



DIVISION FOR
PALESTINIAN RIGHTS

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on action by the United Nations system and
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relevant to the question of Palestine

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I. SECRETARY-GENERAL'S STATEMENT ON ISRAEL'S NON-RENEWAL OF TEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE IN HEBRON

On 1 February, the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General released the following statement ([SG/SM/19451](#)):

The Secretary-General noted the joint statement issued by the Foreign Ministers of Italy, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey following Israel's decision not to renew the mandate of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH), established pursuant to the provisions of the 1995 Interim Agreement (Oslo II Accord) between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). He is grateful to the TIPH's contributing countries and the service of their respective observers over the past 22 years. He further hopes that an agreement can be found by the parties to preserve the TIPH's long-standing and valuable contribution to conflict prevention and the protection of Palestinians in Hebron.

The Secretary-General continues to engage with relevant Member States and the parties on the ground to ensure the protection, safety, and well-being of civilians. He reiterates his commitment to the two-State solution and to safeguarding the principles and vision enshrined in the Oslo framework, relevant United Nations resolutions and other applicable agreements.

II. WORLD BANK APPROVES NEW US \$30 MILLION GRANT TO SUPPORT PALESTINIAN REFORMS AND BOOST ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES

On 7 February, the World Bank issued the following [press release](#):

The World Bank approved today a US\$30 million development policy grant to support the Palestinian Authority's reform program in strengthening fiscal resilience and creating an environment conducive for private investment and job creation.

The grant program [Strengthening Fiscal Resilience and Business Environment Development Policy](#) will continue to support to the Palestinian Authority's implementation of the Palestinian National Policy Agenda 2017-2022 with emphasis on improving government transparency of fiscal transfers to local service providers in key sectors, while reducing the fiscal drain on the Palestinian Authority's budget. Increasing the fiscal stability of the electricity, water, and health sectors will in turn build confidence of potential investors and lay the foundation for improved private sector activities.

“Within the current stalemate of a declining economic growth and squeeze on liquidity, the Development Policy Grant remains a key instrument in supporting both reform priorities and coping with the fiscal problems. Enhancing sustainability and creditworthiness of service providers will not only stimulate economic activities and create jobs but will result in greater citizens' trust,” said Anna Bjerde, World Bank Acting Country Director for West Bank and Gaza and Director of Strategy and Operations for the Middle East and North Africa Region.

This is the ninth in a series of development policy grants, totaling US\$340 million, of budget support grants for public sector governance and transparency reforms. “*While the new grant will continue to support progress to improve the Palestinian Authority’s service delivery in energy, water and health, it is also essential to modernize and improve the legal and regulatory business environment to attract investors and entrepreneurs and to build on a new reform momentum in land administration and cashless mobile payments,*” said Damir Cosic, World Bank Senior Economist.

The focus on land administration will not only contribute to larger tax collections but will increase the availability of collateral for bank lending (only titled land can be used for collateral). In addition, the provision of mobile payments not only benefits financial inclusion of underbanked groups, but it is a cornerstone of provision of public services electronically (e-government) which holds great potential for the public sector to provide citizens with high quality services in a cost-effective manner.

The World Bank will continue to collaborate with other donors, especially through the multi-donor fund administered by the Bank on key issues considered critical for reform. Recently, France and Norway contributed a total amount of about US\$26 million to implement policies supported by the World Bank’s Development Policy Grant.

III. UNITED STATES CONGRESS REVIEWS UNRWA’S TEXTBOOKS

On 10 February, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) released the following official [statement](#):

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) operates an educational system for over 532,000 girls and boys at its 715 schools in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Gaza, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. The agency provides students with a quality education, the centerpiece of which is UNRWA’s commitment to delivering a curriculum consistent with the broader UN development goals and the values and principles of the UN.

UNRWA works actively with all its partners, host governments and donors, to constantly improve its performance in the field of education. In 2017, the investigative arm of the U.S. Congress, the Government Accountability Office (GAO), reviewed the amount of U.S. funding that had been provided for education in the West Bank and Gaza, how UNRWA identified and addressed potentially problematic content in educational materials, and State’s reporting on these issues to Congress.

