

Statement of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories on the occasion of the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

29 November 2007

Chairperson, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honour to address you on behalf of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories. The occupation of the Palestinian territories, namely, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem has now continued for four decades.

After forty years, the situation of human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory still continues to deteriorate. The inhabitants of the West Bank are subjected to severe restrictions of their right to freedom of movement which are implemented through more than five hundred checkpoints, roadblocks and other types of physical obstacles as well as the system of permits. There are 149 settlements in the West Bank inhabited by some 480,000 settlers. In addition to the confiscation of Palestinian-owned land for settlements, land in the West Bank is also taken by the elaborate network of bypass roads connecting the settlements with each other and with Israel. On 24 September the Israeli army announced new land confiscation for a road east of Jerusalem which would further cut the city off from the rest of the West Bank. The West Bank is increasingly being fragmented into ever smaller parts which render the viability of a Palestinian state less and less likely.

In addition, 80 per cent of the separation wall is currently being built in occupied territory, taking in the best Palestinian agricultural land and other resources. With recent extensions in the southern part of the West Bank, the separation wall will now encompass some 13 per cent of its territory. The 2004 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the legal consequences of the building of the separation wall in occupied Palestinian territory has gone unheeded to date.

There are some 11,000 Palestinian prisoners detained in Israel of whom almost 400 are children. The cities and towns of the West Bank are subjected to constant military incursions, arrest and search operations as well as targeted assassinations.

The situation of human rights in the Gaza Strip is even more dire and it is facing a rapidly deteriorating humanitarian crisis. Gaza has been cut off from the rest of the world since since June when all the crossings in and out of it have been closed. The Israeli army has carried out regular incursions into Gaza and destroyed property there. Gaza is subjected to repeated air strikes and targeted assassinations of militants in which innocent civilians are often hurt or killed. Seriously ill Palestinian patients from Gaza have increasingly been denied access to hospitals in Israel and their number has fallen from an average of 40 in July to less than five a day in September. In October, a 21-year-old cancer patient from Gaza died after his entry into Israel was delayed for 10 days.

The situation in Gaza deteriorated further when it was declared "hostile territory" or "enemy entity" by Israel. A number of Israeli banks have stopped dealing with banks in Gaza which makes the sending of remittances from abroad more and more difficult and is starting to cause cash shortages. At the end of October, in violation of international law, the Government of Israel started reducing the supply of electricity and fuel to the Gaza Strip which is likely to endanger, among other things, the functioning of hospitals and sewage and water services and amounts to collective punishment of some 1.5 million inhabitants.

The international community needs to take urgent measures to remedy the current situation of human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory through a peaceful, just and lasting solution that would lead to the end of the occupation and would enable the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination in a viable Palestinian state.