



**UNITED NATIONS ROUNDTABLE ON LEGAL  
ASPECTS OF THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE  
CONVENED BY THE COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE  
OF THE INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF  
THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE**

**United Nations Office at Geneva, 24 and 25 April 2014**

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**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

**OPENING SESSION**

Statement by

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Director

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Office of the Human Rights Commissioner

Representative of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Excellencies, Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to represent the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in this Roundtable on the Legal Aspects of the Question of Palestine. I would like to take the opportunity to extend our thanks to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for convening this event.

There have been significant developments in recent times regarding the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. By General Assembly resolution 67/19 Palestine was granted non-member observer State status in the United Nations in November 2012. This formal recognition of Palestinian statehood by the General Assembly is a significant step towards Palestinians' realization of the right to self-determination. The High Commissioner, as well as her predecessors and many of the United Nations human rights mechanisms, have consistently called for the right to self-determination of Palestinians to be respected, protected and fulfilled. Self-determination is a fundamental human right, one to which Israelis and Palestinians are equally entitled.

Many key human rights concerns related to the occupation of Palestine were highlighted in reports of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General to the recent 25th session of the Human Rights Council. These need to be addressed urgently regardless of the outcome of the current round of peace talks. In the West Bank including East Jerusalem, concerns include the excessive use of force against Palestinians by Israeli Security Forces, violations of rights of Palestinians deprived of their liberty, the ongoing construction of Israeli settlements and settlement-related activities such as the demolition of Palestinian homes, forcible transfer of Bedouin communities and settler violence.

The situation in the Gaza Strip has been of equal concern to OHCHR. Israel's blockade of Gaza, which constitutes a form of collective punishment prohibited under international law, coupled with the recent destruction of most of the tunnel network with Egypt has resulted in a significant deterioration of economic and social rights in Gaza. In addition, the renewed hostilities between Palestinian armed groups and Israeli armed forces in the Gaza Strip in recent months are troubling.

An overarching concern which affects the entire spectrum of Palestinians' economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights, has been a lack of accountability on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides. As recalled by the High Commissioner at the latest session of the Human Rights Council, there is an urgent need to carry out prompt, thorough, effective, independent and impartial investigations into allegations of unlawful killing or injury and torture and ill-treatment, and to prosecute individuals responsible for violations and provide victims with an effective remedy.

10 years after the unequivocal Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, it is past time that human rights of Palestinians and Israelis alike be respected and international obligations be observed – this is imperative for any lasting peace. In the context of the current talks, the parties need to do everything possible to respect human rights.

I am pleased that two days of this Roundtable will be used to discuss many important questions. My colleague will be making a presentation in session 1, focusing on how United Nations procedures and mechanisms have addressed the human rights concerns related Palestinian detainees and prisoners. The session on Palestine's status as a State promises to be a very interesting discussion. The recognition by the General Assembly of Palestine as a non-member observer state has opened the door for Palestine to accede to international instruments. Much has been said about the recent decision by Palestine to request

accession to a number of international treaties, including eight human rights instruments. However, it is a positive development that Palestine has acted to formally commit itself to the international human rights principles and standards contained in those instruments.

I would like to thank again the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for this initiative and look forward to two days of fruitful discussions.

Thank you.

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