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Illegal Israeli actions in Occupied East Jerusalem and the
rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Security Council
Seventy-sixth year

Identical letters dated 25 February 2021 from the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council

I must again draw attention to the critical situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, due to escalating violations by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people.

Just over a week has passed since our most recent letter, and not a day has gone by where Israel has not exploited the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crisis to intensify its violations as the world remains consumed by the pandemic. These manifestations of belligerent occupation are designed to inflict severe suffering through acts of violence, dispossession, displacement, dehumanization and other forms of calibrated oppression, which are part and parcel of a blatant colonization and annexation drive in grave breach of the law.

We must recall that today marks the twenty-seventh anniversary of the massacre perpetrated at the Ibrahimi Mosque in Al-Khalil (Hebron) by a terrorist Israeli settler, who killed 29 Palestinians worshipping at dawn prayers, among them children and elderly, and wounded dozens of others. That terrorist settler's presence and lawlessness were aided and abetted by the occupying Power, as it continues to do to this day with the hundreds of thousands of settlers it continues to transfer to Occupied Palestine, in grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention and in violation of obligations under Security Council resolutions, including resolution [904 \(1994\)](#), in which the Council called, inter alia, for the disarming of Israeli settlers and militias and for measures to be taken to guarantee the safety and protection of Palestinian civilians.

The Ibrahimi Mosque massacre was a turning point that was fully exploited by Israel to close off parts of the Old City of Al-Khalil to Palestinians, including Shuhada Street, where hundreds of shops were closed by military order and remain so to this day, choking socioeconomic life and movement in the city, and to divide the city and to divide the Mosque itself, all for the protection and privilege of the extremist group of fanatical Jewish settlers illegally transferred there. Such methodical and brutal



colonization continues to this day all over the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, as Israel further entrenches its illegal occupation of nearly 54 years.

For decades now, Israel has tried to normalize its illegal policies of home demolitions and forced displacement and its construction of colonial settlements in Palestine under countless pretexts, ranging from “security concerns”, to settler “claims” to properties, to the absence of construction permits, to Biblical claims as justifications for these crimes. Yet nothing can be considered normal about such abnormal, immoral and illegal acts and their grave impact on the people targeted, children, women and men alike.

In this regard, we must draw attention to the situation in occupied East Jerusalem, where countless Palestinian families face forced eviction from their homes to make way for Israeli settlers. These illegal actions are proceeding apace with the support of Israeli occupation courts, which continue to render “judicial” decisions reinforcing such crimes against Palestinian families and claiming that the evictions are necessary to enable Jews to “recover” property, since Israel’s establishment. However, the same law does not apply to Palestinians, who were and remain uprooted from and dispossessed of their homes.

Israeli courts rejected appeals by Palestinian families in the Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighbourhoods against forced eviction from their homes in favour of the state-backed Nahalat Shimon and Ateret Cohanim settler groups. The families, who have lived in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan since long before Israel’s establishment and the start of the occupation, are facing decades-old campaigns by settler groups that enjoy the automatic support of the occupation’s so-called legal system.

The impending mass displacement campaigns in occupied East Jerusalem order Palestinian families in Sheikh Jarrah to abandon their homes by 2 May 2021, and families in Silwan, by August 2021. According to the Israeli non-governmental organization (NGO) Ir Amim, if the evictions are not halted, over a thousand Palestinians from Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan could be uprooted from their homes and communities and supplanted by settlers, amounting to a form of forcible transfer. These illegal campaigns aim to replicate the situation in Al-Khalil, where settler enclaves are encroaching on Palestinians inside the city itself, imposing an unbearable reality of oppression, segregation and discrimination, and facilitating annexation plans.

Such practices, which promote and perpetuate the supremacy and privilege of one group over another, a blatantly discriminatory and apartheid practice, constitute grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention and serious violations of Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, which prohibit any attempts to alter the character, demographic composition and status of the Holy City of Jerusalem. We recall Security Council resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#), in which the Council, inter alia, condemned “all measures aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and status of the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, including, inter alia, the construction and expansion of settlements, transfer of Israeli settlers, confiscation of land, demolition of homes and displacement of Palestinian civilians, in violation of international humanitarian law and relevant resolutions”.

