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

**Joint written statement* submitted by International
Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial
Discrimination, Association Ma'onah for Human Rights and
Immigration, International-Lawyers.Org, Union of Arab
Jurists, United Towns Agency for North-South Cooperation,
non-governmental organizations in special consultative
status, International Educational Development, Inc., World
Peace Council, non-governmental organizations on the roster**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is
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* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

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Occupied Palestinian Territory: the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination

Introduction

The authors of this joint statement have firmly advocated for the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, which will only be realised after Israel's illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories ends. The right to self-determination is an inalienable and universal right afforded to all people, yet it has eluded Palestinians in the occupied territories for decades.

There have been numerous United Nations resolutions affirming the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, both from the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly. Despite this, the right remains to be realised for Palestinians as long as Israel's illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories persists. In this statement, we emphasize the imminent threat to the Palestinian people's right to self-determination posed by Israel's recent unveiled plans to annex parts of the West Bank.

Plans to Annex Parts of the West Bank

In January 2020, the United States of America (United States) released its "peace to prosperity" plan, which irresponsibly endorsed Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem and the further annexation of parts of the West Bank with Israeli settlements as well as the Jordan Valley. Following suit, Israel announced plans to annex parts of the West Bank, which it has illegally occupied since 1967. Palestinian reactions were swift with condemnation of the United States' "peace to prosperity" plan as well as Israel's consequential threats to annex parts of the West Bank.

It is important to bear in mind that Israel has de facto already been annexing Palestinian land since the beginning of the occupation. Ahead of the formal declaration of the annexation and under the cover of the Covid-19 pandemic, Israel however has significantly accelerated the process. In June 2020, the number of house demolitions has increased by 250%.¹ The trend continued throughout July and August 2020². Since 1 July 2020, Israel has further intensified an ongoing arrest campaigns against students and human rights defenders, including Mahmoud Nawajaa, coordinator of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, who was arrested at his home in Ramallah on July 30th.

Recently the United States has claimed success for halting Israel's annexation plans, after brokering a so-called "historical deal" between Israel and the United Arab Emirates. Such claims are misleading, as Israel has made clear that it remains committed to the annexation and has only agreed to temporarily halt the annexation. The "historic deal" therefore is a virtual invitation to Israel to continue creating facts on the ground and does nothing whatsoever to safeguard the human rights of Palestinians or address the persistent violations.

Forced unilateral annexation of a territory violates established international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. Despite its clear illegality, Israel has proceeded with illegal unilateral forced annexations in the past, particularly the annexation of East Jerusalem in 1980 and the Syrian Golan in 1981. Israel intends to annex parts of the West Bank, and will proceed to do so, unless the international community takes urgent steps to condemn the annexation and force Israel to abandon its illegal plans.

¹ <https://www.ochaopt.org/poc/2-15-june-2020>.

² <https://icahd.org/2020/08/05/july-2020-demolition-and-displacement-report/>.

The Right to Self-Determination in Dire Straits

The annexation plan relays the clear message that Israel has no intention of ever putting an end to the illegal occupation and will do all within its power to ensure that the Palestinian people will never realise their right to self-determination. The term “annexation” itself³ is even rejected by large parts of the Israeli society. They prefer to say that Israel has a legitimate right to claim these territories and that Israel is ‘extending Israeli sovereignty’.

The boldness of such a mentality, along with Israel’s illegal plans and threats, exposes the fragility of the immense work done over long decades towards ending the illegal occupation and guaranteeing Palestinians’ right to self-determination. The numerous United Nations resolutions on the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination cannot save them if Israel proceeds with the illegal annexation of parts of the West Bank.

It is imperative that the international community, particularly the United Nations, mobilise urgently and immediately in a unified response to Israel’s plans for illegal annexation. That response must reciprocate the ferocity that the threat poses against the Palestinian people, particularly their right to self-determination. Mere words are insufficient, and now more than ever, countermeasures are required to put an end to the threats of annexation and to demand the end to the illegal occupation.

The Need for Action

The question that the Palestinian people are asking is “how much more do we have to suffer before the world comes to our aid?” The documentation of human rights violations in the occupied territories is voluminous. Reports of the United Nations special procedures capture an extreme situation demanding action.

The reports of civil society, including those belonging to the authors of this joint statement, have painted an accurate picture of Israel’s determination to continue the illegal occupation and even take matters further through annexation. Reports from human rights defenders and civil society actors within the occupied territories provide a never-ending list of violations committed by Israel on a daily basis, including war crimes and crimes against humanity. Despite the clear evidence of the ongoing violations, there is no real action by the international community or pressure placed on Israel to end the long illegal occupation. There have been many speeches and words but insufficient deeds and as time progresses, the international community’s commitment towards guaranteeing the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination becomes lip service and an unfulfilled promise never to be realised.

The international community’s failure to take appropriate and drastic action against Israel has led to the current impasse, where they now seek to advance further annexation plans contrary to international law. United States’ continued support of Israel despite the ongoing violations of human rights and international law in the occupied territories, coupled with their irresponsible “peace to prosperity” plan, has emboldened Israel to set in motion its plans to illegally annex parts of the West Bank.

Inaction is no longer an option. The international community must take appropriate steps, through all legitimate means at its disposal, to force Israel to put an end to the illegal occupation and liberate the Palestinians in the occupied territories, enabling the realisation of their right to self-determination.

Lack of Consensus on Human Rights Council Resolution 43/33

The authors of this joint statement further relay their shock, concern, and disappointment at the lack of consensus during the adoption of Human Rights Council resolution 43/33 on the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.

³ <https://www.israelhayom.com/opinions/annexation-vs-sovereignty-words-matter/>.

Australia called for a vote on the agenda Item 7 resolution on the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination. Australia and the Marshall Islands voted against the resolution with abstentions by Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Surely, the resolution on the right to self-determination is an inalienable and universal right afforded to all peoples. There is no justification for a vote against and abstention on a resolution, which recognizes the Palestinian people's right to self-determination.

Australia, the Marshall Islands, Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo have failed in their duties as members of the Human Rights Council. Their position on the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination is undeserving of their membership to the Human Rights Council. They are meant to be the gatekeepers for human rights and they have failed the Palestinian people.

Recommendations

The authors of this joint statement recommend the following:

- The Human Rights Council must condemn Israel's ongoing annexation of parts of the West Bank as a clear violation of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination;
- The Human Rights Council must demonstrate solidarity on the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination through an adoption of future resolutions on that right by consensus;
- The international community, particularly the United Nations, must continue to promote the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination;
- The international community must continue to pressure and urge Israel to put an end to the illegal occupation of the Palestinian territories;
- The international community must actively engage in the widespread dissemination of accurate information on Israel's persistent violations of international law in the occupied territories, which has deprived the Palestinian people of their right to self-determination, and to create global awareness and rally a global unified outcry for an end to the illegal occupation;
- United Nations Member States must implement effective countermeasures to pressure Israel into ending the illegal occupation and its continuing de facto annexation of the Palestinian territories;
- The international community must urge the United States to unequivocally withdraw its support of Israel's annexation plans and rescind its "Peace to Prosperity" plan.

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ), Just Atonement Inc., The Arab Lawyers Association-UK, Human Rights Defenders (HRD), The Brussels Tribunal, The Iraqi Commission for Human Rights (ICHR), Association of Humanitarian Lawyers (AHL), Association of Human Rights Defenders in Iraq (AHRD), General Federation of Iraqi Women (GFIW), Organisation for Justice & Democracy in Iraq (OJDI), The Iraqi Centre for Human Rights, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.