Amid Violence in Holy City, Durable Social, Political Solutions Encouraged as International Conference on Question of Jerusalem Opens in Jakarta

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JAKARTA, 14 December — The two-day International Conference on the Question of Jerusalem opened in Jakarta, Indonesia, this morning under the theme “Addressing the present and shaping the future” of the city also known as Al-Quds Al-Sharif.

Retno Lestari Priansari Marsudi, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, said it was no coincidence that her country was hosting the International Conference, particularly because Jakarta was East Jerusalem’s sister city and was proud to be host the Conference, convened by the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

She said that, while ongoing conflicts in Syria and Yemen and growing threats by radicalism and extremism of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) had diverted the international community’s attention from the prolonged conflict between Palestine and Israel, it was to be hoped that the Conference could provide an important impetus towards bringing the issue of Palestine back onto the global radar. She encouraged participants to craft a formula for workable political and social solutions, particularly focusing on how people-to-people relations between Israelis and Palestinians could be strengthened.

“In such a situation, we could figure out and nurture common grounds on how to realize peaceful coexistence among the peoples from different religions and backgrounds living in the holy city,” she said. The spirit of coexistence was a necessary foundation for a meaningful peace process that would yield the ultimate result — ending the illegal occupation” and bringing a brighter future for Palestinians.

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in a message delivered on his behalf by Douglas Broderick, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Indonesia, said a growing one-State reality threatened to close the window of opportunity to reach the two-State goal. Indeed, the Meeting was taking place against a backdrop of one of the most serious eruptions of Israeli-Palestinian violence in recent years.

Security cooperation between Palestinian and Israeli authorities must continue, however, security alone could not and would not address the violence, he said. Leaders must urgently rein in incitement, Israeli security forces must ensure a calibrated use of force in response to incidents and all stakeholders must address the prevailing lack of a political horizon to end the occupation and achieve a negotiated two-State solution.

“The violence and attacks against civilians, including rocket fire from Gaza, are unacceptable and must stop,” he said, pledging support from the United Nations to help the parties bring the occupation and long-standing conflict to an end, in pursuit of the lasting vision of Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security. “Let us empower the voices of all those on both sides who want peace to prevail.”

Samir Bakr, Assistant Secretary-General for Palestine Affairs of the OIC, called upon the international community to intervene to rescue the two-State solution, which was now threatened by the occupying Power, and to act through the implementation of a political track with the participation of effective global partners.

The success of such political efforts would begin with the adoption of a Security Council resolution that would include a clear political reference, a specific timeframe for an end to the occupation and international guarantees and agreed mechanisms for the implementation of all United Nations resolutions, he said. The international community must also ensure that the Palestinian people were allowed to exercise their right to freedom and their own State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Riad Al-Malki, Foreign Minister of the State of Palestine, spoke on behalf of President Mahmoud Abbas, saying that Conference participants must act with resolve to ensure that issues addressed in their statements translated into intensified political, diplomatic and financial support by the United Nations and the OIC and their members. Jerusalem was the beating heart of the holy land and the cornerstone of Palestinian identity and future, but its holy sites and history were under attack.

The city was also a symbol, he continued, but today it stood as a testimony to double standards, injustice, racism and apartheid. “Let us allow it to be what it was destined to be — an open and shared city of peace, tolerance and pluralism,” he said, expressing hope that the international community would urgently adopt strong actions to end the occupation.

Desra Percaya (Indonesia), Vice-Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, said that “as Member States of the United Nations, we have a collective responsibility over Jerusalem”. In recent weeks, tensions related to the holy sites in the Old City of Jerusalem had triggered a new wave of violence. The conflict, however, was not about religion, he said. Rather it concerned the dispossession of a people and the occupation of a land.

“We must prevent, at all cost, injecting a religious dimension to the conflict,” he said. “At the same time, the status quo at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount must be respected, in line with existing agreements between Israel and Jordan and with respect to the special role of the King of Jordan, as Custodian. We urge Israeli authorities to abide by international law and previous agreements.”

Many General Assembly and Security Council resolutions had been adopted “and yet, here we are, 40 years after the creation of our Committee, holding another meeting to alert the international community on the unresolved status of Jerusalem,” he said. “Let us meet to express our support and solidarity with the Palestinian people in the hope that the Palestinian flag that now flies at UN Offices all over the world, will one day symbolize the full realization of the two-State solution, with East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine.”

The International Conference will feature two plenary discussions on the status of Jerusalem and on historical and contemporary models of coexistence. On 16 December, the Committee will hold a Civil Society Forum, titled “Civil society action in support of justice in Palestine, ending the occupation”.

Also delivering statements were the representatives of the League of Arab States, Morocco, Jordan, Pakistan, China and Indonesia.

