



**KINGDOM OF BELGIUM**

Statement delivered by

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Permanent Representative  
of Belgium to the UN

Open debate Middle East

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Mister President,

I thank Special Coordinator Mr. Nickolay MLADENOV for his statement. Belgium fully aligns itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union.

Let me first turn to the recent developments regarding the COVID-19 outbreak. We echo the appeal of the UN Middle East Envoys made in line with the Secretary-General's recent call for a global ceasefire during the COVID-19 pandemic. We encourage cooperation and coordination between Israeli and Palestinian authorities and stress Israel's responsibility as an occupying power in this regard. Measures taken to prevent the spread of the virus should be in line with international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

The situation in East-Jerusalem is a cause for concern; both because of the lack of information as well as the lack of access to testing and appropriate medical care. The forced closure of a testing facility in Silwan is of particular concern.

Also for the West Bank, we call for an end to the destruction and seizure of health, water and sanitation facilities which not only constitutes a breach of international humanitarian law, but also undermines efforts to contain the spread of the virus.

The COVID-19 pandemic has a significant impact on the Palestinian health system, already strained by longstanding challenges, particularly in Gaza. We call on the Israeli authorities to immediately lift the blockade of Gaza and call on all duty bearers to enable the entrance of essential medical supplies and humanitarian workers into Gaza to provide relief.

We welcome the efforts deployed by the UN, including UNRWA, in the fight against COVID-19. We remain concerned about UNRWA's lack of financing.

The COVID-19 crisis will have dire socio-economic consequences on an already weakened Palestinian economy and on the budget of the Palestinian Authority. We welcome the initial intentions of Israel to release the withheld clearance revenues in line with its commitments under the Paris Protocol and call for a smooth, regular transfer of funds to the Palestinian Authority.

We are deeply concerned about the wider effects of the pandemic on the most vulnerable, including women and children. We call on all duty bearers to take immediate action to release all Palestinian child detainees to ensure their safety and health in this pandemic.

Mister President,

The current COVID-19 pandemic only further exacerbates an already fragile situation on the ground, where security incidents and human rights violations occur every day. In this regard, we note with concern the sharp increase of settler's violence in the past few weeks. We urge Israel as occupying power to protect the population and to ensure that those responsible are held accountable. Once again the developments on the ground underline the need to come to a sustainable and peaceful solution of the conflict in line with international law and the internationally agreed parameters. The international community needs to exert all possible efforts to get the parties around the table and take a clear stance against any unilateral measure that undermine the viability of the two-state solution.

I would like to express our deepest concern about provisions regarding the prospect of annexation by Israel of parts of the occupied Palestinian territories in the political agreement that has opened the way to the formation of a national emergency government in Israel. If put into practice, these would constitute a clear breach of international law, including the resolutions of the Security Council, and would risk entailing significant legal, political, security and other consequences. Annexation would undermine any prospect for the start of negotiations. As friends and close partners of Israel, we therefore strongly advise the Israeli government against such steps. We also call on the international community to take a clear stance against any steps towards annexation in order to give space to international and multilateral efforts aimed at reaching a fair and durable peace.

I thank you.