



DIVISION FOR
PALESTINIAN RIGHTS

Bulletin

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

November 2020
Volume XLIII, Bulletin No. 11

	<i>Contents</i>	<i>Page</i>
I.	UN Humanitarian Coordinator condemns largest demolition in years	1
II.	UN agencies and international NGOs call for the protection of Palestinian olive harvesters	2
III.	UNRWA issues emergency call for humanitarian assistance amid end-of-year shortfall	3
IV.	Secretary-General pays homage to Saeb Erekat	4
V.	Gaza aid worker must be given fair trial or released, say UN experts	4
VI.	UN Palestinian Rights Committee holds virtual event on “International Parliamentarians and the Question of Palestine”	5
VII.	Statement by UN Special Coordinator Mladenov on settlement expansion in Givat Hamatos	9
VIII.	UNOPS and UN Women support rehabilitation of women’s shelters in OPT	10
IX.	Special Coordinator Mladenov briefs Security Council	11
X.	Palestinian Rights Committee to convene special meeting for International Day of Solidarity, at UN headquarters, on 1 December 2020	15

	<i>Contents</i>	<i>Page</i>
XI.	Israeli, Palestinian leaders must uphold responsibility in realizing two-State solution, Secretary-General says in Solidarity Day message	15
XII.	UNESCO Director-General calls to strengthen Palestinian education in Solidarity Day message	17

*The Bulletin can be found in the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL) on the Internet at:
<https://www.un.org/unispal/data-collection/monthly-bulletin/>*

Disclaimer: The texts cited in this Monthly Bulletin have been reproduced in their original form. The Division for Palestinian Rights is consequently not responsible for the views, positions or discrepancies contained in these texts.



<http://www.facebook.com/UN.palestinianrights>



<http://www.twitter.com/UNISPAL>



<http://www.youtube.com/UNpalestinianrights>



<https://www.instagram.com/unispal/>

I. UN HUMANITARIAN COORDINATOR CONDEMNS LARGEST DEMOLITION IN YEARS

On 4 November, Yvonne Helle, United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator ad interim for the Occupied Palestinian Territory, issued the following [statement](#):

Yesterday, 73 people, including 41 children, were displaced when Israeli authorities demolished their homes and other structures and destroyed belongings in the Palestinian community of Humsa Al Bqai'a. Three quarters of the community's population lost their shelters, making this the largest forced displacement incident in over four years.

Humanitarian agencies visited the community and recorded 76 demolished structures, more than in any other single demolition in the past decade. The destroyed properties – including homes, animal shelters, latrines and solar panels – were essential to, livelihoods, wellbeing and dignity of community members, whose rights have been violated. Their vulnerability is further compounded by the onset of winter and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the demolished structures had been donated as humanitarian assistance.

So far in 2020, 689 structures have been demolished across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, more than in any full year since 2016, rendering 869 Palestinians homeless. The lack of Israeli-issued building permits is typically cited as a reason, even though, due to the restrictive and discriminatory planning regime, Palestinians can almost never obtain such permits. Demolitions are a key means of creating an environment designed to coerce Palestinians to leave their homes.

Located in the Jordan Valley, Humsa Al Bqai'a is one of 38 Bedouin and herding communities partially or fully located within Israeli-declared 'firing zones.' These are some of the most vulnerable communities in the West Bank, with limited access to education and health services, and to water, sanitation and electricity infrastructure.

I remind all parties that the extensive destruction of property and the forcible transfer of protected people in an occupied territory are grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention. While assuring that the humanitarian community stands ready to support all those who have been displaced or otherwise affected, I strongly reiterate our call to Israel to immediately halt unlawful demolitions.

II. UN AGENCIES AND INTERNATIONAL NGOS CALL FOR THE PROTECTION OF PALESTINIAN OLIVE HARVESTERS

On 5 November, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Food Security Sector in Palestine, and the Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA), which represents over 80 international NGOs, issued the following [statement](#):

International NGOs and UN agencies call on the Israeli authorities to protect Palestinians participating in the ongoing olive harvest season, as well as their property, from violence by Israeli settlers, and ensure that farmers can access their land freely and safely.

In the first four weeks of the season alone (7 October – 2 November), the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) recorded 33 incidents where people known or believed to be Israeli settlers attacked Palestinians or damaged their trees or produce. Twenty-five Palestinians were injured, over 1,000 olive trees were burnt or otherwise damaged, and large amounts of produce were stolen. In some incidents, Israeli Security Forces intervened in clashes between Palestinians and settlers, including by shooting tear gas canisters and rubber bullets, resulting in the injury of olive harvesters, and forcing them to leave the groves.

As in previous years, the Israeli authorities allow farmers to reach their farmland near certain settlements just 2-4 days during the entire season, citing the need to prevent friction with settlers. This not only undermines the productivity of the trees and Palestinian farmers' ability to harvest them, but also fails to prevent settlers from vandalizing trees when the farmers are away.

To access olive groves behind the Wall, farmers must obtain special permits. In recent years, most applications have been rejected for various bureaucratic reasons, such as failure to prove land ownership. Ahead of this year's season, concerns were also raised with the Israeli authorities over potential COVID-19 transmission at their overcrowded offices, where Palestinians must submit permit applications. In response, some procedural easings were recently announced: A longstanding limit on the number of times farmers can access land beyond the Wall was lifted on 24 October, 17 days into the season, following protracted legal action.

