

AIDA calls on international community to act to prevent West Bank annexation

On behalf of its 84 international, humanitarian, development, and human rights member organisations, the Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA) reiterates its call on the Government of Israel to forgo plans to further annex areas of the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), including much of the Jordan Valley and areas where Israeli settlements have been established, in breach of international humanitarian law.

Following the release of the Israeli coalition government agreement on 20 April, calling for a legislative process to extend Israeli sovereignty, law and administration over parts of the West Bank from 1 July, and the US political framework released in January supporting Israeli acquisition of at least 30 percent of the West Bank, there is an urgent need to act. A joint US-Israel committee has already begun the process of drawing up maps of areas to be annexed.

Any annexation of occupied Palestinian territory constitutes a flagrant violation of international law and must be emphatically opposed by the international community. Any US-Israeli agreement to annex parts of Palestinian territory, as well as subsequent Israeli legislation, have no international legal validity and represent a breach of peremptory norms of international law, which prohibit the acquisition of territory by force. These actions also undermine the territorial integrity, and political independence of a future Palestinian State and the self-determination of its people. This violation of international law triggers the duty of all states not to recognise as lawful, aid, or assist such wrongful conduct, and, equally importantly, to cooperate in bringing the violation to an end.

AIDA urgently calls on the international community to demand that Israel refrain from imposing sovereignty over more of the occupied Palestinian territory. We call on third states to communicate to Israel, privately and publicly, lawful countermeasures that will be adopted to prevent it from resorting to formal annexation of large parts of the West Bank. The global community must stand firm in ensuring respect for international law, including the right of self-determination of the Palestinian people.

The further acquisition of territory by Israel would result in increased fragmentation of Palestinian land, eroding the prospects of a territorially contiguous and politically independent Palestinian state. Annexation will generate adverse human rights and humanitarian impacts, including the denial of civil status, restriction of movement, and obstruction of access to essential services and livelihoods for Palestinians in areas of the West Bank seized by Israel.

Through our work in the oPt, AIDA members and our Palestinian and Israeli partners already witness the devastating effect of occupation and annexation on Palestinian lives and livelihoods. In areas subject to *de facto* annexation, we see spiralling poverty and chronic dependency on relief provided by AIDA members and other humanitarian actors.

Annexation would restrict humanitarian aid and development support to Palestinians living in newly-annexed areas. East Jerusalem serves as a cautionary example for the proposed West Bank annexation and the disfranchisement linked with Israel exerting authority over annexed East Jerusalem, where Palestinians face institutionalised discrimination and have minimal access to vital services provided by humanitarian and development agencies in the West Bank and Gaza.

AIDA appreciates that a number of states have issued forceful statements cautioning Israel not to proceed with annexation. All five European members of the UN Security Council spoke in opposition to annexation during recent sessions on the Question of Palestine and 12 European ambassadors registered diplomatic protests over the annexation plan. The European Union is on record opposing annexation proposals, with the EU's High Representative and Vice President Josep Borrell stating "steps toward annexation, if implemented, could not pass unchallenged."¹

Considering the calamitous human rights, humanitarian, and development impacts of annexation, and the adverse implications for international, rules-based legal order, AIDA calls on third states, the EU, and its member states, to devise and publish an exhaustive list of countermeasures to adopt in order to disincentivise Israel's annexation policies in the occupied Palestinian territory to ensure the protection of Palestinian communities in the West Bank.

¹ EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and Vice-President Josep Borrell statement 4 February 2020.