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**REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON THE SITUATION IN
THE MIDDLE EAST AND PALESTINE**

REPORT ON THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND PALESTINE

I. Introduction

1. The Palestinian question remains the subject of interest and continuous monitoring by the African Union in solidarity with the Palestinian people as they struggle for freedom and to recover their land occupied by the since 1967. The Palestinian struggle is the affirmation of the right of their State to exist on the whole Palestinian territory with East Jerusalem as its capital. The African position also supports the immediate withdrawal of Israel from the Golan Heights of Syria and South Lebanon.

2. The African Position on the Palestinian situation is within the context of the support for the Afro-Arab Partnership through the support for an issue that is crucial to the Arab world. It is consistent with the AU shared values of liberty, justice and humanitarian principles that Africa defends in international fora. The AU shares these values with those who defend the rights of Palestinians and strive to ensure that Palestine regains its right to exist as a key State in a region where much of the history of mankind and religions abound, and which is considered the cradle of the prophets, messages and civilizations that the world has the obligation to preserve.

3. During the period under consideration, Israeli elections have taken a centre stage and cast a shadow on the revitalization of peace efforts, particularly for certain developments on the international scene and the deadlock in the US position due to the cold relations between the Obama administration and the Netanyahu Government, which returned to power after winning the elections.

4. The AU supports peaceful solution and calls for the resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, and the international and regional efforts to find a peaceful, just and definitive solution based on the two-state solution. It calls for the implementation without delay of the relevant African Union and UN Security Council decisions and resolutions which would no doubt contribute to a resolution of the problems plaguing the Arab region in terms of political unrest and ideological, intellectual and partisan conflicts which have plunged the region into violence and the emergence of extremist movements in Iraq, Syria and Yemen, thereby posing a threat to regional peace and security. A viable solution to the Palestinian question is a solution that could contribute to the resolution of Arab issues in general and reduce the state of tension and frustration in the Arab world.

II. Occupied Jerusalem

5. Attempts at the Judaization of Jerusalem are still being pursued by the Zionist entity, allowing Jewish extremists to carry out their religious rites within Haram al-Sharif and the relentless action of the Zionist State to change the historical sites of the city and rid it of Islamic and Christian monuments, despite the unambiguous position of the

international community and represented by the principles of international law and the resolutions of international legitimacy on the issue in occupied Jerusalem.

6. Despite all the warnings and international resolutions, the State of Israel continued to change the landmarks of the city and provide protection to extremist Jewish groups and settlers in their attacks against Islamic and Christian holy places, generating much friction and violence, the victims of which are invariably unarmed Muslim and Palestinian Christians.

7. Plans for Judaization therefore continue in the rest of East Jerusalem, with the aim of total elimination of the two-state solution, despite efforts by King Abdullah of Jordan and King Mohammed VI, Chairman of the Al-Quds Committee. At the last Arab Summit in Sharm El-Sheikh, President Mahmoud Abbas called on all free men of the world to visit Al-Quds, Jerusalem, in solidarity with the resistance of its people and their right to establish the State of Palestine with its capital in East Jerusalem.

III. Israeli-Palestinian Peace Talks

8. The deadlock in the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks continued and Israel's commitment to peace remains weak, especially in the Netanyahu era whose policy tends more to violence and extremism, land confiscation and persistence in the arrogance of power and the worst exploitation of Israel's allies. Netanyahu revealed the true nature of his position in his past electoral propaganda when he said he would not allow the existence of a Palestinian State as long as he was in power, and that he would go ahead with construction and consolidation of new settlements. He also stated that he would not negotiate on Jerusalem and nor give up the border on the River Jordan. He also called on the Palestinian Authority to put an end to its relation with Hamas and to recognize the Jewishness of the State of Israel as a condition for the resumption of negotiations.

9. Israeli intransigence and blocking of any possibility of agreement forced the Palestinians to embark on another path that of the internationalization of the Palestinian cause. With a wide Arab and international support, the Palestinian Authority turned to the United Nations requesting the latter to set a deadline for ending the occupation, and applied to a number of international organizations for admission, including the International Criminal Court which welcomed Palestine as a member on 1 April 2015.

10. President Abbas stated in his speech before the Arab Summit in March 2015 that despite all efforts to internationalize the Palestinian cause in response to Israeli intransigence, Palestinians remain committed to peace based on international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative, in accordance with Resolution 19/67 of the General Assembly, which emphasizes the end of the occupation of Palestine, the attainment of independence and full sovereignty over their territory occupied since 1967, with its capital in East Jerusalem, and resolution of the refugee problem in accordance with Resolution 194, the complete cessation of settlements, including Jerusalem, release of

prisoners, lifting of the siege on the Gaza Strip and non- recurrence of the seizure of the tax funds.

