Gaza crisis and Israel's aggression against thePalestinian People

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Death and Destruction

After three months of brutal attacks on our people in Gaza, the Palestinian death toll has now reached in excess of 24,000 people, mainly women, children and the elderly. 60,000 people have been wounded. 1.7 million people are internally displaced.

In addition, more than 8,000 Palestinians are missing, most presumed dead, many buried under the rubble. Others are now Israeli captives. These attacks have damaged over 261,000 homes, 70,000 of which have been totally destroyed. Israeli actions, including the cutting off water and electricity supplies and blocking access to food and medicine, have led directly to malnutrition and even starvation. Mounting civilian deaths, especially of the frail and weak, is the inevitable outcome of these heartless Israeli policies.

The West Bank has not been spared in this onslaught. 641 Palestinians were killed last year by security forces and/or by settlers and some 8000 people arrested. Our cities and towns have been reoccupied and refugee camps are invaded nightly. The Israeli government has been dishing out weapons to settlers willy-nilly. Illegal settlement construction has intensified, and settlers have repeatedly made incursion into the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The West Bank has been fragmented into "security" areas making economic and social life virtually impossible.

At the same time, sadly, public sentiment in Israel, encouraged by irresponsible faciest politicians, seems to support and endorse all these counterproductive actions and massive killings.

Mobilising for Peace

Since October 7, the President, the Prime Minister and the entire Palestinian leadership, have been working hard — at regional and international levels, through bilateral and multilateral forums — to stop this aggression against our people. A primary focus has been at the UN Security Council and in the General Assembly. Significant progress has already been achieved and international support for Palestineis growing strongly.

Even powerful countries that were highly critical of the Palestinian people following the October 7 events, including some who sought to shun contact with the Palestinian Authority and to block or review their support, are seeking to reestablish constructive dialogue.

Following the October 2023 Arab and Islamic Summit, envoys went around the world to focus international concern on Israeli aggression and to demand its cessation. The Palestinian Embassy in Cairo has worked closely with Egypt in a Joint Operations Room to facilitate aid and logistical support for the victims of this aggression.

Given the nature of its coalition government, and the weak political situation of the Prime Minister, Israel — the occupying power — has sought to prolong its aggression on Gaza as long as possible. This will achieve nothing — except, as we have noted, the killing of ever more civilians and the destruction of more and more homes and civilian infrastructure.

Israel may hope to prolong and expand the war in order to force the United States to become more deeply involved in the region militarily. This is already beginning to happen following the Yemeni disruption of Red Sea. With US elections approaching, it seems unlikely that President Biden to invest much political capital in pressuring Israel to cease its aggression. Even if he does, Netanyahu — given his precarious political situation — is likely to call his bluff.

Whether by design or not, the United States has proved unable to bring the war to an speedy end. This is politically embarrassing, especially given America’s directsupport for Israel by vetoing Security Council Resolutions and by the supplying

lethal weapons. The American public must fear that the country will be drawn more deeply into an endless conflict as it was in Vietnam.

After war ends

What matters is **today**, not the day after. only Today, we must demand an immediate endto the aggression. Much current speculation about the day after is unrealistic and completely detached from reality: this includes: the intervention of an Arab or Islamic force in Gaza; placing Gaza under international guardianship; or setting up a civil administration to govern Gaza in cooperation with some local figures. We and Our people, in Gaza and in the West Bank, will categorically reject all these options.

The Palestinian Authority will not return on an Israeli tank because we never left the Gaza Strip since its establishment in 1994. Even after the Hamas military coup, the government, under the guidance of the President, has continued to provide the essential services needed by our people in Gaza.

Ongoing support for Gaza

Our position on Gaza is crystal clear. We have always demanded that the siege be lifted. We have assumed financial responsibility for Gaza in order to protect our political and national project. We have steadfastly sought to maintain the unity of the Palestinian people and land and to resist the occupation’s plan to isolate Gaza from the West Bank and undermine our national aspirations.

At the moment, we pay the salaries of 50,000 government employees in the Gaza Strip (including security officials, doctors, nurses, teachers, ministry employees and the staff in various institutions). We also pay retirement allowances. The Ministry of Social Development provide cash assistance for 116.000 poor families.

The Palestinian Authority’s budget includes funds for Gaza’s electricity and water bills, medicine, vaccinations, health care and medical referrals. The Municipal Fund provides ongoing support to Gaza's municipalities for infrastructure and other development projects. We issue all passports and high school diplomas for our people in Gaza, certify university degrees and provide all forms of accreditations.

