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Statement to the United Nations Security Council, Quarterly Open Debate on the Situation in the Middle East, including the Palestine Question

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Mr. President, Esteemed Members of the Security Council,

I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to address you today, especially thankful to H.E. Ambassador Macharia Kamau, Foreign Affairs Principal Secretary and the Republic of Kenya for the kind invitation.

For over 70 years, the UN and its various bodies have been seized of the Palestine question; repeatedly reviewing conditions, adopting resolutions, and dispatching fact-finding missions, to no avail. Sadly, this Council has been unable to assert authority, allowing this injustice to become a perpetual tragic human, moral, political and legal travesty.

So it would be disingenuous of me to come before you assuming I could inform you of something you do not already know. Nevertheless, I do appreciate the opportunity to communicate in a candid manner, not to recite endless statistics, nor to reiterate the ongoing pain of a people, deprived of their basic rights, including even the right to speak out, admonished not to “whine” or “complain,” as a means of silencing the victim.

The tragedy is that you know all of this; yet, it has had a minimal impact, if any, on the horrific conditions in Occupied Palestine.

I imagine it must be disheartening and frustrating for this distinguished organization and its members to find themselves trapped in this cycle of deliberate disdain and futility.

It is therefore imperative that this Council consider where it has gone wrong and what it can do to correct course and serve the cause of justice and peace.

Undoubtedly, the absence of accountability for Israel and of protection for the Palestinian people has enabled Israeli impunity to ride roughshod over the rights of an entire nation, allowing for perpetuation of a permanent settler-colonial occupation.

Mr. President,

Much of the prevailing political discourse overlooks reality and is diverted and subsumed by chimeras and distractions proffered by Israel and its allies under such banners as “economic peace,” “improving the quality of life,” “normalization,” “managing the conflict,” “containing the conflict,” or “shrinking the conflict.”

These fallacies must be dismantled. Volatile situations of injustice and oppression do not shrink. They expand and explode, with disastrous consequences. Similarly, the delusion of “imposing calm” under siege and systemic aggression, particularly as in Gaza, is an oxymoron, for calm or security on the one hand and occupation or captivity on the other are antithetical and irreconcilable.

Likewise, the fallacy of “confidence-building measures” is misguided since occupation breeds only contempt, distrust, resentment, and resistance. The oppressed cannot be brought to trust or accept handouts from their oppressor as an alternative to their right to freedom and justice.

The misleading and flawed “both sides” argument calling for “balance” in a flagrantly unbalanced situation is another attempt at obfuscation and generating misconceptions.

Israel’s impunity is further enhanced using such excuses as being the so-called “only democracy in the Middle East” or a “strategic ally,” or having “shared values,” or even for the sake of protecting its “fragile coalition.”

There has also been tacit and, at times overt, acceptance of Israel’s ideological, absolutist arguments, including the invocation of religious texts as a means to dismiss and supplant contemporary political and legal discourse and action. Hence, the so-called “Jewish State Law,” which allocates the right to self-determination exclusively to Jews in all of historic Palestine, is endorsed and normalized.

In the meantime, a massive disinformation machine persists in its racist maligning and demonizing of the Palestinian people, going so far as to label them “terrorists,” or a “demographic threat,” a dehumanizing formula exploited as a way to deny the right of millions of Palestine refugees to return.

Such slander has warped political focus and discourse globally. Some states have gone off on a tangent pursuing Palestinian textbooks for so-called “incitement,” or adopting the IHRA definition that conflates criticism of Israel with anti-Semitism, or criminalizing BDS, or intimidating and censoring academics and solidarity activists who stand up for Palestinian rights.

These distortions ignore the unequal and unjust laws designed to persecute Palestinians, individually and collectively. It is evidenced in the defamation of our political prisoners and the targeting of their families’ livelihoods, as though Israeli military courts or prison systems have anything to do with justice or legality.

The mindless refrain that Israel has the “right to defend itself,” while the Palestinian people are denied such a right, is perverse in that the occupier’s violence is justified as “self-defense” while the occupied are stigmatized as “terrorists.”

We cannot afford to disregard the context of occupation and its systemic aggression as the framing device for all critical assessments and action.

Excellencies,

Occupied Palestine, including Jerusalem, is the target of a comprehensive and pervasive policy of colonization and erasure, of displacement and replacement, in which Israel is appropriating everything Palestinian; our land and resources; our cultural and human heritage; our archeological sites, which we have safeguarded for centuries; our history; our cuisine; the names of our streets; and most egregiously the identity of Jerusalem, as we witness in the ethnic cleansing of the Old City, Sheikh Jarrah, Silwan among others. Even our cemeteries have been desecrated such as the building of a so-called “museum of tolerance” on top of human remains in Maman’ Allah

cemetery. And, Israel continues to stoke the flames of a “holy war,” with repeated assaults on our holy sites, particularly Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Jerusalem is being targeted in a deliberate campaign of annexation and distortion. Israel now brazenly declares its intent to complete the settlement siege of Jerusalem and destruction of the territorial contiguity of the West Bank, with its outrageous plans for E-1, Qalandiya airport (Atarot), “Pisgat Ze’ev” and “Giv’at HaMatos.”

We cannot be distracted by symbolic gestures that create a false impression of progress. Claims that the “time is not right,” or that it is “difficult now” to work for a peaceful solution, give license to Israel to persist in its perilous policies. Likewise, repeating a verbal commitment to the two-State solution, while one state is allowed to deliberately destroy the other, rings hollow.

Mr. President,

All of this does not preclude our recognition of our own shortcomings. We do not shirk our responsibility to speak out against internal violence, human rights abuses, corruption, or other such practices that are rejected and resented by our own people. It is our responsibility to carry out democratic reform and revitalize our body politic while ending our internal divisions. This is a Palestinian imperative.

But we must caution others against exploiting our shortcomings to justify Israeli crimes or international inaction, or to condition any positive engagement on the creation of an ideal system of governance in Palestine while we languish under a lawless system of Israeli control.

We ask that you, trustees of the rules-based order, uphold your responsibilities: provide us with protection from aggression and empower our people to amplify their voice, both in governance and liberation.

Esteemed Members of the Council,

Peace is not achieved by “normalizing the occupation,” sidelining the Palestine Question, or rewarding Israel by repositioning it as a regional superpower. Such an approach maintains the causes of regional

instability and insecurity, while enabling Israel as a colonial apartheid State to superimpose “Greater Israel” on all of historic Palestine.

Generation after generation, the people of Palestine have remained committed to the justice of their cause, the integrity of their narrative, the authenticity of their history and culture, and their inviolable right to live in freedom, and dignity, as an equal among nations and in the fullness of our humanity.

It is time to reclaim the narrative of justice and invoke our collective will to activate the UN Charter and affirm the relevance of international law.

The time has come for courageous and determined action, not just to undo the injustice of the past but to chart a clear and binding course for a peaceful future of hope and redemption.

I thank you.