11. Efforts and international pressure to create a breakthrough between the two parties continue in the hope of revitalizing the peace process. In this respect, the Head of European Foreign Policy, Mrs. Federica Mogherini is working to activate the European participation in the negotiations, in addition to her attempt to further involve Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt in the work of the Middle East Quartet made up of the United States, United Nations, European Union and Russia. The European Union, in a series of annual reports in the areas of democracy and human rights, stated that Israel should make every effort for the early resumption of the peace process in the Middle East, also urging the Palestinian Authority to pursue positive steps to resume peace talks, and called on Israel to ensure respect for international law and human rights in the occupied territories. The statements made by the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a day prior to his election victory raised serious concerns in Brussels and Washington, when he stated that the Palestinians would have no state, as long as he was in power. It should be recalled that the European Union has chosen the Italian veteran negotiator Fernando Gentilini as its Special Representative for the Middle East.

IV. The Israeli Election and its Implications

12. The Likud Party led by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu won a surprise victory in the Israeli general elections. The results offer Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu a strong chance to form a right-wing coalition government. They allow him to preside over the Israeli government for the fourth time, becoming the Israeli Prime Minister with the longest term in office. The results give the Likud 30 seats in parliament (Knesset), composed of 120 members, while its main rival, the Zionist Union, led by Isaac Herzog, who represents the centre-left, won 24 seats.

13. In light of the results of the recent elections won by former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, indications are that there is no Israeli partner committed to peaceful negotiations in order to achieve a satisfactory political solution. Therefore, Palestinian actions at the international level to find a peaceful solution which restores Palestinian rights and establishes justice on the ground cannot be regarded as unilateral. The results also confirm the commitment of the Israeli voter to the colonial expansionist project advocated by the Likud and in escalating and affirming the Jewishness of the State, support for Israeli extremism and rejection of the two-state solution.

14. The Israeli-Arab parties occupied the third place and won 14 seats in the new Knesset, according to polls conducted at the exit of the polling stations. That is the largest share obtained by the Palestinians inside the Green Line in history, which poses a challenge for them in terms of effective use of the considerable parliamentary force. The Arab parties participated for the first time as part of a common list and plan to become the third force in the next Knesset, and play an influential role in political life,

even if they refuse to participate in any future government due to the considerable difference between their programme and that of other parties.

V. Internal Palestinian Situation

15. The Palestinian government continues to deploy efforts to unite the Palestinian people, end the division, make the Palestinian reconciliation a reality and hold the presidential and parliamentary elections as soon as possible in accordance with the Agreements reached in Doha, Cairo and Gaza respectively.

16. In order to achieve that objective, it was agreed at the Palestinian Central Council to assign a delegation of the Palestine Liberation Organization to go to the Gaza Strip while leaving the Government of National Accord to continue to assume its role, despite the obstacles in its way, in order to exercise its full authority and control over the passages for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip.

17. In this regard, we emphasize the need to understand the Palestinian situation through the Palestinian legitimacy in order to preserve the unity of the position and representation.

VI. Palestinian Refugees

18. One third of Palestinian refugees are registered with UNRWA, or more than 1.4 million refugees in 58 recognized refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

19. Due to the deteriorating security situation in the Arab region, particularly in Syria, which hosts in one camp alone, the Yarmouk refugee camp, about 160,000 Palestinian refugees, their suffering has significantly increased during the last period when the Organization of the Islamic State was exercising control over large parts of the camp near Damascus, the Syrian capital. However, the entry of that Organization, known by the media as "Daesh" or "ISIS" in the camp has sparked fear among inhabitants, more than 2,500 of whom have fled to neighboring districts, after the police had facilitated their passage. It seems that the new reality has contributed to the unity of Palestinian factions against the extremist organization.

20. The Minister of National Reconciliation Ali Haidar, announced that the current situation in the Yarmouk refugee camp, in the south of Damascus, of which the "Islamic state" controls large parts, requires "a military solution". Before the start of the Syrian conflict, the population of the camp was about 160,000 and currently they are only 18,000.

21. It is well known that the first victims of military intervention are unarmed and innocent refugees, particularly as Syrian intervention would probably be by air by shelling residential areas without ruling out the possibility of the use of prohibited chemical weapons causing a large number of injuries and deaths among children and

women. Therefore, the suffering of Palestinian refugees is increasing in the absence of political solutions to their cause and the failure of the international community to implement decisions of international legitimacy in support of their right to return to their original homeland, Palestine.

VII. Conclusions and Recommendations

22. We reaffirm our support for the peaceful resolution of the Palestinian cause through agreed negotiation mechanisms, in accordance with the principles of international law, all previous relevant AU Decisions, and resolutions of the UN and the Arab League.

23. We call for the immediate return to peaceful negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians. We call upon the international community to bring pressure to bear on Israel to immediately cease settlements, assassinations, destruction of houses and expansion into Palestinian territories. Israel should also return to the two-state solution and recognize the Palestinian right to establish their State with its capital in East Jerusalem, within the 1967 borders, in order to live in peace side by side with the Israeli State for peace to prevail in the region.

24. The African Union urges the Palestinian factions to unite and promote the values of national reconciliation in order to obtain unified negotiating positions and thus enjoy regional and international support to compel the Israeli side to accept the terms and conditions of Palestinians, backed by international decisions namely, the two-state solution.

25. The African Union is committed to supporting the Palestinian cause in all international fora. The Union urges its Member States to support the just cause of Palestine in all international fora, and to support the struggle of the Palestinian people to establish an independent State based on the 4 June 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The African Union also reaffirms all its previous relevant decisions in support of the Palestinian cause.

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