The annual olive harvest is a key economic, social and cultural event for Palestinians. Settler violence and access restrictions undermine the safety and livelihoods of many, which is more concerning than ever during the current economic crisis, brought about by the pandemic.

While the recent easings are welcome, more is required: UN agencies and international NGOs call upon the Government of Israel to abide by its obligations under international law to facilitate timely and sufficient access of Palestinians to their olive groves, to protect Palestinians and their property from violence, damage and theft, to ensure Israeli Security Forces protect farmers, and to hold perpetrators of crimes accountable.

III. UNRWA ISSUES EMERGENCY CALL FOR HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AMID END-OF-YEAR SHORTFALL

On 9 November, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) issued the following [press release](#):

Today, Commissioner-General for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) Philippe Lazzarini announced that the Agency has run out of money as of today to pay the salaries of 28,000 UNRWA staff in November. The Agency needs to raise US\$ 70 million by the end of the month if it is to pay full salaries for the months of November and December.

“Despite all of our efforts to raise the resources needed to keep our humanitarian and development programmes running, it was with great regret that I informed our staff today that we don’t have sufficient funding at this stage to honor their salaries this month,” said Lazzarini. “If additional funding is not pledged in the next weeks, UNRWA will be forced to defer partial salaries to all staff. I am deeply saddened to know that the earned salaries of our fearless, resilient social, sanitation and health-care workers on the front lines and our teachers working to ensure students’ education continue during this emergency health crisis are at risk.”

UNRWA is the main UN body responsible for delivering assistance, education, and protection to millions of Palestine refugees living in the Middle East today. The COVID-19 global pandemic has only exacerbated the insecurity that many vulnerable refugees already experience on a daily basis. UNRWA is working on the front lines of the crisis, triaging and treating patients, keeping patients safe in established quarantine centers, implementing innovative telemedicine approaches, engaging in home delivery of medicines and most importantly educating children, families, staff, and the community about how to protect themselves during this unprecedented moment.

Over the last five years, UNRWA cut US\$ 500 million out of its budget by enacting efficiency and cost-reduction measures. This has included cutting staff, stopping needed repairs and investments in our infrastructure, increasing classroom size to 50 students per teacher, and reducing life-saving humanitarian assistance at a time of rising needs.

“Today’s call to the international community comes with the utmost urgency,” continued the UNRWA Commissioner-General. “To ensure the Agency can continue its critical services and live-saving operations, it is imperative that UN Member States match their political commitment with sufficient and predictable financial contributions so that UNRWA has a reliable stream of funding to purchase medical supplies, continue fighting the COVID-19 pandemic in refugees camps, and deliver on social services and emergency response programmes. Without their income, UNRWA staff, the vast majority of whom are refugees themselves, will see their source of livelihoods disappear, and they are very likely to descend into deep poverty.”

IV. SECRETARY-GENERAL PAYS HOMAGE TO SAEB EREKAT

On 10 November, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres issued the following [statement](#):

I am deeply saddened by the death of Dr. Saeb Erekat, Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Secretary-General and Chief Negotiator for Palestinians in the Middle East Peace Process.

I am grateful to have known Dr. Erekat and to have called him my friend. He was dedicated to the peaceful pursuit of justice, dignity and the legitimate rights of Palestinians to self-determination, sovereignty and statehood.

Now is the time to continue his crucial work and end the conflict that has tragically affected the lives of so many. I reiterate my own and the United Nations' commitment to support all efforts to bring the parties together to achieve a long-awaited, just and sustainable two-State solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security.

On behalf of the United Nations, I extend our heartfelt condolences to Dr. Erekat's family, President [Mahmoud] Abbas, the people of Palestine and his many friends and supporters around the world.

V. GAZA AID WORKER MUST BE GIVEN FAIR TRIAL OR RELEASED, SAY UN EXPERTS

On 12 November, Michael Lynk, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967; Agnès Callamard, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Nils Melzer, Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; and Diego García-Sayán, Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, issued the following [statement](#):

Israel must release a former Gaza aid worker who has been in prison for more than four years without a verdict, or immediately grant him a fair trial, UN human rights experts said today.

Mohammed el-Halabi, the former Gaza director of the World Vision charity, was arrested by Israeli security forces in June 2016 on allegations that he diverted millions of dollars in development funds to armed groups in Gaza, charges he denies, and which audits have not substantiated.

“Mr el-Halabi's arrest, interrogation and trial is not worthy of a democratic state,” the experts said. “Israeli authorities must grant him the full rights of a fair trial, or else release him unconditionally.

“What is happening to Mr. el-Halabi bears no relation to the trial standards we expect from democracies and is part of a pattern where Israel uses secret evidence to indefinitely detain hundreds of Palestinians,” they said.

Israel's internal security service, Shin Bet, questioned him for 50 days after his arrest without allowing him access to a lawyer. El-Halabi says he was tortured, deprived of sleep and hung from a ceiling during this time. His lawyer says the Israeli prosecutor repeatedly offered him a plea deal, but he rejected it and maintained his innocence.

"It's particularly disturbing that the prosecution is relying upon confessions allegedly obtained by force while he was denied access to a lawyer, and on testimony from undercover informers," the experts said.