The recently de-classified [GAO report](#) affirms UNRWA’s unwavering commitment to UN values. GAO confirmed UNRWA’s curriculum framework emphasizes neutrality, human rights, tolerance, equality and non-discrimination with regard to race, gender, language, and religion throughout the teaching and learning process. GAO also validated UNRWA’s scrupulous textbook review process in which it found that approximately three percent of the material was not in line with UN values.

As noted in the report, UNRWA openly discussed with GAO the challenges associated with addressing problematic content in textbooks. With new educational materials having been issued

since the report was prepared, some of GAO's conclusions in this regard are already outdated. UNRWA is continuously adapting its enrichment materials and addressing these challenges. UNRWA has identified and categorized the key issues in relation to the current textbooks. As part of the "teacher-centered approach", education staff are provided with key documents that enable them to determine, from a small number of options, the enrichment approach most suited to their students in addressing the specific identified issues to ensure that the curriculum delivered is aligned with UN values. It is mandatory for teachers to address all issues identified.

UNRWA uses Host government textbooks, the content of which States globally view as a matter of national sovereignty, and there are separate processes for the international community to raise concerns with the relevant authorities such as the Education Sector Working Group that supports the PA in reviewing the curriculum.

UNRWA thanks the GAO for reporting on this important issue. Quality education is of the highest importance to UNRWA, and we are committed to continuously reviewing the material taught in our schools and finding effective solutions for any passages that are not in line with UN values. Education is among the key services UNRWA provides to Palestine refugees pending a just and lasting solution to their plight.

IV. SECRETARY-GENERAL WARNS SETTLEMENTS DEEPEN SENSE OF MISTRUST AND UNDERMINE TWO-STATE SOLUTION

On 15 February, the Secretary-General of the United Nations António Guterres delivered the following [statement](#) at the 394th meeting of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in New York. At the same meeting, the Committee re-elected its Bureau and adopted its 2019 Programme of Work ([A/AC.183/2019/L.2](#)). The Committee heard a briefing by Amnesty International on its recent [report](#) (Destination: Occupation – Digital Tourism and Israel's Illegal Settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories).

I am honoured to participate in your first meeting of the year. I congratulate the Chair, Cheikh Niang, and other members of the Bureau on your election. And I commend your efforts and commitment towards a peaceful and just solution of the Palestinian question.

This can only be achieved through realization of the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States, based on relevant United Nations resolutions, long-held principles, previous agreements and international law.

Unfortunately, over this past year, the situation has not moved in that direction. Protests in Gaza resulted in hundreds dead and thousands wounded by Israeli security forces. Security incidents and provocations by Hamas and other militants in Gaza, including the launching of rockets and incendiary kites, dangerously escalated the situation. Thanks to United Nations and Egyptian mediation efforts, a major escalation was avoided.

I appeal to Hamas authorities in Gaza to prevent provocations, and under international humanitarian law, Israel, too, has a responsibility to exercise maximum restraint and to not use

lethal force, except as foreseen in international law, as a last resort against imminent threat of death or serious injury.

The United Nations stands firmly in support of Palestinian reconciliation and the return of the legitimate Palestinian Government to Gaza. We welcome the efforts made by Egypt in this regard.

Gaza is an integral part of a future Palestinian State and Palestinian unity is needed for a politically stable, economically viable, sovereign and independent State of Palestine.

The ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza must also be immediately addressed. Approximately 2 million Palestinians remain mired in increasing poverty and unemployment, with limited access to adequate health, education, water and electricity. Young people see little prospect of a better future.

I urge Israel to lift restrictions on the movement of people and goods, which also hamper the efforts of the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies, without naturally jeopardizing legitimate security concerns. The international community must also significantly increase efforts to revitalize Gaza's economy.

I commend the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for its critical work in Gaza, the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and across the region. This is despite an unprecedented financial crisis in 2018.

I thank those donors who have increased their commitments and enabled Palestinian refugees to continue to receive the essential services provided by UNRWA. I ask them to maintain their support in the coming year and beyond.

There is also risk of further unrest in the West Bank. The construction and planning of settlements by Israel have expanded deeper into Area C in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem.

