

Opening statement by Ambassador Ophir Kariv

Meeting with the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence

May 13th 2021

Mr. Chairman, Committee members, Chair of the Ireland Israel Alliance, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for the invitation to participate in this discussion here today.

The subject of today's meeting is an important one. In addition to discussing the historic, legal and humanitarian aspects of the issue at hand, today's discussion can also be a starting point to explore the ways in which Ireland can constructively contribute to progress in the Middle East peace efforts in general and to Palestinian welfare in particular.

The area referred to today as the West Bank was first delineated in 1949 in the armistice agreement signed by Israel and Jordan following the Israeli War of Independence. That war was launched by the Arab world, including the Palestinians, to prevent the implementation of the two states solution, known as the partition plan, proposed by the UN General Assembly in 1947 and accepted by the Jewish national leadership. In that war the newly established State of Israel thwarted the coordinated attempt of five Arab armies and Palestinian militias to exterminate the nascent State. In part due to inspiration by then Palestinian leader, the Nazi collaborator Haj Amin El Hussein, not a single Jew remained in areas under Arab control in what used to be mandatory Palestine. At the same time, Arabs living in Israel constitute today 20% of its population and enjoy full and equal civil rights.

After the war, that area was annexed by Jordan in an act recognized by only two states.

Israel gained control over the West Bank in 1967 following another war of self-defense forced on it by several Arab armies including Jordan's.

Following the Oslo Accords between Israel and the PLO, the Palestinian Authority was created and for the first time in their history, Palestinians achieved self-administration.

While Arab citizens of Israel are the only Arabs in the Middle East to enjoy full and equal civil rights in a real democracy, the only time the Palestinian national movement managed to produce any tangible achievements has been through direct negotiations with Israel.

Area C, which is the geographical area we are discussing today constitutes approx. 60% of the territory of Judea and Samaria, or the West Bank. At the same time, it is home to less than 10% of Palestinians living in the West Bank, while over 90% live under full civil administration of the Palestinian Authority in Areas A and B. Those areas were agreed on and defined in the signed Oslo accords. These accords also specify that Area C remains under full Israeli control – both security and civil. In the lack of progress in negotiations due to years long Palestinian refusal to renew them, those agreements continue to serve as the legal and practical framework of everyday life in those areas.

The final status of these areas is one of the main issues to be negotiated in the framework of a final peace agreement which is for all our mutual benefit. Israel has repeatedly shown its readiness to make painful compromises for the sake of a genuine peace and we want to achieve a just and lasting peace with the Palestinians.

In the interim, in accordance with international law and the signed agreements, Israel continues to administer Area C through the Military Commander of Judea and Samaria. Under the provisions of International law and the signed agreements, the Israeli authorities are also responsible for civil administration in area C, including safety, planning and construction. Therefore, all activities in these spheres have to be coordinated with the relevant Israeli authorities.

Israel is committed to carrying out its responsibilities in area C to maintain law and order according to international law and the existing agreements.

We call on all stake holders, including NGOs and foreign governments, to conduct their activities in this area in a responsible and lawful manner and make sure all activities and projects are adequately coordinated with the relevant Israeli authorities.