Since his arrest and imprisonment, el-Halabi has attended more than 140 court hearings, all behind closed doors. His lawyer has been prevented from reviewing Israeli prosecution evidence, or was given only limited access with secrecy restrictions.

"These fundamentally unfair practices stain the justice system of any state," the experts said. "We demand that Israel adhere to the requirements of the international rule of law."

The international rule of law requires that an individual who is arrested must only be detained if there are reasonable suspicions that she or he has committed a recognised crime, and the charges and the evidence must be clearly laid out so defendants know what they have to answer. Comprehensive audits of the financial records by World Vision and by the Australian government, which donated the money, failed to turn up any misappropriation of funds or other wrongdoing.

Under the international rule of law, a defendant is entitled to swift access to a lawyer and to timely criminal proceedings that are fair and impartial. Any defendant must be presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty, and is entitled to cross-examine witnesses and to present her or his own witnesses.

"Even in security trials, these fundamental rights must be respected," the experts said. "Unfortunately, Mr el-Halabi has been put in the position where he is required to refute allegations against him without knowing the details or who the accusers are. Keeping him in the dark like this shifts the burden of proof to the defendant, and is a fundamental violation of the right to a fair trial."

VI. UN PALESTINIAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE HOLDS VIRTUAL EVENT ON "INTERNATIONAL PARLIAMENTARIANS AND THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE"

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP) held the virtual event on 12 November, reflected in the following [Chair summary](#):

The virtual event "**International Parliamentarians and the Question of Palestine**" was convened on 12 November 2020 under the auspices of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP). The event was moderated by Ambassador Cheikh Niang, Chair of the Committee and Permanent Representative of Senegal to the United Nations. It consisted of an opening session with remarks by the Chair and Minister Riyadh Mansour, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations. The panel was comprised of Ms. María Arena, Member of the European Parliament and Chair of the Subcommittee on Human

Rights; Mr. Mandla Mandela, Member of the National Assembly of South Africa; and Ms. Betty McCollum, Member of the United States Congress. Member States participated in the two-hour event on WebEx, which was also livestreamed on UNTV. Viewers watched the conference on UN WebTV and had an opportunity to make comments and pose questions to the panellists on the Committee's social media pages and via WhatsApp.

At the opening, **Ambassador Niang** reiterated the important role played by national and regional parliaments as well as interparliamentary unions towards resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through shaping public opinion, formulating public policies and upholding international legitimacy in support of a comprehensive and just settlement of the question of Palestine. Parliamentarians promoted diplomatic recognition of the State of Palestine, pressed for the implementation of international law by the executive branches in their respective countries and built on the advocacy of civil society organizations to put forward draft bills. The Chair referred to the example of the United States grassroots movements advocating for the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and how recent open letters from members of the US Congress have served to sensitize on the looming *de jure* annexation of territory in the occupied West Bank and on the importance to reconsider the US military aid to Israel in light of its human rights violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. He also mentioned efforts by the Members of the European Parliament to call on the European Union member states to pressure Israel to end the occupation and its settlement policy and to lift the Gaza blockade, and those of South African parliamentarians in providing technical guidance to Palestinian civil society organizations on advocating at the UN Human Rights Council for the revival of the UN Centre Against Apartheid to address the situation in Palestine.

In his introductory remarks, **Minister Mansour** recalled the Committee's respect for the role of parliamentarians with whom special conferences had been held throughout the years, in addition to Committee delegation meetings with parliamentarians in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. He lauded parliamentarians' efforts in advocating for the recognition of the State of Palestine, including in the European Union, and highlighted the importance for the Committee to continue engaging with all branches of governments in order to open meaningful doors for a political process leading to a peaceful settlement between Israel and Palestine in accordance with the relevant UN resolutions and based on the two-State solution on the pre-1967 borders with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine. Ambassador Mansour expressed his hope that the Committee would be given the opportunity to engage with the US Congress to work together to seek an end to Israeli occupation.

María Arena considered making the fulfilment of human rights for the Palestinian people a collective challenge. As the Chair of the EU parliamentary Sub-Committee on Human Rights (DROI), the question of Palestine remained a priority. The human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) was planned to be discussed soon in the presence of Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territory Occupied Since 1967, Michael Lynk, and prominent civil society organizations such as B'Tselem and the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies. She also underlined her responsibility as the Chair of DROI to follow up on individual human rights cases, brought to her by civil society, and the use of silent diplomacy to address them. Ms. Arena insisted that it was a responsibility for parliamentarians to keep the Palestinian issue on the global agenda, including: the status of refugees and assistance to UNRWA; administrative detentions without charges, particularly child detainees, by the Israeli authorities;

the right to a fair trial based on international standards; the Gaza blockade exacerbated by the pandemic; as well as the Israeli disregard of international law and unilateral actions undermining multilateralism.

Addressing the differentiation policy of the European Union, she referred to the EU Commission's Interpretative Notice of 12 November 2015 on the indication of origins of goods from the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967. These guidelines were not about the prohibition of importing Israeli settlement products into the EU but about labelling Israeli products in line with the EU legislation on consumer protection and about implementing EU tariff agreements on Israeli products made in Israel and not those originating from the illegal settlements. As the former Rapporteur for the Trade Committee on the Relations with Israel she had followed up on the implementation on these guidelines, which proved to be challenging because customs authorities cannot verify the origin of products and there was no political will from Member States to do so. Technical agreements on postal codes from Israel to locate these products proved inefficient.