Resuming this afternoon for a plenary session, the International Conference will hear from experts and hold a discussion on the status of Jerusalem, examining the current situation and its genesis, the status of religious sites under local and international law and the protection of civilians.

Opening Remarks

RETNO LESTARI PRIANSARI MARSUDI, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, said it was no coincidence that her country was hosting the International Meeting, particularly because Jakarta was East Jerusalem’s sister city. Indonesia had provided a range of support to Palestinians and had strongly supported General Assembly resolution 67/19, in which the United Nations recognized Palestine as a non-member observer State. Her country had also co-sponsored the decision to raise the flag of Palestine at United Nations Headquarters, which was not only symbolic, but a step towards full membership.

Yet, despite those and many other efforts, peace prospects had come and gone, she said, emphasizing that Israel had continued to impose a reign of terror throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, violating international and human rights laws. “This cannot and must not continue,” she said, underlining that Israeli practices had exacerbated tensions on the ground and triggered instability in the region. Calling on the Security Council to honour its Charter responsibilities and act to ensure Israel’s compliance with international law, she said more work needed to be done to break the current political impasse.

She said that while ongoing conflicts in Syria and Yemen and growing threats by radicalism and extremism of Islamic State had diverted the international community’s attention from the prolonged conflict between Palestine and Israel, it was to be hoped that the meeting could provide an important impetus towards bringing the issue of Palestine back onto the world’s radar. She encouraged participants to craft a formula for workable political and social solutions to the issue of Jerusalem, particularly focusing on how people-to-people relations between Israelis and Palestinians could be strengthened.

“In such a situation, we could figure out and nurture common grounds on how to realize peaceful coexistence among the peoples from different religions and backgrounds living in the holy city,” she said. The spirit of coexistence was also necessary as a foundation for a meaningful peace process that would yield the ultimate result of ending the illegal occupation and ensure a brighter future for Palestinians in line with the two-State vision, where an independent and sovereign State of Palestine could live in peace and harmony with its neighbouring countries.

DOUGLAS BRODERICK, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Indonesia, delivered a message on behalf of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, saying the meeting was taking place against a backdrop of one of the most serious eruptions of Israeli-Palestinian violence in recent years. It was no coincidence that Jerusalem was one of the sparks that had lit the fuse of the latest escalation, as it had in the early 2000s, when the intifada had taken so many Palestinian and Israeli lives.

As one of the oldest cities in the world, Jerusalem held shrines that were sacred to billions of people worldwide — Muslims, Jews and Christians alike, he said. What happened in Jerusalem reverberated around the world. Attempts to change that delicate balance, and particularly the status quo of the holy sites, carried the risk of conflict. Welcoming the understandings reached in October between the Governments of Israel and Jordan to stabilize the situation around the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, he said Israel’s reaffirmation not to seek to divide the site and the commitment to enforcing the long-standing policy in which Muslims pray and non-Muslims visit the holy sites must be strictly upheld.

Leaders must urgently rein in incitement, he said, underlining that Israeli security forces must ensure a calibrated use of force in response to incidents and all stakeholders must address the prevailing lack of a political horizon to end the occupation and achieve a negotiated two-State solution.

While continued security cooperation between Palestinian and Israeli authorities remained integral to a peaceful resolution of the conflict, those measures alone could not and would not address the violence, he continued. The current anger had been bred from nearly five decades of Israeli occupation and was the result of fear, humiliation, frustration and mistrust. It had also been fed by the wounds of decades of bloody conflict, which would take a long time to heal. Palestinians youth in particular were tired of broken promises and they saw no “light at the end of the tunnel”.

A growing one-State reality threatened to close the window of opportunity to reach the two-State goal, he said. All parties must refrain from attempts to establish facts on the ground that altered the character of the Holy City or the demographics of the West Bank. Further, he said, settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, were illegal under international law and an obstacle to peace. Demolitions of houses and other measures of collective punishment violated Israel’s obligation to protect civilians.

“The violence and attacks against civilians, including rocket fire from Gaza, are unacceptable and must stop,” he said. “Let us empower the voices of all those on both sides who want peace to prevail. Let us stand up against extremists seeking to exploit the bloodshed.”

Looking forward to a revitalized Quartet, strengthened by its cooperation with regional partners and the international community, to create the conditions for a return to meaningful negotiations, Mr. BRODERICK said that the United Nations and the Secretary-General remained committed to helping the parties bring the occupation and long-standing conflict to an end, in pursuit of the lasting vision of Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security.

SAMIR BAKR, Assistant Secretary-General for Palestine Affairs of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), said the international conference on Jerusalem focused on an issue that not only remained at the forefront of OIC concerns, but had been the impetus, following the brutal arson attack on the Al-Aqsa Mosque in 1969, for establishing the organization. Today, the grave practices perpetrated by Israel continued to be a concern as they represented an act of ethnic cleansing that amounted to war crimes and crimes against humanity.