Settlements are illegal under international law. They deepen the sense of mistrust and undermine the two-State solution. Settler violence remains a very serious concern. I was also shocked by the recent murder of an Israeli teenager, which has now been categorized as a terrorist act.

I also regret the decision by Israel not to renew the mandate of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron. I hope an agreement can be found by the parties to preserve this long-standing and valuable arrangement.

Palestinians have endured more than a half-century of occupation and denial of their legitimate right to self-determination.

Israelis and Palestinians continue to suffer from deadly cycles of violence. Leaders have a responsibility to their populations, not least the youth, to reverse this negative trajectory and pave the way towards peace, stability and reconciliation.

I commend the Committee for keeping the focus on the ultimate objective of a [just] and peaceful solution with two States coexisting in peace and security. This is the only way to achieve the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. As I have said repeatedly, there is no plan B.

**V. UN SPECIAL COORDINATOR WARNS OF RISING EXTREMISM,
HIGHLIGHTS ISRAELI DECISION TO WITHHOLD US \$140 MILLION
IN PALESTINIAN REVENUES**

The Security Council, at its 8466th meeting of 20 February, was briefed by the Special Coordinator on the Middle East Peace Process, Nickolay Mladenov, and by the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, Ursula Mueller. The two briefings ([S/PV.8466](#)) are reproduced below.

[Nickolay Mladenov]

I brief the Security Council today as we continue to face a growing humanitarian, security and political crisis in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

The prospect of sustainable peace is fading by the day as the spectre of violence and radicalism grows. Our efforts today focus on the immediate challenges, namely, preventing the risk of an economic and humanitarian implosion in the West Bank and Gaza and preserving the hope, slim as it is, that Israelis and Palestinians will be able to live in peace, side by side, in States of their own that are recognized and integrated into the global and regional community. We are working hard to preserve that prospect as the viability of the two-State solution is systematically eroded by the deteriorating reality on the ground. The number of extremists is on the rise again and the risk of war continues to loom large. In order for Israelis and Palestinians to get back on track towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict, the first thing that is required is leadership that believes that peace is possible through negotiations. It also requires an international community that is committed to supporting both parties in reaching agreement on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions and bilateral agreements and that understands that the weaker party — the Palestinian people, who have lived under occupation for more than 50 years — need our support now more than ever. It should never be about Israel or Palestine. It should always be about Israel and Palestine.

Unfortunately, unilateral steps, continuing violence, financial pressure and the lack of progress towards peace are exacting a heavy toll on Palestinian society and undermining the foundations of peace. In 2018, the Palestinian Authority (PA) had a budget deficit of approximately \$1.04 billion, over 60 per cent of which was covered by donor aid. That shortfall is expected to increase in 2019 because of the withdrawal of significant amounts of donor funding and a worsening economic situation.

Earlier this week the Government of Israel decided unilaterally to withhold approximately \$140 million in Palestinian tax revenue transfers. That decision is the result of legislation adopted by the Knesset last year that instructs the Israeli Government to withhold money equivalent to the amount that the PA pays to Palestinians convicted of involvement in terrorism or other security-related offences by Israeli courts and to their families.

Today the Palestinian leadership is meeting to discuss its financial and political response to that measure. These are very serious developments that put at risk the financial stability of the Palestinian Authority and, ultimately, the security of Israelis and Palestinians alike. The Secretary-General has repeatedly warned that unilateral moves undermine the chances for peace.

The recent halting of United States assistance to Palestinians may also impact ongoing efforts to bridge existing divisions. The ending of vital training, facilities and equipment support could potentially risk security coordination. I encourage ongoing efforts to ensure that this crucial assistance is continued. The important work being carried out by civil society organizations working towards peace is also under threat, and I hope that donors will continue their support to civil society, which serves a critical role in preserving the fraying links between Israelis and Palestinians.

We also regret Israel's decision on 28 January not to renew the mandate of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron, established pursuant to the provisions of the 1995 Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip — also known as the Oslo II accord — between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). I echo the Secretary-General's appreciation for their service and the generous contribution of all participating countries over the years. The United Nations continues to engage with relevant Member States and the parties on the ground to ensure the protection, safety and well-being of civilians in Hebron and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory.