As the main clause in the Association Agreement between the EU and Israel stipulated that relations of the EU with other states were to be based on the respect of human rights and democratic principles, Ms. Arena had to consequently call for the suspension of such an agreement following Israel's disregard for UN Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), adding that there was no support for such a measure from EU Member States as a whole. She concluded with recommending the recognition of the State of Palestine by all EU Member States, and other countries as a first step in the peace process as well as the respect for UN SCR 2334 (2016), which includes the differentiation policy. She welcomed the publication of the UN database on businesses engaged in the illegal settlements, which should encourage Member States to adopt due diligence laws on the issue and recommended its annual update as a means to fight human rights violations and grave breaches of international law in the OPT. Lastly, she called for partnerships between the EU parliamentary committees working on the question of Palestine and the UN Palestinian Rights Committee.

Mandla Mandela spoke of the opportune moment for a United Nations panel event on international parliamentarians and the question of Palestine following the US elections as the prospects of a return to multilateralism would strengthen the UN in its role of bringing a just world order and universal rights as envisioned in its founding Charter. He criticized the policy of unilateralism advocated by the US administration on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for the past four years, particularly the unilateral declaration of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, sending shockwaves to all parliaments in the world, and applauded the initiative of the Committee to condemn such a decision and have it declared illegal. He also criticized the drastic budget cuts undergone by UNRWA, because of the loss of US funding, and their devastating impact on the over 5 million Palestine refugees relying on its schools, health care and social services, while the US administration was increasing its military aid to Israel. Parliamentarians across the world had also condemned the 2020 US peace plan because it called for the permanent annexation of Palestinian territory in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Referring to the situation of South Africa in the apartheid era, he highlighted the unwavering support received at the time from neighbouring countries, and criticised recent Member State decisions to normalise relationships with Israel calling instead for the isolation of Israel – akin to the isolation of South Africa in the late apartheid era – until it met the conditions conducive to a just and fair settlement.

In line with his grandfather Nelson Mandela's saying that "only free men can negotiate", he called for the release of all political prisoners, the right of return of Palestine refugees and diaspora, the freeze of all illegal settlements and the return of lands to their rightful owners. He called on the Arab countries, who had stood by South Africa in its struggle against the apartheid regime, including through a boycott, to return to the same principled stand vis-à-vis Israel. He also called on his fellow parliamentarians to rally around the Palestinian cause, as they have the power to translate policies into concrete initiatives by their respective governments and inform regional blocs in support of the Palestinian struggle and concluded with Nelson Mandela's quote that "The greatest moral issue of our time is the struggle of the Palestinian people."

Betty McCollum spoke about her work in the US House of Representatives as part of a small group of Members of Congress who vocally support Palestinian rights. She criticized that the current US administration had abandoned the Palestinian people and inflicted hardship on them through the expulsion of their diplomats from Washington, D.C., and cutting off economic assistance to the OPT and of funding to UNRWA. The US government had also abandoned universal values and the international consensus on advancing a just Middle East peace and with these actions caused significant damage to longstanding relationships. She believed that with the upcoming Biden administration, a change for the better was possible, but it would require a prioritization of a respectful and substantive diplomatic re-engagement with the Palestinian Government and civil society, as well as addressing questions like the Israeli Government's level of interest in a just peace, following decades of military occupation and settlement expansion, and the prospect of self-determination for the Palestinian people.

She shared how her interest in promoting Palestinian rights in the Congress had been triggered by a UNICEF report on children in Israeli military detention, highlighting the ill treatment of Palestinian children in the Israeli military detention system as widespread, systematic and institutionalized. Learning about this system of child detention as a weapon of military occupation imposing collective trauma and control over Palestinian families led her to introduce the legislation "Promoting Human Rights for Palestinian Children Living Under Israeli Military Occupation" (H.R. 2407) in 2019, as the first bill ever introduced in the US Congress to promote or protect Palestinian rights. The legislation, which is unlikely to pass Congress, would place human rights conditions on US security assistance to any country, including Israel, and prohibits US tax dollars from being used to support or enable the military detention of Palestinian children.

As another issue of great concern, she mentioned the threat of further Israeli annexation of Palestinian lands and for which in August 2020 she had introduced the "Israeli Annexation Nonrecognition Act" (H.R. 8050) aimed to prohibit any US government or department from extending assistance or legitimacy to any area in the OPT annexed by Israel. While her actions remained limited, nonetheless these two bills send a clear message to her colleagues and the American and Palestinian peoples that there were American political leaders in the US Congress, where Palestinian rights were generally ignored, who did respect the rights and dignity of the Palestinian people. As parliamentarians had the power to shift the discourse and promote rights respecting policies and foster constructive dialogues, she welcomed the opportunity to collaborate and work with parliamentary colleagues and the UN Palestinian Rights Committee.

During the **Question-and-Answer** session, **Alia Bouran**, President Emeritus of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM), introduced her organization as an assembly

of 34 parliamentarians with a unique balance of representation from the two sides of the Mediterranean, giving it credibility in terms of its work, messaging and narrative. Referring to a meeting in Malta in 2010, she proposed a future joint effort between PAM and the

Committee to bring together parliamentarians from the Euro-Mediterranean region and the wider Arab world to signal strong unity and support to peaceful negotiations for a just solution to the Palestine question.

