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

Security Council
Seventy-seventh year

Identical letters dated 8 March 2022 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

The situation in Occupied Palestine is worsening as Israel persists with its human rights violations and war crimes. Since the start of 2022, Israeli occupation forces have murdered 17 Palestinians, including children. Just as in 2021, this year is witnessing escalating attacks and provocations against the Palestinian people, stirring tensions as religious holidays approach, including the holy month of Ramadan, and must serve as a warning to the international community about the fragility and volatility of this ongoing crisis.

It is clear that Israel, the occupying Power, carries on with systematic repression and attacks against the defenceless Palestinian civilian population, all the while entrenching its colonial occupation and apartheid regime because it is fully confident that it will not be held accountable by an international community that continues to fall short of its obligations to ensure justice for victims who look to the United Nations for hope and accountability.

This has led to the normalization of an absolutely inhumane situation where Israel kills, maims, displaces and persecutes Palestinians with no regard for their human rights and the international laws created to protect civilians in armed conflict. Since our last letter, dated 22 February 2022, Israeli occupation forces killed seven Palestinians, including three children, throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.

Just hours after the above-mentioned letter was sent to the Security Council, 14-year-old Mohammed Shehadeh was shot and killed by Israeli occupation forces in Al-Khader, near Bethlehem. Mohammed was accused by the Israeli occupation forces of allegedly throwing a Molotov cocktail at occupying forces, who then justified his execution on the spot. Just days earlier, Nehad Barghouthi, age 19, was shot and killed by Israeli occupation forces in Nabi Saleh, near Ramallah.

The following week, Israeli occupation forces shot and killed three Palestinians in a single day, evidencing a barbaric shoot-to-kill policy, with even children



mercilessly targeted by soldiers armed with the most lethal weaponry that continues to be provided to the occupying Power by its allies around the world with zero accountability.

On 1 March, Israeli occupation forces launched an overnight raid on the Jenin refugee camp and killed Shadi Najim, age 18, and Abdullah al-Husari, age 22. Both Shadi and Abdullah were killed by direct gunshots to the head, while more than 20 others were injured. Hours later, Israeli occupation forces shot and killed Ammar Abu Afifa, age 21, in Beit Fajjar, near Bethlehem. Like the previous victims of the occupation's barbarity, Ammar was also killed by a direct gunshot to his head, in a clear pattern of extrajudicial killings.

And this week, within the past 48 hours, three Palestinians, including two teenagers, were killed by Israeli occupation forces in Jerusalem. Kareem Al-Qawasmi, age 19, and Abdelrahman Qasem, age 22, were shot and killed by Israeli occupation forces in Jerusalem's Old City. Yamen Jaffal, age 16, was also shot and killed by Israeli occupation forces in yet another extrajudicial killing in Abu Dis. Israeli occupation forces then prevented medics from reaching Yamen before seizing and withholding his dead body.

We underscore the recent statement of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory that "Extrajudicial killings such as this are the consequence of the regular resort to lethal force by well-armed and well-protected Israeli security personnel against Palestinians, and the almost total lack of accountability for killings and injuries of Palestinians by Israeli forces".

In this regard, we must also draw attention to the absolutely sadistic and inhuman practice by Israel of necroviolence against Palestinians. Since the occupation began, in 1967, the bodies of hundreds of deceased Palestinians, including children, have been abducted by Israeli occupation forces and withheld from families, violating the rights of the deceased for burial and depriving their families from mourning and burying their loved ones according to religious practices and traditional customs.

According to the Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center, Israel is illegally holding the bodies of 335 Palestinians killed by Israeli occupation forces. The Center continuously pursues the return of the bodies of Palestinians killed by Israel. In 2010, the Center facilitated the return of Mashour Al-Arouri's remains after they were withheld for 34 years by Israel. The following year, the Center facilitated the return of Hafez Abu Zanat's remains, withheld for 35 years. And today, after being withheld for nearly four months, the body of 16-year-old Omar Abu Asab was finally returned to his family after he was killed by Israeli occupation forces on 17 November 2021.

For decades, Israel has held the bodies of Palestinian children as hostages in mortuary refrigerators, inflicting psychological torture and trauma on their parents, who only wish to wash their children's bodies one last time for proper burial. Moreover, Israel has placed hundreds of Palestinians that it has killed in a so-called "cemetery of numbers", where graves are marked with numbers instead of names. In this regard, the Committee against Torture has explicitly called on Israel, the occupying Power, to "return the bodies of the Palestinians that have not yet been returned to their relatives as soon as possible so they can be buried in accordance with their traditions and religious customs, and to avoid that similar situations are repeated in the future".