As the safety of holy places in the city was closely tied to the entire region’s security and stability, Israeli aggressions threatened to spread the conflict and give it a religious dimension, he said. Such aggressions by the occupying forces and extremist groups of settlers against Palestinian civilians further aggravated those living under the yoke of Israeli occupation. It was no longer admissible for the international community to merely issue condemnations and express concern. Instead, it needed to rise up to its responsibility and ensure international protection of the Palestinian people against those aggressions.

Paying tribute to the European Union for its support for the two-State solution, particularly through labelling Israeli products produced in settlements in Occupied Palestinian Territory, he said more must be done by all countries. At such a critical juncture, the international community was called upon to intervene with a sense of responsibility to rescue the two-State solution, which was now threatened by the occupying Power, and to act through the adoption of a political track with the participation of effective global partners.

The success of such political efforts would begin with the adoption of a United Nations Security Council resolution that would include a clear political reference, specific timeframe for an end to the occupation and international guarantees and agreed mechanisms for the implementation of all relevant resolutions. The international community must ensure that the Palestinian people were allowed to exercise their right to freedom and their own State, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

RIAD AL-MALKI, Foreign Minister of the State of Palestine, spoke on behalf of President Mahmoud Abbas, saying that participants must act with resolve to ensure that issues addressed in their statements translated into intensified political, diplomatic and financial support by the United Nations and the OIC and their members. Jerusalem was the beating heart of the holy land and the cornerstone of Palestinian identity and future, but its holy sites and history were under attack. Palestinians in the city were subjected to aggression through forcible transfers, colonization, home demolitions and revocation of residency cards. Israel was now attempting to blame the Palestinians for the fire it had ignited.

Even though the inalienable rights of the Palestinians were enshrined in international law, the world had failed to activate existing protection mechanisms, he said. Palestine remained the greatest test of the international system as a whole, a test the world could not afford to fail. United Nations resolutions, the General Assembly, Security Council and the Human Rights Council and many other agencies and organizations had clearly indicated the illegal nature of Israeli policies and laws. Resolutions and reports were not designed to describe realities, but to trigger action.

Jerusalem was besieged within and without by illegal settlements, the wall and checkpoints, he continued. That segregation created daily suffering. Families were being burned and youth murdered in the streets, he said, asking when the world was going to start worrying about the security of Palestinians’. Emphasizing that States had a responsibility not to render aid or assistance to such illegal acts, war crimes and crimes against humanity, the rapid deterioration on the ground was a direct consequence of the international community’s inaction.

He stressed that settler terrorism must be outlawed, the Security Council must adopt a resolution supporting a timeline-based end to the occupation and States must ban settlement products and link their relations with Israel to its respect of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. In Jerusalem, all Palestinians were targets, he said, describing the situation in the city as a terrible reflection of the reality throughout the occupied State of Palestine, where there was no shelter or safe haven.

Israel, he said, had held his nation hostage for seven decades by counting on international involvement that had been limited to calling for bilateral negotiations between a colonial occupying Power determined to pursue its colonization and the occupied people, who wanted to fulfil their inalienable rights. “Our freedom is non-negotiable,” as was Palestine’s statehood, he emphasized. The regional context and the many tragedies surrounding it had not made the Palestinian cause less relevant, and peace for all could, in fact, trigger a positive wave across the region and beyond. Jerusalem was a symbol, but today it stood as a testimony to double standards, injustice, racism and apartheid. “Let us allow it to be what it was destined to be — an open and shared city of peace, tolerance and pluralism,” he said.

DESRA PERCAYA (Indonesia), Vice-Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, welcomed participants to a critical gathering. In recent weeks, tensions related to the holy sites in the Old City of Jerusalem had triggered a new wave of violence, including use of excessive force and tear gas by Israeli forces.

The conflict, however, was not about religion, he said. It concerned the dispossession of a people and the occupation of a land. At the same time, the status quo at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount must be respected, in line with existing agreements between Israel and Jordan, and with respect to the special role of the King of Jordan as Custodian. He also urged Israeli authorities to abide by international law and previous agreements.

“As Member States of the United Nations, we have a collective responsibility over Jerusalem,” he said. Every year the General Assembly “reiterates its determination that any actions taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration on the Holy City of Jerusalem are illegal” and the Security Council had, over many years, passed resolutions on the status of Jerusalem.

“And yet, here we are, 40 years after the creation of our Committee, holding another meeting to alert the international community on the unresolved status of Jerusalem,” he said. “Let us meet to express our support and solidarity with the Palestinian people in the hope that the Palestinian flag that now flies at UN Offices all over the world, will one day symbolize the full realization of the two-State solution, with East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine.”

