

**STATEMENT BY SRI LANKA  
ON BEHALF OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE ISRAELI PRACTICES  
AFFECTING THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE AND OTHER ARABS  
OF THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES**

**AT THE SPECIAL MEETING IN OBSERVANCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL  
DAY OF SOLIDARITY WITH THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE**

Mr. Chairman,

I wish to thank you for the kind invitation extended to me to address today's special meeting in Observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People in my capacity as Chair of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of Occupied Territories.

29<sup>th</sup> November has much significance to the Palestinian people and to all of us. Resolution 181 (II) was adopted on 29 November 1947 with much hope and expectations of peace. Regrettably, 74 years later, we are yet to witness the resolution of the question of Palestine. This special meeting to mark the Day of Solidarity which we have observed for 44 years remains a stark reminder of the urgent need to find a just and peaceful solution for the Palestinian people who have been deprived of their inalienable right to an independent, sovereign and united State of Palestine.

Mr. Chairman,

The Special Committee presented its 53<sup>rd</sup> Report pursuant to General Assembly resolution 75/96 last month. Due to the constraints posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Committee was not able to conduct its annual consultations with Member States in Geneva or undertake its annual mission to the region. The Committee, like most other UN entities and bodies, therefore resorted to holding online meetings with representatives of UN agencies, Palestinian Ministries and institutions and civil society organizations. The Committee also sent requests for written submissions, including to Member States. Information contained in the Report was based on

testimony, briefings and submissions received by the Committee during the reporting period of 01 August 2020 to 31 August 2021.

The main areas of concern highlighted to the Committee related to the escalation of hostilities in Gaza in May 2021, the humanitarian situation and blockade in Gaza, freedom of expression in the occupied West Bank including East Jerusalem, demolitions and forcible evictions, expansion of settlements and settler violence, impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Palestinian rights, the situation of Palestinian refugees and the situation of human rights in the occupied Syrian Golan. The Committee also took note of the concerns expressed by a number of interlocutors with regard to access to health care for Palestinian people, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, including access to COVID-19 vaccines. Accordingly, a significant part of the Report was therefore dedicated to the human rights of Palestinians in relation to the right to health.

According to the WHO, as at 27 July 2021, there had been a total of 345,030 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, as well as 3,877 deaths since the outbreak of the pandemic. Based on the information received, the occupation has weakened health facilities and made the Occupied Palestinian Territory a ‘vulnerable place’ in which the pandemic could thrive. Evictions of Palestinians and demolitions of their homes and health facilities have deprived them of adequate housing and presented further challenges to their access to water, sanitation and hygiene during the pandemic. The absence of COVID-19 testing centers in Eastern Jerusalem beyond the separation wall is a particular concern, given the restrictions on movement faced by Palestinians in these areas in traveling to the testing centers in East Jerusalem.

Data received from the Palestinian Ministry of Health indicated that in the Gaza Strip, only 22% of the primary care facilities remained open throughout the outbreak of COVID-19. As at 31 August 2021, only 16% of Palestinians eligible for vaccination had received two doses. On 25 March 2021, the Committee issued a press statement raising concerns over reports that Israel had failed to fulfill its international legal responsibility and obligation to ensure the vaccination of the Palestinian population in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. These concerns were raised in consequence of the reports received indicating that Israel had been donating surplus COVID-19

vaccines overseas while Palestinians remained largely unvaccinated. The Special Committee also received information that, as of June 2021, 150,000 Palestinian workers were vaccinated by the Israeli authorities. However, the cost of these vaccinations was recovered by Israel from the taxes imposed on the Palestinians. It was further reported that thousands of Palestinian workers refused to undergo COVID-19 testing, as they faced the prospect of losing their work permits if found to be positive.

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to have a substantial impact on women and girls during the reporting period, as helplines for survivors of gender-based violence reported a 70% increase in calls received. Experts have attributed this increase in part to financial pressures and the restriction on movement resulting from COVID-19. Pandemic-related restrictions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory have exacerbated domestic violence, sexual abuse, forced marriage and other domestic burdens on women, including the support they provide to children through online education. The pandemic has also affected the well-being of children, limiting their access to essential services such as education, health, nutrition, water, sanitation, and other welfare services.

Mr. Chairman, you would appreciate that the rights to water, sanitation and hygiene are particularly critical during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the reporting period, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs documented the demolition by Israeli authorities of 93 physical structures and facilities providing water, sanitation and hygiene in the West Bank. The contamination of more than 90 per cent of the drinkable water supply in Gaza severely impaired the work of hospitals even before the onset of the current pandemic.

I wish to acknowledge the work done by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in providing care and delivering vital human development services and emergency assistance to Palestinian refugees since 1950. The Special Committee was informed that more than 5.7 million Palestinian refugees are registered with UNRWA while their funding gaps are growing annually, threatening the Agency's ability to deliver essential services. I wish to emphasize that any reduction in funding would seriously affect the work of UNRWA in relation to refugees. The Committee shares its concerns regarding

the broader repercussions of such funding gaps, which are exacerbated by the unstable political and security environment in the territory. The work of UNRWA requires the continued support and engagement of States through adequate and predictable funding to ensure the effective discharge of its mandate.

Mr. Chairman,

When we adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we pledged to leave no one behind. Does this not include the Palestinian people? With the onset of the pandemic, we are at pains to achieve our commitments under the SDGs, but regrettably, sustainable development remains an extremely elusive goal for Palestine. Dear colleagues, we must act swiftly and earnestly call for the much desired change. We must foster conditions where genuine negotiations are possible, where both parties to the conflict actively create the necessary environment to facilitate peace. We must support and encourage mutual confidence-building measures, on both sides, in support of efforts to resume dialogue and substantive negotiations.

The exceptional solidarity that we witness today validates the support of the international community towards the resilience and strength of the Palestinian people over the years, which should reinforce our collective efforts to end their suffering. We reiterate our support to relevant General Assembly resolutions and their implementation regarding the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to Statehood, and the attainment of a two state solution based on the 1967 borders. As the world endeavors to build back better, let us strengthen our commitment for a negotiated settlement, for a just, peaceful and lasting solution to the question of Palestine. The resolution of this issue will undoubtedly create the necessary momentum for greater stability and security throughout the region.

As Chair of the Special Committee, we reaffirm our steadfast support to the Palestinian people as they endeavor to achieve their legitimate rights and pray for wisdom and prudence to prevail over the considerable challenges facing both parties.

Thank you.