The truth is the Authority already manages most aspects of daily lives in Gaza. Palestinian ministries and government agencies implemented many infrastructure projects. On the eve of October 7, 2023, the cost of such projects was estimated at 951 million dollars, funded mainly by donors. These projects include the Gaza

Reconstruction Program, which was funded by donor countries and managed by a national team in Gaza under the supervision of the Prime Minister's Office.

The total monthly government expenditure in Gaza is approximately 140 million dollars, or 1.7 billion dollars a year, which is equivalent to 35% of the government's budget, while revenues from Gaza do not exceed 3 million dollars a month.

Our expenditures in Gaza is a matter of national responsibility designed to protect the integrity of our land and people and is not an act of charity. Gaza and its people are an integral part of the territory of the State of Palestine and the Palestinian people. We have never looked at Gaza from the perspective of expenditures versus revenues, nor did we ever assume that, since Hamas controls Gaza, it bears responsibility for these services.

In our current government, five ministers are from the Gaza Strip and several political factions and organisations that fall under the framework of the Palestine Liberation Organisation are represented in the government.

Israeli's destructive policies

The Israeli strategy, on the other hand, had sought systematically to destroy the possibility of establishing a Palestinian State. Prime Minister Netanyahu's approach has sort to:

- Isolate Gaza, geographically and institutionally, and to encourage and consolidate division. Its pursuit of "money-for-quietness" in Gaza failed tragically on October 7.

- Destroy all manifestations of the Palestinian identity in the West Bank by isolating and Judaizing Jerusalem and intensifying settlement construction. Today 755 thousand settlers reside in 285 illegal colonies in the West Bank including in Jerusalem.

- Fragment the West Bank (Hebron is divided into H1 and H2 areas, and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory divided into areas A, B, and C). Israel's controlof Area C, which comprises 62% of the West Bank, constitutes *de facto* annexation and provides a reservoir for the further expansion of Jewish settlements.

Israel also undermines the Palestinian Authority by conducting regular incursions, killings and arrests; by storming the Al-Aqsa Mosque; by violating both Islamic and Christian holy places; by encouraging and sanctioning settler terrorism; and by refusing

to transfers taxes rightfully owed to the Palestine exchequer.

Since the failure of Israel's 16 year "money-for-quietness" strategy, Netanyahu now seeks to push Gaza out of Palestine. He is destroying Gaza and would like forcibly to empty Gaza of its Palestinian population. He has announced that Israel will prevent the Palestinian Authority from returning to Gaza. Netanyahu, as part of his strategy to undermine the possibility of a two state solution to the conflict, is desperate keep the West Bank and Gaza divided. This strategy is designed to avoid at all costs ending the occupation. The claim that Palestine is divided, that there is no single address for Palestine, is part of this playbook. The Authority, however, will continue to support Gaza as an integral and essential part of Palestine.

The Day After in Gaza

The future of Palestine can only be decided by the Palestine people. This requires first an internal, broad-based agreement founded on clear political agenda, including in regard to resistance to occupation, designed to achieve international legitimacy within the framework of the PLO's commitment to securing statehood. Only on this basis will this dark chapter of our history come to an end.

The "day after" will be painful. We will be faced with scenes of utter devastation: mass graves, thousands of orphans, tens of thousands wounded; the majority without homes. electricity or water. This crisis will not be solved overnight. We need an urgent relief programme, a massive reconstruction programme, and adequate funding to ensure rapid implementation.

Some donors have indicated that, without a clear political path leading to inexorably to the creation of a sovereign Palestinian State, they would not contribute to the reconstruction of Gaza.

Therefore, the "day after" must mean finding a political solution that will end the occupation of all the occupied Palestinian territory, including Gaza and the West Bank, especially Jerusalem. Today Palestine is at the centre of international attention. The world must not miss this opportunity to help bring a lasting peace to the Middle East. The genocidal actions we have witnessed over the past three months must never be repeated.

Revitalizing the Palestinian Authority

The Palestinian Authority is fully aware of its weaknesses and inadequacies. No administration in the world, however, operates under such complex and adverse conditions. Much of the current talk about the need to revitalise the Authority, furthermore, is really just a cover for the failure of international community tocommit Israel to a political solution.

The USA President stated that there is a need to "revitalise the Palestinian Authority so that it can manage Gaza." On this, there seems to be three distinct visions on offer.