Alongside these worrying developments, and despite the concerted efforts of Egypt to bring the Palestinian factions together, recent Palestinian political moves may further widen the growing divide between the West Bank and Gaza. On 27 January, the Fatah Central Committee recommended the formation of a new Government comprising PLO factions and independent figures. On 29 January, Prime Minister Hamdallah's Cabinet submitted its resignation. Consultations on the way forward continue, including on holding long-overdue legislative elections. Hamas and the other factions have called, instead, for the formation of a Government of national unity with the task of organizing legislative, presidential and Palestinian National Council elections.

Elections conducted in line with Palestinian laws and with established international democratic standards throughout the occupied Palestinian territory may now be the only way out of the current internal political impasse. As the Palestinian political dynamics evolve and as we drift further away from the realization of a negotiated two-State solution, I again call on Israeli and Palestinian leaders to recommit to the principles and vision enshrined a quarter of a century ago in relevant resolutions and bilateral agreements.

Last month (see [S/PV.8449](#)), I outlined some steps that were necessary to support the stability of the Palestinian Authority, including expanding opportunities for free trade, addressing fiscal leakages, enabling the Palestinian Government to increase the services it provides to its people, and ensuring continued security coordination. Such steps are not a substitute for peace. They must be matched by political moves, including an end to the policy of settlement construction and expansion and the designation of land for exclusive Israeli use, as well as creating opportunities for Palestinian development in Area C.

In this context, I reiterate that settlements are illegal under international law and remain a substantial obstacle to peace. In the absence of final status negotiations, however, such steps should significantly support Palestinian institution-building and improve lives. The United Nations, together with our partners in the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians (AHLC) format, will continue working to create an environment conducive to such developments.

Meanwhile, in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, 11 Palestinians were killed during the reporting period by the Israeli security forces in various incidents, including attacks on Israeli civilians, demonstrations, clashes and military operations. On 7 February, an Israeli teenager was murdered in a park outside Jerusalem by a Palestinian perpetrator, who was later arrested by Israeli security forces. There is no justification for violence and terror.

Meanwhile protests and violent incidents at the Gaza fence continued, with seven Palestinians, including three children, killed by Israeli live fire on 8 February. This brings to 40 the number of children killed in the context of Gaza protests since they began in March 2018. Children must not be targeted or put in harm's way. They must be protected. Lethal force should be used only as a last resort.

During the reporting period, Palestinian militants fired 18 rockets towards Israel. The indiscriminate launching of rockets, mortars and incendiary kites or balloons from Gaza must stop. Hamas must ensure that protests remain peaceful and prevent provocations near the fence, including attempts to breach it.

In the West Bank this past month, Israeli forces killed four Palestinians, including two children. Demolitions and seizures of Palestinian-owned structures also continued across the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Thirty-nine structures were demolished or seized by the authorities or by their owners upon receipt of a demolition order, resulting in the displacement of some 70 people. Overall, some 200 Palestinian households in East Jerusalem have eviction cases filed against them, mostly by Israeli settler organizations, placing some 900 people at risk of displacement.

The upsurge in settler violence over the past year continues to be a serious concern. During the reporting period, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs recorded 20 incidents in which Israeli settlers injured Palestinians or damaged their property. On 26 January, armed Israeli settlers entered Al-Mughayyir village near Ramallah, where they attacked Palestinian residents. Ensuing clashes, also involving the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), resulted in the killing of a 38-year-old Palestinian man and the injury of 15 others.

For years, we have described the situation facing the population and focused on the urgency of providing Palestinians confined within Gaza's boundaries with the means to live a dignified life and to have hope for the future. Hamas's continuing control of Gaza, Israel's severe movement and access restrictions, and the Palestinian Authority's restrictive measures are pushing the situation to a breaking point. The militant build-up continues as the risk of ever-more radical and extremist groups pushing both sides into war grows by the day. With the prospects of intra-Palestinian reconciliation dimming, the people of Gaza feel more and more left to their own devices, with no representation, no relief and no way out. On 5 February, the PA paid its employees

in Gaza reduced salaries for the month of January and reportedly over 5,000 employees did not receive salaries or other payments due.

