



KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

Statement delivered by

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Permanent Representative
of Belgium to the UN

Open Debate on the Middle East

New York, 07/21/2020

Thank you Mister President,

Belgium aligns itself with the written statement submitted on behalf of the EU.

I would like first to thank Special Coordinator Mr. Nickolay MLADENOV for his briefing. I also thank Mr. Daniel LEVY and Mr. Khalil SHIKAKI for sharing their insights with us today.

Mister President,

Last month, an overwhelming majority of this Council took a clear stance against the stated intention of the Government of Israel to annex parts of the occupied West Bank considering it an illegal act.

Indeed, a unilateral decision formalizing an annexation, regardless of its size, would constitute a flagrant violation of international law, including the UN Charter. The UN Charter strictly prohibits the acquisition of territory by force. Such an act would be considered null and void and could not change the status of the West Bank, which will remain occupied territory; nor will it change Israel's obligations as an occupying power under international humanitarian law, and more specifically the Fourth Geneva Convention. In line with the EU's position, we will not recognize any changes to the pre-1967 borders, including Jerusalem, other than those agreed upon by the parties through direct negotiations. We will also continue to distinguish between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967.

Annexation will have far reaching consequences. Firstly, it would risk gravely imperiling the security situation on the ground, including Israel's security, which is not negotiable for us. Secondly, following our obligations under international law and EU law, it will have an impact on the bilateral relations between Belgium and Israel. It will also inevitably have significant consequences for the relationship between Israel and the European Union.

Furthermore, we are deeply concerned that annexation would lead to the intensification of human rights violations and a further deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the occupied territory, including through the potential imposition of a two-tiered system of unequal political, social and economic rights based on ethnicity.

Finally, annexation would undermine all efforts aimed at restarting negotiations and would mean the end of the two-state solution.

We therefore urge Israel once more to refrain from any unilateral decision that would imply a *de jure* or a *de facto* annexation of any part of the occupied West Bank and we call on the international community to take a strong stance against any such a decision.

Mister President,

At the moment, the threat of annexation is already exacerbated by the destruction of Palestinian owned residential, livelihood-related, or essential service structures, in Area C of the West Bank, while humanitarian aid is also being destroyed for similar arbitrary or unlawful reasons. We are deeply concerned about these destructions, as well as the recent announcements of construction plans in Har Homa and Givat Hamatos. If put into practice, these plans would further detach East-Jerusalem from the West Bank and jeopardize the future of Jerusalem as the shared capital of both Israel and Palestine. We call on Israel to abandon these plans.

Mister President,

It is more than ever time that the parties turn away from unilateral actions and declarations and engage in direct and meaningful negotiations. In this regard, we stress the importance of intra-Palestinian reconciliation and the necessity to hold elections once conditions permit.

The peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be an important driver for peace and stability in a volatile region. It is therefore necessary that the international community redoubles its efforts with the view of achieving a just and durable peace that is rooted in international law, including the resolutions of this Council. Belgium will support all efforts in this regard, including in the framework of the Middle East Quartet.

Mister President,

Allow me in closing to voice Belgium's strong support for UNRWA's mandate and the crucial role the Agency plays in the absence of a durable political solution to the conflict.

I thank you.