

Here in Ramallah despair rises, and annexation makes the coronavirus even more deadly

The number of those infected increases, the economic burden is heavy, the shutdown is stifling and celebrations cannot take place. Israel's annexation plans exacerbate this situation and create no less serious problems for the Palestinians. Discarding these plans will help renew cooperation between the sides in the struggle against the coronavirus, but even more importantly – it will ensure better lives

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The young Palestinian who climbed up the hospital building in Hebron every day for two weeks in order to sit on the windowsill and watch his mother dying of corona, has become a symbol in Palestinian social media. The loyalty, determination, and hope that characterized him, among us characterize an entire generation.

We Palestinians nowadays face numerous challenges, the most prominent of which is the outbreak of the Corona epidemic and the Israeli threat to annex part of our lands. As this is being written, the number of Palestinian patients in the West Bank has already reached almost ten thousand.

The virus, which broke out into our territory after the virus spread in Israel, first attacked us in the area of Hebron, where trade relations and social bonds widely prevail between its residents and Israeli citizens in the Negev. Consequently, it was transmitted from Hebron to the other West Bank governorates, some of which have already been placed in lockdown with their residents quarantined off from the outside world.

At the same time, we are following with concern the declarations about possible annexation of territories that not only include natural resources critical to our lives, including water and minerals, but also include regions at the heart of our future state, in which we have always planned to set up residential, industrial and commercial zones. The annexation virus concerns us no less than the coronavirus, as both are deadly for our future. And yet, we have not abandoned loyalty, determination, and hope.

The economic burden has begun to be too heavy to carry. The direct consequences of corona, such as the closure of workplaces, increased unemployment and restriction of movement hurts many of us directly. The threat of annexation also has a direct impact on our economic situation: the cancellation of security and civil coordination in response to the plan to torpedo any chance to achieve a future two-state solution, includes among other consequences the loss of tax revenues that, according to agreements, Israel collects for us.

Tax revenues, as in every other independent governing entity, comprise the main funding source for the Palestinian Authority. Without them, there is no money to disburse salaries for more than 150,000 civil and military employees, 120,000 dependents on social services, and

73,000 civil service retirees. Such salaries directly or indirectly sustain more than half of the Palestinian population in the OPT, and strengthen our economic cycles in the market.

At the end of the month we will celebrate our holiday, Eid al-Adha. The holiday will mark 90 days since the last time that Palestinian employees received full salaries. The bleak picture is clear in the markets of the West Bank. Traffic is sparse, but still evident despite the restrictions, since people are as afraid to lose meaning in life as they are afraid of getting infected.

Summer is considered the season of weddings in Palestine, which usually means visits of expatriate family members from neighboring countries and other parts of the world. This summer will be different. We are cut off. Even the Al-Karamah crossing, known in Israel as the Allenby bridge, which connects us to Jordan, is closed. Its opening is now dependent not only upon the corona situation, but is additionally derived from the ending of coordination between the Palestinian Authority and Israel.

There are no lifecycle celebrations among us in these days, and even in our moments of sadness, we are prevented from being together. The coronavirus prevents us from taking leave of our loved ones in their last days, and even participation in funeral ceremonies is extremely limited. There is no improvement in sight, which is also due in part to the cessation of coordination between the Palestinian and Israeli sides.

Before the declarations about annexation, there was close coordination between the sides in dealing with corona. We exchanged information with Israel, learned from experience, and even recorded many cases of life-saving medical cooperation. Today, tens of thousands of Palestinian workers pass through Israel and back, and there is no joint mechanism to determine that they are not transmitting the virus when they pass from one side to another.

The corona pandemic has also prevented us Palestinians from carrying out mass rallies and demonstrations against the annexation plans. But make no mistake, the path to peace and prosperity can be achieved if the annexation policy is nullified and there is instead a renewal of cooperation in the combatting the spread of corona and the understanding that our two peoples are comprised of human beings who want better lives, for themselves and for their children. Because just like the young man from Hebron, none of us should give up on loyalty, determination, and hope.

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