also compile valuable and reliable reports that could be used by international parties instead of just reacting to international reports.

In terms of the international framework, attendees acknowledged that the global system, i.e., the UN and its institutions, is not perfect and that the Palestinians mistrust the system to a large extent, but that they must continue to work within it to realize their aspirations. They said the only way for states to implement their obligations is through political will. Today, the UN is paralyzed; it repeats itself in rhetoric and resolutions but without action. The goal, they said, was to find ways within the system to advocate for Palestinian protection, human and national rights and accountability for Israel.

Recommendations:

The attendees discussed a number of recommendations on ways to preserve the Palestinian vision and better forward their agenda in light of the current global situation:

- In spite of the weakness of the global system and the domination of certain member states, it is crucial to work within this system to realize Palestinians aspirations. This can be done through working with parliamentarians and civil society in various countries to push our agenda forward.
- To push for imposing sanctions on Israel in order to make the occupation costly for it
- To urge the international community to pool together its own views and just laws. That is, to work towards forming a critical mass of countries that has real values and respect for human rights, to form a counterbalance rising populism and fascism.
- To devise strategies on ways to penetrate international forums, parliamentarians and other arenas which have an impact on the Palestinians cause and to find 'loopholes' in the system that would allow for better efforts to be made towards ending the Israeli occupation
- Internally, elections must be held in Palestine as a good example of accountability and defending and upholding civil rights.
- To make the PLO commission on human rights more accessible to the public