Despite the difficulties, the United Nations continues its efforts to implement the package of urgent humanitarian and economic interventions in Gaza called for at the September AHLC meeting. The State of Qatar has donated an additional \$20 million to expand United Nations cash-for-work programming in Gaza. This will create some 10,000 new temporary jobs. The World Bank has also launched its \$17-million cash-for-work programme, which will create an additional 5,000 temporary jobs.

Job creation is critical to the stabilization of Gaza's economy. However, all our efforts that we are currently undertaking are short- to medium-term only. Ultimately, only sustainable political solutions — including reuniting Gaza and the West Bank under a single, democratic and legitimate Palestinian Government and ending the closures of the Strip — will genuinely change the current course. I welcome the tireless efforts of Egypt to continue dialogue with Palestinian factions with the aim of maintaining stability in Gaza and achieving genuine reconciliation. I urge all parties to remain engaged in this critical effort.

Turning very briefly to the region, recent incidents that occurred on the Golan, heightening tensions between Israel and Syria, are also of concern. On 11 February, the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force observed, in several separate incidents, the Israel Defense Forces firing tank and high-explosive rounds into the area of separation, which was followed by three rockets being fired into a different part of the area of separation. These developments undermine the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement and jeopardize the long-standing ceasefire between Israel and Syria.

...

In closing, I have repeatedly raised the alarm on the dangerous trajectory of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The United Nations and its partners have provided a series of recommendations that, if implemented effectively, would begin to establish an environment that is conducive to a return to negotiations. We have advocated for a strengthened commitment to bilateral agreements; we are implementing a series of humanitarian interventions aiming at stabilizing Gaza, supporting Palestinian reconciliation and ultimately lifting the closures; and we have continued to stress that the recommendations of the 2016 Quartet report ([S/2016/595](#), annex) remain deeply relevant.

What is needed, first and foremost, is the necessary leadership and political will for change. Until that can be found, Palestinians and Israelis will continue to slide into increasingly hazardous territory.

[Ursula Mueller]

I thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to update the Security Council on the humanitarian implications of the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory.

As the Special Coordinator, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, noted, the situation on the ground is of concern. At its core, the situation remains a protection crisis. Violations of international

humanitarian and human rights law are a key driver of high levels of acute vulnerability among Palestinians. The international community is mobilizing to provide assistance, but funding is diminishing, while needs and constraints continue to grow. Ultimately, the solution is not humanitarian.

The lives and well-being of people must be placed beyond political considerations, and humanitarian aid facilitated and supported. Overall, the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in the Gaza Strip, deteriorated in 2018. That included an increase in casualties associated with the demonstrations at the Gaza fence, limitations on the movement of people and goods, and financial restrictions.

The growing casualty figures cited by Special Coordinator Mladenov are stretching the capacity of health-care providers. The health system in Gaza is at risk of collapse as injuries during protests at the Gaza fence and in related violent incidents continue. Since the start of demonstrations in March 2018, over 27,000 Palestinians have been injured, more than 6,000 of them by live ammunition. According to the World Health Organization, 122 amputations, including 21 paediatric amputations, have taken place since the start of the mass demonstrations.

I join the numerous calls of the Secretary-General upon Israel to ensure that its use of force in response to those public demonstrations is in compliance with international law as a last resort and in response to an imminent threat of death or serious injury. I call upon the organizers of the demonstrations, the demonstrators themselves and Hamas to ensure non-violent protests. I condemn the continued launching of rockets and incendiary devices from Gaza.

Less than two weeks ago, three Palestinian children were killed in Gaza, bringing the total number of children killed this year to four. Since March, 40 children have been killed in the context of demonstrations. Great effort must be made to spare children from violence. They should never be put in harm's way.

The World Health Organization also reports that since the start of the protests, three health-care providers have been killed and over 620 others have been wounded. Medical personnel carrying out their duties must be protected and their work facilitated. Many of the injuries sustained require complex treatment that is not available in Gaza. However, obtaining treatment outside of Gaza remains challenging. In 2018, 61 per cent of all patient requests to cross the Erez checkpoint with Israel to access appropriate health care were approved; since March last year, 17 per cent of the applications by those injured in demonstrations have been approved. Patients are also able to exit Gaza via the crossing with Egypt. That crossing has been open five days per week since July 2018. In December, 98 patients crossed through Rafah.