In the ensuing discussion, **Ambassador Pedro Luis Pedroso Cuesta**, Permanent Representative of Cuba to the United Nations, spoke of the relevance of the event and interventions of the three panellists in contributing to raise awareness on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, which remain the only way to a lasting Middle East peace. He reiterated the condemnation of the Israeli annexation plan by the Foreign Relations Commission of the National Assembly of the People's Power of the Republic of Cuba and the need for a just, comprehensive and peaceful resolution based on the two-State solution and UN resolutions. The Deputy Permanent Representative of Egypt also shared the same position of his country's House of Representatives at the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union and asked about existing initiatives between the panellists and the latter and potential for synergy of efforts. A representative of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in Geneva raised the issue of Palestinian parliamentarians detained in Israeli prisons and asked international parliamentarians to address it within their respective constituencies.

The panellists emphasized the importance of collaboration between the European parliament and interparliamentary unions, for example with the Pan-African Parliament. Such a collaboration would serve to promote a joint implementation of international law and UN resolutions on the question of Palestine. The panellists also spoke of mobilizing support through different structures including civil society organizations, interfaith groups and regional parliamentary structures, to better engage with Arab States and mobilize action.

Ambassador Niang closed the event.

VII. STATEMENT BY UN SPECIAL COORDINATOR MLADENOV ON SETTLEMENT EXPANSION IN GIVAT HAMATOS

On 16 November, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Nickolay Mladenov, issued the following [statement](#):

“I am very concerned by the decision of the Israeli authorities yesterday to open the bidding process for the construction of Givat Hamatos.

If built, it would further consolidate a ring of settlements between Jerusalem and Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank. It would significantly damage prospects for a future contiguous Palestinian State and for achieving a negotiated two-State solution based on the 1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both states.

Settlement construction is illegal under international law and I call on the authorities to reverse this step.

VIII. UNOPS AND UN WOMEN SUPPORT REHABILITATION OF WOMEN'S SHELTERS IN OPT

On 18 November, the UN Office for Project Services and UN Women issued the following [press release](#):

As part of the Government of Canada funded HAYA Joint Programme, UN Women and UNOPS, in close cooperation with national partners, supported the rehabilitation of four shelters delivering services for women and girls who are at risk or survivors of violence. These shelters are located in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, including the Mehwar Centre for the Protection and Empowerment of Women and Families in Bethlehem, Al Bayt Al Aman in Nablus, Bait Al Tawarea in Jericho, and the Hayat Centre in Gaza.

Following rehabilitation, the shelters are now equipped with child-friendly spaces; are more inclusive, gender sensitive and environmentally friendly; and offer a higher level of quality services to address the needs of women and girls.

According to a [UN Women study](#), support for shelters is especially needed during the COVID-19 crisis. With the pandemic and subsequent rapid increase in cases of violence, shelters and support centres worldwide are closing or struggling to take on new cases, provide support for existing cases, and maintain necessary operating standards.

“Protecting women and girls from violence, and supporting services to survivors, is a global priority for the Government of Canada”, says Ms. Robin Wettlaufer, the Representative of Canada in Ramallah. “These shelters will provide critical services, at a time when we have seen an increase in gender-based violence due to challenges posed by COVID-19.”

“Crisis and emergencies, including pandemics, help us better identify issues and take targeted steps to improve women’s access to justice, protection, and security services,” says Mr. Tokumitsu Kobayashi, UNOPS Director in Palestine. “In this context, UNOPS support to UN Women aiming to rehabilitate and refurbish these shelters reflects our commitment to creating a gender-responsive physical structure. A structure that empowers women, girls, or disadvantaged groups by responding to their diverse needs in society.”

As a result of this support and rehabilitation work, almost 250 women annually have been provided with safety, food, hygiene, health care, and education in the four shelters, in addition to about 600 women who receive annual psychosocial and legal support in Gaza. The shelters are now better equipped to continue providing quality services to survivors of violence and help their reintegration to society.

"We are grateful for the rehabilitation and refurbishment work done by UNOPS and UN Women," says Ikhlas Swefan, Al Bayt Al Amen Nablus Shelter Manager. "The improvements have not only changed the employees' working environment for the better but also positively impacted the morale of the women we host. This work also took women and girls' diverse needs into consideration, helping them feel safe and empowered in a space that is more inclusive, and has been equipped with renewable energy technology."

Shelters and other essential services are on the frontline of response to ending violence against women and girls during COVID-19 as they continue their duty of care for survivors of violence. Through the HAYA Joint Programme and its partners, technical and financial support to these shelters will continue for the next two years.

“Violence against women is one of the most widespread human rights violations, even before COVID-19,” explains Ms. Maryse Guimond, UN Women Special Representative in Palestine. “From the onset of the pandemic, this violence has escalated around the world. Shelters, helplines and crisis centres, as well as civil society and women’s rights organizations are needed more than ever. By working together and prioritizing essential services for survivors, Palestinian women and girls can access to the protection and support needed during these challenging times.”

In Palestine, one in three women (29 per cent) has experienced one form of violence by their husbands. 44 per cent of girls aged 12 to 17 years old have been subjected to physical violence, according to the [Preliminary Results of the Violence Survey in the Palestinian Society 2019](#). Since the outbreak of COVID-19, this has intensified, further increasing the need to end violence against women and girls in Palestine and worldwide.

