

Stato di Palestina
Ambasciata di Palestina
Roma - Italia



دولة فلسطين
سفارة فلسطين
روما – إيطاليا

Speech– The Senate Commission for Foreign Affairs

25 June 2020

Esteemed President Petrocelli and Esteemed Senators,

- I'm thankful for this invitation to bring information, our position and what we expect from Italy with regards to the current annexation threat, the Middle East Peace Process and the necessary accountability of Israel after more than half a century of systematic violations of ALL UN resolutions and international law.
- I won't turn this into a history class. I assume we all have enough information. Rather I want to provide you with the necessary context to understand the current situation, the perspective of the State of Palestine and the required actions needed from the international community.
- Last week we marked 40 years of the Venice Declaration, when Europe called for the fulfillment of the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.
- I understand that the main issue you would like to hear about is annexation. But let's put things in context: Annexation is not a new thing and did not come in vacuum. This has been part of a plan that began with the first Israeli colonial-settlements back in 1967.
- When the Oslo Agreement was signed in 1993 the number of settlers was about 236,000. Today, in 2020, the settlers in occupied Palestinian land have amounted to over 620,000.
- But what is occupation? Occupation means control under international law. Israel is the occupying power, with all the responsibilities that it brings, and that certainly it continues to violate.
- We are not saying anything controversial here. Under international law Israel's colonial-settlement occupation is not just illegal, but represents a war crime under the Rome Statute.
- When we talk about a colonial-settlement enterprise we are not talking about housing units but about a whole system of control and domination. This includes the illegal Annexation Wall (declared as such by the International Court of Justice in 2004), hundreds of movement restrictions and settlement businesses and services (that are allowed to freely enter European markets).
- When it comes to the people, let me remind you that Israel has full authority over the population registry while also imposes a system of control through draconian laws aimed at making it impossible to have a Palestinian State. This includes the daily attacks against our people in Occupied East Jerusalem, home demolitions, evictions, ID revocations and the siege over Gaza.

- Attacks against the people of Palestine include the racist Israeli ban on family unifications, a systematic practice approved by the Israeli parliament that only prevents Palestinians from unifying. Why? Because they are Christians and Muslims. Meanwhile, Zionist Jews from all over the world, including Italy, are incentivized to move into occupied Palestinian territory.
- The idea of Israeli annexations to claim as much as land as possible, including their natural resources, while displacing many Palestinians. This reflects into a one-state/two systems reality: Apartheid. Annexation can only be understood from that perspective.
- The position is clear: Annexation of any part of the occupied territory will destroy the prospects of a negotiated solution. It is the principle of annexation that has been rejected – It represents a threat to a rules-based world order.

Moving forward to The Trump Plan, a plan that paved the way for annexation.

- **It is not a peace plan but a US endorsement of every item on Netanyahu's wish list.**
- The Trump Plan is solely an attempt to normalize a situation of Apartheid. A reality whereby Palestine is divided in bantustans.
- US Officials have been clear: For them international law is “irrelevant and UN resolutions [are]unhelpful,” a former US envoy Jason Greenblatt declared at the UN Security Council on July 23rd of 2019. And thus, we believe Italy does not entertain a vision as such.

Moreover, the Plan DOES change the Status Quo of the Holy Sites

- The plan effectively changes the status quo of Al Aqsa Mosque Compound by calling to faithful of all faiths to pray there. This will open the doors to further changes in the status quo, being the most affected a number of Christian sites, beginning by the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

The Plan does not support the Palestinian economy either

- While 50 billion dollars sounds like a large number, the US is not going to bring this money in: This is all mainly Arab and European money that would come to Palestine in any case if they have the will to support an independent State of Palestine: Kushner is counting on other people's money to promote his “vision” of Apartheid.
- **As a former minister of economy I can speak with authority about this: The only way for Palestine's economy to succeed is to reach its full potential, through sovereign Palestinian control over the basic drivers of any economy: Borders, natural resources, imports and exports. This plan does not guarantee any of the aforementioned. And neither does it grant Palestine an airport or seaport.**
- As we speak, US officials are meeting in Washington to decide on Palestine's future. Just as for Sykes-Picot, they will meet to decide the fate of a land that doesn't belong to them.
- It is important to note that the Trump Plan was mainly made by hardcore right-wing Zionists with a proven record of ideological and financial support for Israel's illegal colonial settlement enterprise.
- **There is nothing in the Trump Plan for Palestine to deal with. The plan can be summarized as the following: Annexation of all Israeli settlements, annexation of the**

Jordan Valley, Israeli control over all natural resources, borders, airspace, maritime borders and security – US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman said that in order to have a Palestinian state Palestinians would have to become Canadians (a racist, colonialist rationale).

- As stated by over 50 former European ministers, this plan is a recipe for Apartheid.
- The Israeli Government, composed by Likud, Blue and White, religious parties and the Labor Party, have a clear political plan that calls for annexation of occupied Palestinian territory. This process can begin in less than 10 days being July 1st.

