

Chapter 6

INTIFADA (THE UPRISING), 1987-1993



The children of Intifada, 1987-1993. A Palestinian youth at the Jalazone refugee camp, West Bank.

The intifada, 1987

Conditions in the Palestinian territory of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, including Jerusalem, involving more than 20 years of military occupation, repression and confiscation of land, contributed to the eruption of a spontaneous uprising, the intifada, in December 1987. Palestinians from all walks of life—youth, merchants, labourers, women and children—joined massive demonstrations, economic boycotts, tax resistance and strikes, protesting the military occupation of their land and demanding national independence.

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) followed the situation closely.

The Committee submitted reports on the severe measures—including the use of live ammunition against demonstrators and punitive beatings—adopted by the occupation authorities. Between 1987 and 1993, over 1,000 Palestinians were killed and tens of thousands injured. Thousands of Palestinians were detained, thousands transferred to prisons in Israel and many deported from the Palestinian territory. The reports described instances of maltreatment and torture in jail, lethal use of tear gas and excessive use of live ammunition, beatings and other severe measures. Israel also resorted to various forms of collective reprisal, such as demolition of houses, imposition of prolonged curfews and restrictive economic measures.

The educational system came to a halt when schools and universities were closed for extended periods and informal teaching arrangements were prohibited. Social services were curtailed and media and civil organizations outlawed. Tens of thousands of productive trees were uprooted and crops destroyed. Acts of violence and aggression by Israeli settlers increased in both scope and gravity, the reports said. In this situation, Palestinians attempted against all odds to overcome severe economic hardship through reliance on their community-based economy.

The Security Council, the General Assembly and the Secretary-General responded with deep concern to the measures taken by the occupation authorities against the intifada. From the outset of the uprising, beginning with Security Council resolution 605 (1987) of 22 December 1987, the question of means to ensure the safety and protection of Palestinians in the occupied territory in accordance with the (Fourth) Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian

Persons in Time of War of 12 August 1949 received special attention. In that resolution, the Security Council “strongly deplored the policies and practices of Israel, the occupying Power, which violate the human rights of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories, and in particular the opening of fire by the Israeli army, resulting in the killing and wounding of defenceless Palestinian civilians”.

Following the adoption of its resolution 605 (1987), the Security Council adopted four resolutions specifically on the question of deportations of Palestinians from the occupied territory. In resolutions 607 (1988) of 5 January 1988, 608 (1988) of 14 January 1988, 636 (1989) of 6 July 1989, and 641 (1989) of 30 August 1989, the Council called upon Israel to desist from deporting Palestinian civilians and to ensure the safe and immediate return to the occupied Palestinian territories of those already deported.

In a presidential note dated 26 August 1988, the members of the Security Council said that they were gravely concerned by the continued deterioration of the situation in the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967, including Jerusalem, and especially by the grave and serious situation resulting from the closing-off of areas, the imposition of curfews and the consequent increase in the numbers of injuries and deaths. The members of the Security Council considered that the situation in the occupied territories had grave consequences for endeavours to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

A number of measures initiated in the Security Council to ensure the safe protection of Palestinians in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention were not adopted, owing to a lack of consensus among the permanent members. However, on 20 December 1990, the Security Council unanimously requested the Secretary-General to make new efforts on an urgent basis to monitor and observe the situation of Palestinian civilians under Israeli occupation and urged Israel to apply the

Convention to all occupied territories. Israel has rejected the legal applicability of the Convention, while stating that it respects it de facto.