IX. SPECIAL COORDINATOR MLADENOV BRIEFS THE SECURITY COUNCIL

On 18 November, the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process briefed the Security Council. Excerpts from the [briefing](#) are as below:

Allow me first to extend my deepest condolences for their profound loss to the family of former Palestinian Chief Negotiator and Secretary-General of the PLO, Dr. Saeb Erekat, to the Palestinian Government and to the Palestinian people.

Saeb, as we all know, dedicated his life to the peaceful pursuit of justice, dignity and the legitimate rights of Palestinians. He never gave up on negotiations as the only means of ending the occupation and establishing an independent, sovereign and democratic Palestinian State. He stood proudly and firmly for his people.

Sadly, I must also extend my condolences to the families and colleagues of the seven peacekeepers of the Multinational Force and Observers who lost their lives in service last week.

May they all rest in peace.

We meet today as Palestinians and Israelis continue their efforts to prevent and control the spread of the deadly COVID-19 virus. After weeks of declining numbers, however, active cases are again on the rise.

Gaza remains the most immediate and pressing concern. Its crumbling infrastructure, poor living conditions and fragile healthcare system make it ill-equipped to face a major spike in cases.

Already affected by severe movement and access restrictions, cycles of violent escalation and years of humanitarian and socio-economic calamity, the two million Palestinians living within Gaza’s confines would face catastrophic consequences from a major outbreak.

For these reasons, I welcome the Palestinian Authority's (PA) decision to restart civilian and security coordination with Israel. I express my appreciation to Israel for confirming that existing bilateral agreements continue to govern relations between both parties, particularly in the context of economic, security and civilian affairs.

I want to thank all, particularly our Palestinian and Israeli colleagues as well as the entire team at UNSCO and our partners for working hard and putting forward creative and constructive ideas over the past six months so that this significant challenge could be overcome.

I have previously expressed hope that recognition of the interdependence of Israelis and Palestinians could, with political will and leadership, translate into tangible progress towards a resolution of the conflict. Both sides should understand the importance of respecting the validity and continuing force of the framework that they have agreed to govern their relations. Although the existing agreements fall short of meeting the aspirations for peace, security and statehood for the Palestinian people, they provide the basic foundation without which even the beginnings of a return to meaningful negotiations will not be possible.

Eight months into the pandemic, Palestinian unemployment levels are alarmingly high – 121,000 Palestinians lost their jobs in the wake of the first lockdown and employment figures declined by 17 percent in Gaza. Some 40 percent of Palestinian households lost more than half their income in this period and food insecurity rates have soared. The most recent reports suggest any recovery will be slow and partial. Women and children continue to bear the brunt of the combined effect of the pandemic and the socio-economic crisis across the OPT, facing an increased risk of violence within their homes and limited access to support services.

To address the emergency, the United Nations and its partners have continued to provide critical humanitarian and development assistance.

Since the start of the pandemic, close to 85,000 tests and advanced laboratory equipment components have been delivered, as well as over 5.5 million items for infection protection and control. UN agencies and partners have also delivered dozens of ventilators, monitors, beds and other crucial hospital equipment.

In addition, the UN has supported several quarantine facilities in Gaza with non-food items, bolstered public communication efforts and trained healthcare professionals.

Temporary arrangements by the UN and implemented by the World Health Organization continue to facilitate both the transfer of medical patients out of Gaza and the importation of humanitarian supplies for the Palestinian people. I hope that with the restarting of coordination these additional measures will no longer be necessary.

I again highlight the Secretary-General's call for Israeli and Palestinian authorities to re-examine and improve the nature of their economic relationship. It is as timely as ever and in the interest of both sides to take concrete steps toward addressing this common challenge. The United Nations stands ready to assist in this process.

All sides can take immediate steps to facilitate the movement of goods in and out of Gaza and to allow trade to increase between the Gaza Strip, Israel and the occupied West Bank.

When health conditions allow, Israel can issue a meaningful number of permits for Palestinian workers and traders from Gaza. Israel should also take steps to advance the many outstanding fiscal files and ensure that sufficient revenues are transferred to the Palestinian Government each month – a minimum of 500 million shekels - to maintain its operations and address the COVID19 crisis.

While its budget is currently reduced to a minimum, the Palestinian Authority should consider steps to reform its own expenditures, in line with World Bank recommendations, so that it can more effectively provide basic income support to all vulnerable households.

I take note of ongoing discussions on the prospect of Palestinian reconciliation and sincerely hope the parties will be able to overcome obstacles to holding long-overdue elections.

In a concerning development, on 3 November Israeli authorities carried out the most extensive demolition in the occupied West Bank in the past decade, destroying over 70 structures, including homes, in the Bedouin village of Humsa Al Bqai'a, in Area C. Seventy-three people were displaced, including 41 children. Their vulnerability is compounded by the onset of winter and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Home demolitions in East Jerusalem also resumed during the reporting period after a pause of several weeks.

In total, 153 Palestinian-owned structures in Area C and East Jerusalem were demolished or seized. They displaced 96 Palestinians, including 22 women and 51 children, and affecting some 1,400 others. The demolitions and seizures were executed due to the lack of Israeli-issued building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain. In addition, three structures were demolished by their owners to avoid the payment of additional fines.