The Palestinian position or Palestine's Peace Vision:

- President Mahmoud Abbas presented our peace vision to the UN Security Council on February 2018. It calls for nothing that Italy hasn't called for: The two-state solution on the 1967 border, East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine, implementation of international law, relevant UN resolutions and international facilitation for a meaningful process of bilateral negotiations.
- The two-state solution means Palestine's recognition of Israel over 78% of historic Palestine (the 1967 border). This is our painful compromise for peace and we shouldn't be asked to compromise the compromise while Israel is allowed to systematically violate ALL its obligations under international law and UN resolutions.
- After years of systematic Israeli violations to every single point of our bilateral agreements, the Palestinian leadership has implemented its decisions to cut all agreements with Israel, including security coordination. This is part of our plan to confront annexation sending a simple message: business not as usual.
- We are doing everything we can, contacting international partners and building alliance to protect a rules-based world order. This is not just about Palestine. It's about all peace loving nations.

As for Italy's Presence and Responsibility in Palestine:

- Italy cannot act as an outsider in Palestine. It has a historic presence enshrined in the Status Quo Agreement of the Holy Sites (recognized in the 1878 Berlin Treaty).
- Jerusalem is the center of the Italian presence. There the positions are clear: Israel calls for an exclusive capital for Israeli Jews quoting it as an "eternal and undivided capital of the Jewish people," while Palestine calls for the implementation of international law that is ending the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem; freedom of access to holy sites; respect for the status quo; and the possibility of having one open city that serves as capital of both states.
- We see the role of Italy as much more than having the Consul General in Jerusalem sitting in the first row of the Holy Sepulcher or the Nativity Church. It is a role to protect the Christian presence that has been dramatically affected by Israeli policies of forcible displacement and colonization.
- I know that some people would like to believe that Israel serves as a protector for the Christian presence. But the reality is radically different and it is a matter of looking at how

they have dealt with church land and property in Jerusalem (confiscations, walls, taxes that we never requested in history).

- Just yesterday (Wednesday June 24), as a matter of fact, an Israeli Court allowed for Israeli settlers to take over a strategic building in Jaffa Gate that will separate the Christian from the Armenian Quarters while undermining the Status Quo as it is the entry point for all the Patriarchates towards the Holy Sepulcher, including the Latin Patriarchate.
- Christians in Palestine are an integral part of the Palestinian people and shouldn't be treated as anything but that.
- Additionally, the separation between Bethlehem and Jerusalem threatens to destroy any viable Palestinian Christian Presence. The Trump Plan legitimizes the annexation of vital lands that belong to Palestinian Christians, including in Battir / Al Makhroun Valley (World Heritage Site since 2014) and all the northern area of Bethlehem (including the new colonial-settlement of Giv'atHamatos, the expansions of Gilo and Har Homa).
- Italy has a responsibility to support the call made by the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem by taking actions to prevent annexation.

What are some of the actions deemed necessary to annul Annexation by Italy and the European Union?

- The European position has been overall very important. They have been clear that annexation of any size or shape is illegal. Nevertheless, we expect the EU position to materialize into actions.
- The EU and its member states have not taken any action to prove to Israel that this time they will take a different approach. There are several examples:
 1. First, last week the EU Parliament gave a gift to Israel ratifying the aviation agreement. We know it's not something special and you didn't grant Israel anything new, yet the timing was a mistake: Israeli media presented this as a victory.
 2. Second, no EU ambassador has been recalled from Israel.
 3. Third, no Israeli ambassador has been summoned.
 4. Fourth, the vote on accountability last Friday in the UN Human Rights Council: A resolution negotiated with the EU, merely calling for basic principles of international law to be implemented in Palestine was not supported by any EU country: Three voted against (Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic) while the rest abstained (Denmark, Germany, **Italy**, Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia and Spain).

Annexation is stoppable, occupation can end: What's needed is a different approach, including sanctions.

- EU and its member states have the obligation to review all its agreements with Israel. We make an open call to suspend its Association Agreement as it openly violates Article 2 of human rights policy.
- We understand that other agreements and programs may be cut, such as Horizon 2020.
- Moreover, all settlement products and services must be banned (this is not a boycott, it's a legal obligation just like how European countries have done so in other cases).

- Meanwhile, the EU Court of Justice decision on labeling settlement products should be honored.
- Finally, we call for sanctions to be imposed and for resolutions to be fully implemented, including UNSC Resolution 478 that demands all countries that have opened any kind of diplomatic missions in Jerusalem to withdraw), and UNSC Resolution 2334 that calls for total differentiation between Israel and the territories it occupies.
- We also reiterate our call for Italy to recognize the State of Palestine.

Everything we are asking for is not favors for Palestine, but rather an international responsibility to support a rules-based world order. This being the bear minimum.