

KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

Speech by

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Open debate on the Middle East

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Mr President,

I would like to thank the Special Coordinator, Mr Nickolay Mladenov for his detailed presentation.

Belgium aligns itself with the statement by the European Union and its Member States that has been submitted to you.

Mr President,

My first point concerns the Israeli colonisation policy, which is illegal under international law. This month, the Higher Planning Council met for the first time since last February. The Council announced a significant expansion of more than 5,000 dwellings in the West Bank settlements, including more than 1,600 dwellings in the zones inside and around Jerusalem. We are particularly concerned by these developments. These plans compromise the viability and territorial contiguity of the future State of Palestine with Jerusalem as the future capital of both States. We urge the Israeli government to reverse these decisions and put an end to its settlement policy, including in East Jerusalem and sensitive areas such as Har Homa, Givat Hamatos and E1.

Despite the current COVID-19 pandemic and its significant humanitarian impact on already fragile communities, we are seeing a worrying increase in demolitions and confiscations, including humanitarian structures funded by Belgium and the European Union. We are carefully monitoring the situation regarding the Ras al-Tin school and the villages of Umm al-Heir and Khirbet Al-Majaz, whose populations are threatened with expulsion and their properties with demolition. The forced displacement of these populations would be a clear violation of Israel's humanitarian obligations as an occupying force.

We are extremely concerned by the increased tensions and violence between Israeli settlers and the Palestinians as a result of the settlement policy. We condemn any use of

violence. We call for action to combat impunity for the perpetrators of these acts of violence, including effective prosecutions. The annual olive harvest is taking place at this time; this is a crucial economic activity for Palestinians. We call on Israel to assume its responsibilities and ensure that this harvest takes place without incidents and that the workers can access the olive groves safely and unhindered.

Mr President,

These developments demonstrate that the de facto annexation is continuing unabated despite the suspension of plans to formalise the annexation of certain parts of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. This undermines the trust that the parties need more than ever if they are to resume a credible dialogue. My second point concerns the need to restore this trust. This first and foremost requires all parties to put an end to unilateral acts. But it also involves the resumption of cooperation in keeping with existing agreements and in full compliance with international law. We share the concern expressed by the Special Coordinator regarding the budgetary situation of the Palestinian Authority, and the impact on the Palestinian population of suspending civil and security coordination with Israel. We therefore invite the Palestinian Authority to resume coordination with Israel in the areas of tax, civilians and security.

If dialogue resumes, it is even more important that all the Palestinian factions invest, with a sense of compromise, in the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank under a single and democratic legitimate authority. We strongly encourage the holding of democratic elections in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and Gaza.

Mr President,

Thirdly, like its European partners, Belgium remains attached to a negotiated and viable two-State solution, based on agreed parameters and international law. The goal must be an independent, democratic, contiguous, sovereign and viable Palestinian state living in peace alongside Israel. We support all the international and multilateral efforts to resume dialogue, provided that they comply fully with international law and the agreed parameters and also take account of the legitimate aspirations of both parties. In this respect, we stress the role of the Quartet and the Secretary General of the United Nations.

We welcome the announcement by the Governments of the United States, Israel and Sudan on the normalisation of relations between Israel and Sudan. We hope that these developments will create a new regional dynamic that can help to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on the two-State solution.

Mr President,

I would like to conclude by expressing Belgium's support for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. We are greatly concerned by the non-renewal of the visas of the Office's international staff. We sincerely hope that this situation will soon be resolved, given the essential role that the Office plays on the ground. Lastly, I would like to support the call by the Special Rapporteur regarding the administrative detention of Mr al-Akhras. Administrative detention must remain an exceptional measure, applied for a limited time, and must take account of various guarantees such as the right of defence and the right to a fair trial within a reasonable period.

Thank you.