

January 29th 2021

The Situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question

Introduction

On Tuesday January 26th, 2021, Prime Minister Dr Hon Ralph Gonsalves delivered an address at a meeting of the United Nations Security Council convened to discuss the situation in the Middle East. In it, he outlined the position of this country, on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and underscored our commitment to a viable peace process, that would result in a lasting solution to this long-standing conflict. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines has begun the second year of the 2-year term as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council which ends in December of this year, 2021. Below is the full text of the statement delivered by Dr Gonsalves, also in his capacity as Minister of Foreign Affairs.

“Mr. President:

I thank His Excellency Mr. Ali Nafti, Minister of State for Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tunisia, for convening today's important Open Debate. Thanks, also, to the briefers for their informative remarks. In addition, I wish Mr. Tor Wennesland, the Special Coordinator of the Middle East Peace Process¹, every success in advancing the peace process and sustaining it to a successful conclusion, in accordance with his mandate.

The ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict can only be solved through direct peace negotiations. To this end, we reaffirm the importance of the Middle East Quartet and the regional players in promoting effective dialogue and compromise to settle the long-standing differences between Israel and Palestine, with the support of international partners. In an effort to address the impasse between the parties, we echo President Abbas' call on the United Nations to convene in early 2021 an international conference to launch a genuine peace process. In addition, honouring the Palestinian peoples' long held quest for self-determination and statehood by revisiting the question of full membership at the United Nations is a matter that is long overdue, and an essential component of a lasting Two-State Solution in the drive for a sustainable peace in the Middle East. Peace and security

¹ Recently appointed Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (replacing Nikolai Mladenov)

within well-defined internationally acceptable borders for Israel and Palestine are central requisites for any lasting settlement.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines remains deeply concerned about the critical situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory as a result of the unlawful measures and practices by Israeli authorities. In this connection, we reiterate that all settlement activities, including the recently announced plans to build 800 housing units in the West Bank, as well as tenders for construction of a new settlement of over 2,500 housing units, violate international law. We are also concerned about reports of settler violence against Palestinians, including children and we call for adherence to the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and relevant UN resolutions, including Security Council resolution 2334 (2016).

The critical socio-economic and security situation in Palestine, as well as the attendant humanitarian consequences, demand urgent attention. As Israel's thirteen-year blockade continues to deprive millions of Palestinians living in the Gaza strip of their fundamental rights, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the hardship experienced by the Palestinian people. We therefore call for the immediate lifting of the blockade, and all forms of coercion against the Palestinians. The unprecedented funding shortfall for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), has caused significant decrease in the vital services provided to Palestinian refugees across neighboring countries including Lebanon and Syria. In this regard, we reiterate our calls to the international community for increased assistance to be distributed swiftly to those in need.

Further, we remind Israel, as the occupying power, of its legal responsibility to provide medical supplies and COVID-19 vaccinations to Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza. While vaccine nationalism can produce short-term results at a domestic level, no country will be safe from COVID-19 until every country and everyone is safe. We acknowledge the efforts of the Palestinian Authority to secure as many vaccines as possible, including through the COVAX facility. We take this opportunity to encourage international support for the efforts of the Palestinian Authority in securing vaccines and we call for further support for the COVAX facility. When vaccines do arrive for use in Palestine, the unimpeded and quick passage through Israeli checkpoints would be critical to allow for distribution of vaccines without further delay.

Before closing, I will turn to the internal political situation in Palestine. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines commends the ongoing efforts of the Palestinian people to advance democracy in a mature and well-organised manner. We welcome the announcement by President Mahmoud Abbas to hold the

parliamentary elections on 22nd May, presidential elections on 31st July and the Palestinian National Council elections on 31st August.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines remains firmly supportive of the Middle East Peace Process, within the framework of international law. We continue to support all efforts towards a two-state solution, on the basis of the pre-1967 borders, with Jerusalem as the capital of both states. And in order to achieve this, we need to facilitate dialogue between Israel and Palestine. Let's get this process on the road urgently!

Thank you!"