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**Human rights situation in Palestine and other
occupied Arab territories**

Written statement* submitted by Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[04 June 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

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Announced annexation of Palestinian Territory in the West Bank

The World Council of Churches expresses its grave concern about the announced plans of the government of Israel to annex parts of the occupied West Bank.

Apart from undermining any prospect of a viable independent Palestinian state alongside Israel, this action would entrench the marginalization and dispossession of Palestinian people and communities in the annexed areas. Prime Minister Netanyahu has for example expressly stated that Palestinians living in the Jordan Valley will not receive Israeli citizenship after annexation of the area.¹ We are deeply alarmed that for the more than 50,000 Palestinians living in areas of the West Bank facing annexation, the direct effects of this move will entail a future even more deeply in limbo, and severely heightened risks of expropriation, displacement and expulsion.

In this respect, we would like to draw the attention of the Human Rights Council to the circumstances of the targeted communities in the Jordan Valley that we have already observed this year. Since 1 January 2020, 49 structures have been demolished in this area. 274 people were affected, including 67 displaced (42 of whom are children).² Furthermore, we have seen the confiscation of a field clinic that was meant to serve people living in the more remote areas of the Jordan Valley. During the same period, 32 military operations took place which led to 31 injuries (4 of whom are Palestinian children) and 48 arrests (9 of whom are children).

Israeli settlers living in the area continue to harass the Palestinian population; settler attacks have increased since the start of the COVID-19 crisis, despite the lockdown, movement restrictions and social distancing measures introduced to contain the pandemic. 23 incidents of harassment by settlers have been reported since 1 January 2020, mainly impacting Palestinian agricultural lands used for grazing their flocks, and preventing Palestinians from reaching their lands. Three of the 23 incidents included physical attacks which led to the injury of four people.

We recall that annexation of territory is strictly prohibited under international law,³ and that third states have an obligation neither to recognise nor render aid or assistance in maintaining that situation.⁴

We therefore call upon the Human Rights Council and the international community to:

- take concrete and immediate steps with a view to prevent annexation of any territory in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which would render the situation of the Palestinian people and communities even more precarious, and the realization of their equal human rights even more remote;
- make explicit their commitment to ensuring that any such annexation is met immediately with commensurate consequences in recognition of the serious violation of international law that it would represent;
- ensure that third states are held accountable to their obligation under international law not to recognise or aid and assist in the maintenance of territorial annexation.

¹ <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-netanyahu-says-palestinians-in-jordan-valley-won-t-get-citizenship-after-annexation-1.8879420>

² OCHAopt, <https://www.ochaopt.org/data/demolition>

³ GCIV Art 47, United Nations Charter Art. 2.

⁴ Art. 41 (2) draft articles on the Responsibility of States for internationally wrongful acts of the International Law Commission (ILC).