Statements

The representative of the League of Arab States said the meeting was taking place in the wake of grave escalations of violations against the Palestinian people. The occupying authorities had continued their actions against the holy sites, including construction projects that would empty East Jerusalem of its Palestinian population. The Israeli Government was responsible for the project as well as for its consequences. In that regard, the League had spared no efforts in holding Israel accountable and in providing the necessary protection of the Palestinian people, including by appealing to the Security Council.

The grave violations constituted a continued source of concern for the international community, even as it had not taken the necessary action to fulfil its obligations, he said. That inaction would have serious consequences that could lead to a religious war. The goal of the protection of civilians under occupation was always to end occupation. He warned against Israel’s non-compliance with Security Council resolutions, given the deteriorating conditions in the region, and underlined the League’s continued concern over Israeli breaches of those principles. Israel’s violations and the occupation must end, he concluded.

The representative of Morocco said during the ongoing Israeli occupation, grave violations were occurring in Jerusalem, including attempts to alter its demographic structure. Israel had used the difficult Palestinians’ internal situation and the international community’s preoccupation with fighting terrorism to pursue actions that would change the city. Palestinian youth had suffered from despair by the refusal of Israeli authorities to reach any agreement on a political settlement. The road to peace passed through the recognition of the Islamic and Palestinian identity of Jerusalem, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif becoming the capital of the State of Palestine.

For its part, Morocco had worked towards making Israel accountable for its actions, including hosting the first meeting of the OIC contact group on defending the question of Palestine and Al-Quds Al-Sharif, which had produced a plan to move the process forward, he said. Future actions included supporting an international conference in that regard and working on a timeline-based Security Council resolution to end the occupation.

The representative of Jordan said the wave of Israeli violations included targeting Al-Aqsa Mosque through, among other things, restricting worshippers’ access and attacks on workers. Christian and Muslim sites in Jerusalem were “red lines not to be crossed”. Jordan would move forward to advance the protection of Muslim and Christian holy sites until the Israeli occupation ended, using every possible diplomatic and legal measures available. The continued violations would have an adverse political effect on relations between Israel and Jordan, not to mention deepen concerns over the peace process. He called on the international community to fulfil its obligations to protect holy sites in Jerusalem. Referring to General Assembly 70/16, he said his country supported the principle of keeping the status quo. “We need to protect the sanctity of Jerusalem,” he said. “We need to protect the worshippers.”

The occupying Power had taken measures to desecrate the Mosque, threatening its very existence, he said. The Israeli forces had continued excavations and tunnel building near the Mosque and, since 2011, had attempted to impede maintenance work and Jordan’s reconstruction project. Jordan’s role as Custodian needed to be enhanced to put an end to Israeli attacks against holy sites. In other areas of Jerusalem, the Israeli Government had expanded illegal settlements and prevented Palestinians from building homes. Israeli forces were also impeding the daily lives of Palestinians by maintaining the separation wall, which the International Court of Justice had deemed a violation of a range of laws.

The representative of Pakistan said the last seven decades had resulted in moving one step ahead followed by two steps backwards. Recent General Assembly resolution 70/16 had urged parties to move forward on the question of Jerusalem. Repeated attacks in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, however, had resulted in many casualties. The issues needed to be addressed not only by words, but by actions, including the release of prisoners and returns of refugees.

Resolving the Palestinian question was an international duty, he said. For its part, Pakistan would continue to support the revival of the peace process and the fulfilment of United Nations resolutions. It also supported the end of the occupation and the establishment of the State of Palestine, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

The representative of China said the Meeting carried extra significance given the backdrop of escalating tensions. China was gravely concerned about the recent intensification of violence in Jerusalem, calling on all sides to make the utmost effort to avoid any further escalation. To end the tensions, Israel must stop using excessive force. Efforts must also be made to push forward the peace process.

The Palestinians should enjoy their rights, including the establishment of its independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, he said. China had been active in the peace process in the past and would continue to offer efforts to ease tensions. China had also supported Palestinian capacity-building efforts, including building primary and middle schools and roads. His country would continue to offer assistance to the Palestinian people. The only way to settle the situation in the Middle East was through peace talks based on the Oslo Accords. Doing so would enhance stability in the region.

The representative of Indonesia said six outstanding issues must be addressed to solve the conflict, including the question of Jerusalem, which remained unresolved. The prolonged consideration of the issue represented a double standard. The city was important for Islam, Christianity and Judaism. Indonesia remained concerned that continuing settlement construction in Jerusalem remained an obstacle for progress. Indonesia supported the two-State solution that would establish a just, lasting peace. Peace, on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as the capital, was non-negotiable.