On 28 October, Israeli authorities cut a donor-funded pipe supplying water to 14 herding communities in the Masafer Yatta area of Hebron, home to about 1,400 people. Amid the pandemic, depriving these communities of water could have particularly grave health consequences.

On 2 November, the Israeli Government informed the High Court of Justice that during the next four months it would not demolish the Bedouin village of Khan al-Ahmar. In its explanation, the Government cited COVID-19 restrictions and “additional considerations” as reasons for the delay and said that it would use the additional time to exhaust efforts to reach an agreement with residents.

I reiterate my call on Israeli authorities to cease demolitions, seizures of Palestinian property and efforts to relocate communities in the occupied West Bank. Such actions are contrary to international law and could undermine the chances for the establishment of a viable, contiguous Palestinian state.

In another concerning development, on 15 November, Israeli authorities opened the bidding process for construction of 1,200 housing units in the Givat Hamatos settlement. If built, this project would further consolidate a ring of settlements between Jerusalem and Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank. It would also significantly damage prospects for a future contiguous Palestinian State, and for achieving a negotiated two-State solution based on the 1967 lines, with Jerusalem as the capital of both states. I call for this step to be reversed.

Sporadic violent incidents unfortunately continued in parts of the OPT during the reporting period as well.

In Gaza, militants fired two rockets and released two incendiary balloons towards Israel during the reporting period, with no injuries reported. The IDF fired five shells and missiles into Gaza in retaliation, also no injuries were reported.

Turning to the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, one Palestinian was killed and 21 injured, including eight children, in clashes, attacks, search and arrest operations, and other incidents. One Israeli soldier was injured in these incidents.

On 30 October, Israeli soldiers opened fire at a Palestinian vehicle travelling near Jenin, injuring three children. The circumstances surrounding the incident remain unclear, with the IDF claiming the vehicle posed a threat.

On 4 November, an off-duty officer in the Palestinian Security Forces, who according to the IDF shot towards Israeli soldiers, was shot dead near Huwwara, south of Nablus.

On 8 November, a Palestinian man, who reportedly attempted to carry out a stabbing attack near Hebron, was injured and arrested by the ISF.

Meanwhile, settlers perpetrated some 17 attacks against Palestinians, resulting in the injury of one child and damage to property.

Palestinians perpetrated 23 attacks against Israeli settlers and other civilians in the West Bank, resulting in four injuries and damage to property.

As the olive harvest season continues, there were incidents of settlers damaging Palestinian olive groves and agricultural fields. Over 190 trees were burnt, or otherwise damaged and large amounts of produce were reportedly taken.

On a positive note, as in previous years, hundreds of Palestinian and Israeli volunteers joined Palestinian farmers across the West Bank to assist in the olive harvest and provide protection from harassment and violence.

All perpetrators of violence must be held accountable.

As of today, UNRWA's funding shortfall stands at a staggering USD 115 million for November and December. For the first time, UNRWA forecasts that it cannot pay salaries and expenses in full, impacting 28,000 staff.

UNRWA plays an essential part as the main provider of direct and often life-saving assistance to many of the 5.7 million Palestinian refugees. To sustain crucial assistance in the region, including food for 1.5 million destitute refugees in Gaza and Syria, frontline medical care vital to the fight against COVID-19 in 58 refugee camps, and education for over half a million students, UNRWA urgently needs USD 70 million to meet immediate obligations.

I take the opportunity to, once again, urge the international community to act swiftly and provide the necessary resources for UNRWA to continue delivering its vital services, helping prevent serious risks to stability that the region simply cannot afford.

Moving briefly to regional developments, let me begin by welcoming the first visit of the Foreign Minister of Bahrain to Israel today to meet with Israeli leaders and visiting U.S. Secretary of State Pompeo and to sign several bilateral agreements. I agree with the statement of the Minister earlier today that the future of peace in the Middle East requires a resolution of the Israel-Palestinian conflict and hope that this development will also contribute to that effect.

...

In closing, I wish to emphasize that Israeli and Palestinian leaders have a responsibility to explore every opening that can restore hope in the two-State solution. We, in the international community must help them resolve the conflict in line with United Nations resolutions, international law and prior agreements.

As I have outlined, with the necessary political will, there are practical steps that can be taken by all. Steps that can begin to fundamentally change the dynamics between the two sides and set the stage for an eventual return to dialogue.

This work must begin in earnest and be accompanied by concrete actions to create a legitimate political horizon.

It is imperative that the Middle East Quartet, key Arab partners, and Israeli and Palestinian leaders build upon recent developments in the region and urgently re-engage on returning to the path of meaningful negotiations.

The United Nations remains committed to supporting Israelis and Palestinians in their efforts to return to a legitimate political process that will deliver the long-overdue peace both sides require and deserve.

**X. PALESTINIAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE TO CONVENE
SPECIAL MEETING FOR INTERNATIONAL DAY OF SOLIDARITY,
AT UN HEADQUARTERS, ON 1 DECEMBER 2020**

On 24 November, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People issued the following [statement](#):

The United Nations marks the passage of General Assembly resolution [181 \(ii\)](#) of 1947 every year as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, with special meetings and events at Headquarters in New York, and at the UN offices in Vienna, Geneva, Nairobi and elsewhere, organized on or around 29 November.