In addition to the ongoing and repeated displacement and trauma inflicted on Palestinian families, including 146 people, among them 83 children, in Humsa Al Bqai’a in the Jordan Valley, and the blatant destruction of humanitarian aid to these vulnerable families, the occupying Power persists with home demolitions and evictions in other parts of Palestine.

On 15 February, another two Palestinian families in Jerusalem were forced to self-demolish their own homes in order to avoid the heavy demolition fees imposed

by the occupation. One of those families was the Awadallah family, who had to self-demolish their two-story home, built in Shu'fat over 20 years ago, after numerous unsuccessful attempts to obtain an occupation-issued permit. On the same day, Israeli authorities issued demolition orders for more Palestinian homes in Jerusalem; they also ordered the halting of construction on three homes in Al Khader, south of Bethlehem, under the pretext that they were built without permits, preparing to demolish those homes as well. According to the Israeli NGO Breaking the Silence, Israel has rejected nearly 99 per cent of building permit applications submitted by Palestinians over the years, making it impossible for Palestinians to build and develop their communities in their own land.

These systematic violations are clearly part of Israel's land grab and settlement expansion schemes, which continue unabated and have been accompanied by the transfer of more settlers and their increasing violence and extremism against the Palestinian population. These crimes are officially supported by the Israeli government and numerous organizations, including those claiming to be "charities", such as the Jewish National Fund (JNF), which recently decided to "officially authorize" the purchase of occupied Palestinian land in order to accelerate settlement expansion. As stated by the United States-based Foundation for Middle East Peace, "Notwithstanding the significant controversy this 'new' policy has provoked, the reality is that the JNF has long worked in support of settlements. What is different now is that, where in the past the JNF preferred to leave its settlement-related activities deliberately obscured, under the new policy the JNF would openly claim and promote its support for settlements."

Israel's annexation agenda is further exposed by its construction of hundreds of roads, tunnels and overpasses designed to serve settlers across the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. For instance, one of Israel's ongoing annexation projects includes the construction of the segregated and so-called "Sovereignty Road", which is aimed at connecting the illegal "Ma'ale Adumim" settlement to nearby settlement blocs and outposts. Another aim of this scheme is clearly to advance the construction of settlements in the so-called "E-1" area, where Israel seeks to entrench settler presence in order to cause irreversible damage to the contiguity of the Palestinian State. As cautioned by the Israeli NGO Peace Now with regard to this illegal move: "The Israeli government is de facto annexing the West Bank by investing billions of shekels into roads designed to double the number of settlers to a million and even more."

We recall, once again, Security Council resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#), in which the Council, inter alia:

- Reiterated "its demand that Israel immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and that it fully respect all of its legal obligations in this regard"
- Underlined "that it will not recognize any changes to the 4 June 1967 lines, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties through negotiations"
- Called upon States "to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967".

Nevertheless, Israel persists in defying the Security Council, carrying on with all of these illegal measures, which have also been accompanied by a sharp uptick in settler violence against Palestinians, with Israeli soldiers either joining in settler-related attacks or refusing to intervene. In an urgent appeal to several United Nations special rapporteurs on the escalation of settler violence, the Palestinian human rights group Al-Haq has urgently requested the Organization's "immediate intervention to

protect the Palestinian protected population from systematic and ongoing settler attacks, which are conducted with institutionalized impunity”.

It is undeniable that such settler violence and aggression are directly incited by the Israeli government, military and religious officials and the culture of hate that continues to be fuelled by extremist rhetoric. According to a recent study by the Hebrew University dubbed the “Map of Hatred”, Palestinians are the group most feared and hated by Israeli Jews, with polls suggesting the high rates of hatred and rejection indicate that anti-Palestinian incitement is tolerated and acceptable. As Israel enters yet another round of elections, the cynical connection between anti-Palestinian rhetoric and incitement continues at a fever pitch.