The Palestinian perspective on revitalising the Authority means:
1- Allowing the Palestinian Authority to function on its land, through cessation of all unilateral acts, including incursions, settlement, and annexation.
2- Ending Israel's financial deductions and the financial blockade imposed on the Palestinian National Authority by American administration. It also means implementing of our reform program and preparing for general elections including in Jerusalem. We need a political solution to the conflict so as to renew hope among the Palestinian people.

The Israeli perspective on revitalisation means:
Stopping the social assistance for prisoners and martyrs, and developing a new school curriculum that calls for coexistence with the occupation; and for the Palestinian Authority to be an administrative-security structure without any political goals or efforts towards liberation and national independence; and to have arrangements for Gaza that have nothing to do with the Palestinian authority in the West Bank.

The American international perspective means:
Empowering the Palestinian Authority on its land including introducing elements of civil society, and working on freedom of expression, reforming the judicial system, security, public finances, school curriculum, allocations for martyrs and prisoners, and holding general elections, while working to achieve the two-state solution. But this is preceded by a transitional arrangement for the Gaza Strip.

The reform, revitalisation, renewal of the Palestinian Authority are critically important but can easily become a smokescreen. The primary barrier to progress resides not with the Palestinian Authority but with the Israeli Government. Similar conversations took place in the wake of the second intifada. The International

Quartet, however, failed dismally to overcome Israel's intransigence and the seeds of further conflict were sown. We must not permit history to repeat itself.

The Palestinian Authority has designed its own reform programme not as a result of any outside pressure but because it is the right thing do. We are committed to provide a competent, responsive, and corruption free administration, to serve the needs of all Palestinians.

Reform Programme

We presented our reform programme at the May 2022 meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC), which coordinates international assistance to Palestine in the presence of 36 countries and international organisations including the United States. The Programme was welcomed by participants.

A Revised copy was recently headed to a US delegation who made some good comment on it. Implementation is underway and progress is recorded in many fields.

In conclusion our well-established diplomatic and political demands are based on the following:

First: The aggression against our people must stop. This is our top priority.

Second: All crossings must be opened in order to guarantee the unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance to the Gaza Strip, including in the northern areas.

Third: There must be no reoccupation of the Gaza Strip or the annexation of any land under the spurious pretext of creating buffer zones (or under other security measures).

Fourth: The forced or voluntary transfer of Palestinians, for instance by pushing them towards Rafah, must be prevented. The principled positions on this matter adopted by Egypt and Jordan position are highly appreciated, as is the international positions that rejects such measures.

Fifth: Urgent priority must be given to agreeing on a political path towards resolving the conflict. Since, in light of the events of October 7, the Palestinian situation has risen to the top of global concern, it is necessary to work towards the following objectives:

A. International recognition of the State of Palestine as a member of the United Nations (we had been observer status for more than 11 years!).

B. Bilateral recognition of the State of Palestine by the countries of Europe and by the United States.

C. The establishment of a United Nations timetable to end the occupation, recognising that previous negotiations have failed due to the unequal power of thetwo parties (resulting in Israel's effective cancellation of the Oslo Accords).

D. Secure an independent, sovereign Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. Gaza is an integral part of the land of Palestine. There is no state in Gaza, and no state without Gaza.

E. Everything possible must be done to hold Israel accountable for its crimes**.**
At the same time, we must secure a national consensus among all political factions, within the framework of the Palestine Liberation Organization, in support of a political programme designed to achieve an independent, fully sovereign State of Palestine with Jerusalem as its capital. Thus the political struggle against occupation will be intensified until victory is won.

Civil society, the private sector, and Palestinians in exile are called upon, through their various structures, to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our people, and to help strengthen the steadfastness on their land and in their homeland.

Palestinian Liberation Organization is a fully inclusive framework. Its institutions (include by its National and Central Councils) are open to all Palestinian Factions based on its political programme which is designed to serves the Palestinian people's ultimate goals: ending occupation, embodying the Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, and the right of return for refugees in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative.

For our part, we are working for a democratic, pluralistic society in which no one is left behind. We urgently need the hold new elections, including in Jerusalem. If Israel continues to prevent us from holding elections in Jerusalem, creative ways must be found to overcome such constraints. The international community, recognising the importance of democracy to the revitalisation of the Palestinian Authority, must apply strong pressure on Israel to permit such in Jerusalem.