The 2020 International Day will be observed on 1 December with special meetings. At the UN Headquarters in New York, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, a body of the United Nations General Assembly promoting the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and independence, will convene high-level officials of

Member States, the Secretary-General, intergovernmental organizations and representatives of civil society.

They are expected to make statements on the question of Palestine and attend, at 10 a.m., the official launch of a virtual exhibit focusing on the Wall built in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which has been ruled illegal by the International Court of Justice in its advisory opinion of 9 July 2004. The exhibition explores this through the words of various advocates and public personalities, and images from artists and human rights activists who have used the wall as a canvas to express their solidarity with the Palestinian people. These events will be broadcast live via UN Web TV [<http://webtv.un.org>] and the exhibition will be available on the United Nations website: <https://www.un.org/unispal/2020-solidarity-day/>.

Activities on the occasion will also be organized by governmental bodies and civil society organizations, in cooperation with United Nations information centres around the world.

The General Assembly will convene on 2 December 2020 for its annual debate on the question of Palestine and is expected to adopt draft resolutions pertaining to this question.

For further information, please visit: <https://www.un.org/unispal/>. Viewers are encouraged to use the hashtag #Rights4Palestine and #PalestineDay on their social media and to tag the Committee's social media pages using Twitter and Instagram: @UNISPAL, Facebook: @UN.palestinianrights.

There will be live updates from the Committee's Twitter account and Facebook page.

XI. ISRAELI, PALESTINIAN LEADERS MUST UPHOLD RESPONSIBILITY IN REALIZING TWO-STATE SOLUTION SECRETARY-GENERAL SAYS IN SOLIDARITY DAY MESSAGE

On 27 November, Secretary-General António Guterres issued the following [message](#) on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People:

As the United Nations marks its seventy-fifth anniversary, the question of Palestine remains distressingly unresolved. The COVID-19 pandemic has decimated the Palestinian economy and undermined the already fragile humanitarian, economic and political situation in Gaza, further entrenched by crippling restrictions on movement and access. Meanwhile, prospects for a viable two-State solution are growing more distant. A host of factors continue to cause great misery, including: the expansion of illegal settlements, a significant spike in the demolition of Palestinian homes and structures, violence and continued militant activity.

Israeli and Palestinian leaders have a responsibility to explore every opening to restore hope and achieve a twoState solution. I remain committed to supporting Palestinians and Israelis to resolve the conflict and end the occupation in line with relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements in pursuit of the vision of two States – Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous and sovereign Palestine – living side by side in peace and security, within secure and recognized borders, on the basis of the pre1967 borders, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States.

I hope that recent developments will encourage Palestinian and Israeli leaders to re-engage in meaningful negotiations, with the support of the international community, and will create opportunities for regional cooperation. We must also do all we can to ease the suffering of the Palestinian people.

I am extremely concerned by the financial situation facing the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The agency plays an essential role as the main provider of direct and often lifesaving assistance to many of the 5.7 million Palestine refugees. I appeal to all Member States to urgently contribute to enable UNRWA to meet the critical humanitarian and development needs of Palestine refugees during the pandemic.

On this International Day of Solidarity, I also extend my heartfelt condolences on the tragic passing of Dr. Saeb Erakat, Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Secretary-General and Chief Negotiator for Palestinians in the Middle East Peace Process.

Let us together resolve to renew our commitment to the Palestinian people in their quest to achieve their inalienable rights and build a future of peace, dignity, justice and security.

XII. UNESCO DIRECTOR-GENERAL CALLS TO STRENGTHEN PALESTINIAN EDUCATION IN SOLIDARITY DAY MESSAGE

On 29 November, Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), issued the following [message](#) on the occasion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People:

“On this International Day of Solidarity, let us reaffirm our commitment to upholding the rights of the Palestinian people.”¹

These words by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, capture the spirit of the 29 November day of solidarity. It is an opportunity to reaffirm the support of the international community for the Palestinian people in its hopes for a free and peaceful future.

This call for solidarity is even more necessary today because of the terrible effects of the pandemic on the most vulnerable among us. The health crisis has compounded the already harsh economic and social conditions of the Palestinian people, marked by very high poverty and unemployment rates and a fall in per capita GDP for the third consecutive year.²

There is then an urgent need to recall that assistance provided by the international community is still vital for the Palestinians and essential to the setting up of resilient, thriving communities.

As the context is particularly dire for Palestinian youth, who run the risk of falling behind in matters of education and economic opportunities, UNESCO’s work is based on a conviction and a commitment.

¹<https://www.un.org/en/observances/International-day-of-solidarity-with-the-palestinian-people>

² <https://news.un.org/fr/story/2020/09/1076702>

The conviction is that young Palestinians hold the keys to becoming agents of peace and mutual understanding.

The commitment is that UNESCO will continue to work in Palestine towards the development and civic engagement of its young people through the fostering of creativity and culture.

For UNESCO, this mission finds its full meaning in the promotion of education as the cornerstone of human dignity. We must therefore strengthen the Palestinian education system so as to ensure broader participation of girls and young people from rural areas. Inclusive quality educational programmes, and intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding are the means by which young Palestinians will gain the skills necessary to meet the challenges of today and of the future.

Not only in this crucial area, but also regarding freedom of expression, culture and science, our cooperation with other United Nations agencies must continue and strengthen.

This Day of Solidarity thus affords us the opportunity to underscore our common commitment to accompany the Palestinian people in building a lasting peace.