Compounding the burden on health services in Gaza, essential drugs and medical supplies are scarce. Health-care providers continue to coordinate and preposition field treatment posts to minimize the loss of life. The recent boost in the electricity supply, enabled by Qatar's donation of funding to purchase fuel, has remained steady, with 9 to 12 hours of electricity per day. However, emergency fuel for back-up generators to run emergency and surgery rooms during the outages is running out. Multiple times in the past year, the provision of essential services in Gaza have been at risk of shutdown, with potentially harsh consequences for the population.

The ongoing internal Palestinian divide has contributed to that deteriorating situation and the rising vulnerability of Palestinians in Gaza, who already struggle to meet basic daily needs. Recent reports of reductions or the withholding of the salaries of some public sector employees are of concern. Over 5,000 people have reportedly had their salaries cut, including in the health and education sectors. Unemployment exceeds 50 per cent and food insecurity is estimated to be nearly 70 per cent in Gaza. In order to avoid a recurring need for humanitarian aid, further sustained action is needed on longer-term projects, such as those of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians, on which Special Coordinator Mladenov updated the Council.

As of 2 January, for the first time since 2000, Israel has partially expanded the fishing zone from 6 to 12 nautical miles in the middle area off the Gaza coast. That expansion may potentially help revive the fishing sector and provide a sustainable source of income.

While the humanitarian situation in the West Bank is less acute, many Palestinian families and communities in Area C, the city of Hebron and East Jerusalem face growing pressures. Demolitions, evictions, restrictions on movement and access and rising settler-related violence continue to foster an environment that heightens the risk of forcible transfer for many Palestinians.

Between 22 January and 19 February, four Palestinians were killed and 85 were injured by Israeli forces in the West Bank within the context of search-and-arrest operations, demonstrations, clashes and Palestinian attacks and alleged attacks. In addition, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has recorded 20 incidents in which Palestinians were injured and their property damaged by Israeli settlers.

On 26 January, armed Israeli settlers entered the village of Al-Mughayyir, where they reportedly attacked Palestinian residents. Subsequent clashes, also involving the Israeli Defense Forces, resulted in the death of a 38-year-old Palestinian man and injury to other Palestinians. In some 280 incidents during 2018, one Palestinian was killed and 115 others were injured as a result of settler-related violence. That is the highest recorded number of incidents in any single year since 2014.

Israeli authorities have stepped up law enforcement efforts in response to such events. I call on authorities to strengthen those efforts so as to ensure accountability and reverse the trend in growing settler-related violence.

Palestinian attacks against Israelis have also continued, resulting in one fatality and at least four injuries. Of note, on 7 February, a 19-year-old Israeli woman was stabbed to death in Jerusalem.

The protection of the Palestinian population in the H-2 section of Hebron is of concern. As described by Special Coordinator Mladenov, the departure of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron leaves Palestinians with a greater sense of exposure and vulnerability to settler harassment. A recent survey coordinated by OCHA in the H-2 settlement area, which is home to some 7,000 Palestinians, indicates that nearly 70 per cent of families have been exposed to settler-related violence and harassment in the past three years. The aid community is examining how it can increase the provision of assistance and promote protection.

As reflected by Special Coordinator Mladenov, Palestinians continue to face displacement and loss of property, which occurs due to demolitions of structures lacking Israeli-issued building permits, which are nearly impossible to obtain. Many families live under the threat of eviction orders. As mentioned, approximately 200 Palestinian households in East Jerusalem have eviction cases filed against them, predominantly by settler organizations claiming ownership of the buildings.

On 17 February, members of the Abu Asab family were evicted following such a legal battle. Of similar concern is the risk of eviction facing 32 members of the Sabbagh family, who are Palestinian refugees. The Humanitarian Coordinator, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights have called on the Israeli authorities to immediately halt the eviction of this family and those facing similar actions.