Unsurprisingly, Israel's cruelty against Palestinian families in such situations does not stop there. It has been documented that, in cases where the withheld body of

a Palestinian is returned, Israel returns the body in bags containing more soil than human remains, and Palestinian families are forced to pay a hefty fee and cannot perform autopsies. Moreover, families are forced to hold a quick and small funeral at night-time. As previously detailed by the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, “Israeli authorities have prohibited autopsies, and that the dead bodies are kept in poor and inhumane conditions, stacked on top of each other. It was brought to the attention of the Committee that the bodies returned to the families are often disfigured, sometimes beyond recognition, denying the families the right to accord, with dignity, final religious rites”.

There is no justification in international law for the withholding of the deceased. There is a universal human need to bury the dead, and international jurisprudence is clear on the matter. Israel is under legal obligation to return their bodies as per article 17 (3) of the First Geneva Convention, article 120 of the Third Geneva Convention and article 130 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. The international community must ensure that Israel abides by its international legal obligations, including in respect of numerous relevant United Nations resolutions, including with regard to accounting for persons killed and missing (General Assembly resolution [3220 \(XXIX\)](#)).

All of these crimes reveal the occupying Power’s inhumanity towards the Palestinian people, including children, in flagrant disregard for international human rights law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, humanitarian law and all standards of moral decency. As Palestinian children continue to be the victims of Israeli aggression, we must ask: Are they not entitled to such universal rights and the protections of international law? Or are the insecurities of heavily armed soldiers valued more than the lives of the children being held captive under this 55-year illegal occupation?

All evidence points to the fact that Israel’s extrajudicial killings of Palestinians and withholding of the bodies of those killed are not just arbitrary incidents, but rather part of a systematic pattern of policies designed to control and coerce the occupied population through violence, repression and fear. Tragically, international inaction has normalized the killing of Palestinians, even children, and Israel’s so-called “security concerns” continue to be prioritized over the rule of law.

Our children are not just numbers, data for world statistics. Our children have names. Our children have mothers, fathers, families and friends who love them and who grieve for them. Our children deserve to be buried by their families in their homeland. The following are the names of Palestinian children who were killed by Israeli occupation forces and whose bodies are still being held captive by Israel:

Muhammad Tarayrah, age 16, killed by Israeli occupation forces on 30 June 2016

Muhammad Dar Yusef, age 17, killed by Israeli occupation forces on 26 July 2018

Muhammad Abu Mandeel, age 17, killed by Israeli occupation forces on 21 January 2020

Mahmoud Kamil, age 17, killed by Israeli occupation forces on 21 December 2020

Attallah Rayan, age 17, killed by Israeli occupation forces on 26 January 2021

Zuhdi al-Taweel, age 17, killed by Israeli occupation forces on 24 May 2021

Muhammad Odeh, age 15, killed by Israeli occupation forces on 26 September 2021

Muhammad Musa, age 15, killed by Israeli occupation forces on 6 December 2021

These crimes by an illegal, belligerent foreign military occupation cannot go unpunished. International law must be upheld equally in all circumstances, without exception. Without a doubt, selectivity in the application of international law has prolonged this grave injustice, causing so much civilian suffering and loss and immensely weakening the authority and worth of international laws aimed at protecting civilians in armed conflict and promoting justice and peace. This has been to the detriment of all.

Yet, even as Israel continues and intensifies its crimes in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem – as shown even just in this past week witnessing the killing and injury of civilians, violent military raids, detentions and imprisonments, colonial settlement construction, settler terror, home demolitions, forced displacement, denial of basic rights, attacks on holy sites and the continuing illegal blockade on Gaza – the Palestinian people remain resilient, certain in the justness of their cause and insistent on their right to live as a free people in their homeland in peace and security, refusing to surrender to this injustice.

The Palestinian people are a nation with thousands of years of history, and our history has shown that, like all occupiers in the past, Israel must come to realize that it cannot occupy and subjugate them indefinitely. But this inevitability will be delayed for as long as the international community fails to uphold the law and ensure accountability, allowing Israeli impunity and double standards to thrive and causing so much more human suffering.

We therefore once again call on the international community, including the Security Council, to uphold its obligations under international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, to bring an end to this grave injustice, to save human lives and to contribute to the realization of a peaceful and secure future for the Palestinian and Israeli peoples and all the peoples of our troubled region.

The present letter is in follow-up to our 744 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 22 February 2022 (A/ES-10/891-S/2022/146), 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 distributed 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