This dehumanization of the Palestinian people also continues to be manifested by Israel’s ongoing arrest and detention of civilians and its abuse of the nearly 5,000 Palestinians held captive in its jails. In recent weeks, dozens of Palestinians, including children, have been rounded up and detained. This shockingly included two young boys, aged 8 and 6, in the town of Hizma. In addition, on 16 February, a Palestinian woman, Rahmeh Abu Ahour, 67, suffered a fatal heart attack after Israeli soldiers ransacked her home during a raid in Abu Njeim, east of Bethlehem. Israeli occupation forces routinely carry out such violent arrest raids with utter disregard for the state of emergency declared in the West Bank owing to the pandemic and for the well-being of the Palestinian civilian population, in grave violation of international humanitarian law.

The occupying Power also persists with its use of administrative detention, holding Palestinians indefinitely, without charge or trial. Among the hundreds being held is Mohammad Al-Halabi, a Palestinian aid worker from the Gaza Strip, who has been administratively detained for four years. According to his lawyer, Mr. Al-Halabi has attended more than 140 military court hearings since his arrest. United Nations human rights experts have called on Israel to release Mr. Al-Halabi or to immediately grant him a fair trial, stating: “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 recognized crime, and the charges and the evidence must be clearly laid out so defendants know what they have to answer.” Another military court hearing for Mr. Al-Halabi is scheduled for 3 March 2021. We call for his release and the release of all Palestinian civilians illegally imprisoned by the occupying Power.

Israel also persists with its immoral policy of withholding the bodies of dead Palestinians, collectively punishing and traumatizing their families, who are prohibited from burying their loved ones in accordance with religious and cultural rituals. On 20 February, Israel finally returned the body of Daoud Al-Khatib, who died in September of last year as a result of ill-treatment and medical negligence by prison authorities. However, at least 70 Palestinian bodies continue to be held by the occupying Power, in addition to the hundreds withheld and buried in secret in cemeteries controlled by the occupation. We call for an end to this cruel and illegal practice and for the return of the bodies to their families for burial.

This year, as we near 54 years since the onset of the occupation and, once again, observe numerous other tragic anniversaries, conventional wisdom holds that the only viable response to Israeli impunity is through preventive measures, including serious measures of accountability. Without consequences, these crimes and this inhumanity will clearly not end.

The Security Council must uphold its duty under the Charter of the United Nations to maintain international peace and security. Israel cannot continue to be the exception to every rule; this privileged treatment has only emboldened its impunity and undermined international law, with disastrous effects on our people and the rules-based system as a whole. It is high time for accountability, as only halting violations and de-escalating the situation can create trust and open a credible horizon for making

peace, a peace sought worldwide by all who support the long-standing international consensus based on the relevant United Nations resolutions.

As stated by Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh at the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting held earlier this week: “While we remain committed to peace based on the two-State solution to achieve the legitimate national rights of our people to live in their independent sovereign contiguous State of Palestine on 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, and a just solution to the refugees’ question based on UN resolution 194, the reality on the ground after 30 years of peace process, is a systematic destruction of the Palestinian State and the two-State solution.” We urge the international community to act forthwith to uphold international law, protect the Palestinian people, stop the destruction of the two-State solution and make the necessary efforts to advance the realization of a just peace, a Palestinian-Israeli peace that will transform not only the Middle East region, but also the prospects for global peace and security.

The present letter is in follow-up to our 705 letters regarding the ongoing crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, which constitutes the territory of the State of Palestine. These letters, dated from 29 September 2000 (A/55/432-S/2000/921) to 16 February 2021 (A/ES-10/851-S/2021/148) constitute a basic record of the crimes being committed by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people since September 2000. For all of these war crimes, acts of State terrorism and systematic human rights violations being committed against the Palestinian people, Israel, the occupying Power, must be held accountable and the perpetrators must be brought to justice.

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the present letter circulated as a document of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 5, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) **Riyad Mansour**
Minister
Permanent Observer