Alongside the deterioration of humanitarian conditions, our ability to provide humanitarian assistance is increasingly constrained. Funding last year was at a record low, with the 2018 appeal for the occupied Palestinian territory only 46 per cent funded— far below the global average of 60 per cent. The situation reflects not only cuts to UNRWA, the largest humanitarian provider in the occupied Palestinian territory, but also to other United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, thereby reducing their ability to provide aid. For instance, funding cuts have forced the World Food Programme to suspend food assistance to about 27,000 people and reduce rations to another 166,000 beneficiaries. In addition, humanitarian organizations face challenges to their operating space from both the Israeli and Palestinian authorities. There is mounting pressure on human rights defenders and attempts to delegitimize humanitarian action in the occupied Palestinian territory.

The humanitarian response plan for 2019 requests \$350 million to provide basic food, protection, health care, shelter, water and sanitation to 1.4 million Palestinians, down from the 1.9 million targeted last year. The request is based on the maximum number of vulnerable people whose needs we are able to address. Recognizing this lack of funding, the occupied Palestinian territory will receive an allocation of \$8 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund. About 70 per cent of this funding will help to address the immediate health crisis in Gaza, as well as water and sanitation issues; some 30 per cent will enhance international assistance in Hebron and the rest of the West Bank. However, the amount is far from enough to bridge the considerable funding gaps. I therefore urge Member States to step up and increase their support to humanitarian operations in the occupied Palestinian territory.

In order to reduce vulnerability, it is also critical that all parties uphold their obligations under international human rights law and humanitarian law. And, ultimately, the solution is not humanitarian. It is for stakeholders to continue to work towards a viable political solution.

VI. EU AND ARAB LEAGUE REAFFIRM COMMON POSITIONS ON MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS IN SHARM EL-SHEIKH SUMMIT DECLARATION

On 25 February, the European Union (EU) and the League of Arab States (LAS) issued the following [press release](#). Excerpts are reproduced below:

...

7. We reaffirmed our common positions on the Middle East Peace Process, including on the status of Jerusalem, and on the illegality under international law of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. We reiterated our commitment to reaching a two-state solution on the basis of all relevant UN resolutions, as the only realistic way to end the occupation that began in 1967, including of East Jerusalem, and to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace between Israelis and Palestinians through direct negotiations between the parties that addresses all final status issues. We recalled the importance of upholding the historic status quo for the holy sites in Jerusalem, including with regard to the Custodianship of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. We reaffirmed the indispensable role of UNRWA and the need to support it politically and financially in order to allow it to continue fulfilling its UN mandate. We expressed our concern about the humanitarian, political, security and economic situation in the Gaza Strip, and called for all parties to take immediate steps to produce a fundamental change to the better in full respect of international law, including human rights and humanitarian law, especially with respect to the protection of civilians.

...

VII. UN INDEPENDENT COMMISSION OF INQUIRY ON PROTESTS IN GAZA PRESENTS ITS FINDINGS

On 28 February, the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Protests in the Occupied Palestinian Territory issued the following [press release](#) summarizing the findings of its report ([A/HRC/40/74](#)).

The United Nations Independent Commission of Inquiry on the protests in the Occupied Palestinian Territory today presented its findings. The report focuses on the demonstrations in the Gaza Strip, referred to as the “Great March of Return and the Breaking of the Siege”.

“The Commission has reasonable grounds to believe that during the Great March of Return, Israeli soldiers committed violations of international human rights and humanitarian law. Some of those violations may constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity, and must be immediately investigated by Israel,” said the Chair of the Commission, Santiago Canton of Argentina.

The Commission was mandated by the Human Rights Council in May 2018 to investigate all alleged violations and abuses of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in the context of the large-scale protests that began in Gaza on 30 March 2018. The Commission comprises Santiago Canton of Argentina (Chair), Sara Hossain of Bangladesh and Betty Murungi of Kenya.

More than 6,000 unarmed demonstrators were shot by military snipers, week after week at the protest sites by the separation fence.

The Commission investigated every killing at the designated demonstration sites by the Gaza separation fence on official protest days. The investigation covered the period from the start of the protests until 31 December 2018. 189 Palestinians were killed during the demonstrations inside this period. The Commission found that Israeli Security Forces killed 183 of these protesters with live ammunition. Thirty-five of these fatalities were children, while three were clearly marked paramedics, and two were clearly marked journalists.

According to the Commission's data analysis, the Israeli Security Forces injured 6,106 Palestinians with live ammunition at the protest sites during this period. Another 3,098 Palestinians were injured by bullet fragmentation, rubber-coated metal bullets or by hits from tear gas canisters. Four Israeli soldiers were injured at the demonstrations. Four Israeli soldiers were injured at the demonstrations. One Israeli soldier was killed on a protest day but outside the protest sites.

“There can be no justification for killing and injuring journalists, medics, and persons who pose no imminent threat of death or serious injury to those around them. Particularly alarming is the targeting of children and persons with disabilities,” said Sara Hossain. “Many young persons’ lives have been altered forever. 122 people have had a limb amputated since 30 March last year. Twenty of these amputees are children.”

The Commission found reasonable grounds to believe that Israeli snipers shot at journalists, health workers, children and persons with disabilities, knowing they were clearly recognizable as such.

Unless undertaken lawfully in self-defence, intentionally shooting a civilian not directly participating in hostilities is a war crime. The Commission found reasonable grounds to believe that individual members of the Israeli Security Forces, in the course of their response to the demonstrations, killed and injured civilians who were neither directly participating in hostilities, nor posing an imminent threat. These serious human rights and humanitarian law violations may constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity.

The Commission took note of the Israeli claim that the protests by the separation fence masked “terror activities” by Palestinian armed groups. The Commission found however that the demonstrations were civilian in nature, with clearly stated political aims. Despite some acts of significant violence, the Commission found that the demonstrations did not constitute combat or military campaigns.

The applicable legal framework was thus based in international human rights law. This assessment did not change even though the commission's investigation revealed that some demonstrators were members of organized armed groups. Others were members of political parties. International human rights law prohibits the use of force based solely on a person's actual or alleged affiliation to any group, rather than their conduct.

The Commission found that some members of the Higher National Committee organising the protests, which includes Hamas representatives, encouraged or defended demonstrators' use of indiscriminate incendiary kites and balloons, causing fear among civilians and significant damage

to property in southern Israel. The Commission concluded that Hamas, as the de facto authority in Gaza, failed to prevent these acts.

The Commission conducted 325 interviews with victims, witnesses and sources, and gathered more than 8,000 documents. An integral part of the investigation was comprehensive analysis of social media, and of vast amounts of audio-visual material showing incidents, including drone footage.

The Commission was mandated by the UN Human Rights Council to focus on accountability and identify those responsible for violations and alleged international crimes.

“The Commission will place the relevant information in a confidential file to be handed over to the High Commissioner of Human Rights, to provide access to this information to national and international justice mechanisms. The International Criminal Court is already concerned with this situation,” said Betty Murungi.

As the one-year anniversary of the Great March of Return on 30 March draws closer, the Commissioners urged all concerned to exercise restraint.

The large-scale killing and maiming of 30 March last year, when 18 people were killed and over 700 people shot, and of 14 May, when 60 people were killed and over 1100 people shot, must not be repeated. “The shooting must stop,” said Sara Hossain.

“The onus is now on Israel to investigate every protest-related killing and injury, promptly, impartially and independently in accordance with international standards, to determine whether war crimes or crimes against humanity were committed, with a view to holding accountable those found responsible”, said Santiago Canton. “We also urge the organisers, the demonstrators, and the de facto authorities in Gaza, to ensure that the Great March of Return is entirely peaceful, as it is intended to be.”

“The Commission finds that these protests were a call for help from a population in despair”, Santiago Canton reminded. “Not only Israel but also the de facto authorities led by Hamas and the Palestinian Authority have responsibilities towards them. The Commission calls on Israel to lift the blockade of Gaza, and on all three duty bearers to comply with their responsibilities and improve the living situation in Gaza.”

The Israeli authorities did not respond to repeated requests by the Commission for information and access to Israel and to the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

A fuller report, containing detailed factual and contextual information and legal analysis will be published and presented to the Human Rights Council on 18 March 2019 in Geneva.