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PALESTINIAN RIGHTS

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relevant to the question of Palestine

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I. WITH THE PROSPECT OF PEACE REMOTE, SECRETARY-GENERAL CALLS FOR FULL UNRWA FUNDING

Following are UN Secretary-General António Guterres' [remarks](#), as delivered by Courtenay Rattray, Chef de Cabinet, at the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) Pledging Conference in New York on 2 June 2023, during which 25 donors announced contributions.

Ladies and Gentlemen, at the outset, just allow me an opportunity to convey to you the Secretary-General's deep regret at being unable to participate in this very important meeting this morning.

I think all of you know the deep commitment the Secretary-General has to the cause of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). It is unfortunate. He was notified yesterday of a family emergency and so departed last evening on a flight to Portugal.

What he wanted me to assure you is of his sincere and deep commitment and that he will do everything in his power to right the ship of UNRWA as we go forward in these next few months through to September, which is a pivotal month as you have heard from the President of the General Assembly. Let me just read his statement that he would have delivered personally, were he here:

Thank you for your coming together today in solidarity with Palestinian refugees. Every year we meet — and every year we confront the same contradiction. On the one hand, we all recognize the essential role that UNRWA plays: as a safety net for the most vulnerable; pillar of regional stability; a catalyst for development; a critical conflict prevention tool; and a lifeline of hope and opportunity for millions.

On the other hand, however, we allow UNRWA to remain trapped in financial limbo. Soaring needs are met by stagnating funds. In fact, some of the largest and most reliable donors have recently signalled to UNRWA they might reduce their contributions.

This is deeply concerning. The Agency is already operating, as you have heard, with a shortfall of around \$75 million. Let's be clear: UNRWA is on the verge of financial collapse. The consequences of further budget cuts would be nothing short of catastrophic.

When UNRWA's future hangs in the balance, so do the lives of millions of Palestine refugees relying on essential services. Services like education for over half a million girls and boys; health care for around 2 million people; job opportunities for youth in Gaza and elsewhere; psychosocial support for hundreds of thousands of children; and a social safety net for nearly half a million of the poorest Palestinians.

Behind these facts and figures are countless individual stories of opportunities created and of lives forever changed. The story of Loay Elbasyouni, who attended UNRWA schools and went on to work for the team at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration of the United States (NASA) that designed the Perseverance rover that landed on Mars.

Or the story of Bara'a Abu Asakar, who was educated at the UNRWA Rimal Elementary Co-Ed school in Gaza before moving abroad to complete her medical studies. Today, she is working on a cure against pancreatic cancer. It is examples like these that demonstrate how much all of us gain if we invest in opportunities for all. Investing in UNRWA means investing in our common future.

UNRWA was created to support one of the first humanitarian operations of the United Nations nearly 75 years ago. And still, the prospect of peace remains remote. If anything, it is receding. The past year was the deadliest for Palestinians since the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs began systematically tracking fatalities in 2005. Halfway into the new year, violence rages on without reprieve.

There is no alternative to a political solution that realizes the vision of two States — Israel and Palestine — living side by side in peace and security, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States. The outlines of this solution are well known: they are laid out in United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements.

But realities on the ground — from the continuing occupation to expanding settlement construction — are working against us. In this darkening picture, UNRWA is one of the few rays of hope. I urge you to nurture and sustain this hope. Do your part and ensure that UNRWA is fully funded. Let us help UNRWA help Palestine refugees. I thank you.

II. OIC CONDEMNS ISRAEL'S DECISION TO ESTABLISH SIX NEW SETTLEMENT OUTPOSTS

On 3 June, the General Secretariat of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) issued the following [statement](#).

The OIC General Secretariat has strongly condemned the Israeli occupation Government's decision to establish six settlement outposts in Masafer Yatta area, south of Hebron. It affirms that the Israeli colonial settlement policy is illegitimate and illegal under International Law and UN Resolutions, including Security Council Resolution 2334 of 2016.

The OIC stresses the need to hold Israel, the occupying power, accountable for this crime, which is a continuation of its persistent violations and crimes, including in particular colonial settlement, ethnic cleansing, and forced displacement.

At the same time, the OIC calls on the international community to assume its responsibilities towards putting an end to all the Israeli occupation's policies against the Palestinian people, their land and their sanctities.

III. RIGHTS OF CIVIL SOCIETY MEMBERS BEING VIOLATED IN ISRAEL AND OPT, UN COMMISSION OF INQUIRY REPORT SAYS

On 8 June, the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel, issued the following [press release](#) announcing its latest report.

The rights of civil society members in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory are being violated by authorities in all areas through harassment, threats, arrests, interrogations, arbitrary detention, torture and inhuman and degrading treatment, according to a [report](#) to the Human Rights Council issued today by the UN Independent International [Commission of Inquiry](#) on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel.

The report examined attacks, restrictions, and harassment of civil society actors in Israel, and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. It found that the majority of violations are being committed by Israeli authorities as part of the Israeli Government's goal of ensuring and enshrining its permanent occupation at the expense of the rights of the Palestinian people.

The report found that the Israeli Government has increasingly restricted civic space through a strategy of delegitimizing and silencing civil society. This includes criminalizing Palestinian civil society organizations and their members by labelling them as “terrorists,” pressuring and threatening institutions that give a platform for civil society discourse, actively lobbying donors, and implementing measures intended to cut sources of funding and support.

This strategy is being implemented in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory against Israeli and Palestinian civil society organizations and activists, and internationally against international advocates of Palestinian rights.

The report determined that the designations by Israeli authorities of six Palestinian NGOs as “terrorist” organizations and a seventh Palestinian NGO as unlawful were unjustified and violated fundamental human rights, including the rights to freedom of association, expression, opinion, peaceful assembly, privacy and the right to a fair trial.

Palestinian authorities in both the occupied West Bank and in Gaza were also found to be targeting Palestinian human rights defenders and civil society activists with the aim of silencing dissenting opinions. The arrest and detention of Palestinian activists by both Israeli and Palestinian authorities was noted as a particularly harsh reality for many Palestinian activists.

“Today we issued a report that focuses on the silencing of civil society in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel, and we concluded that all duty bearers are engaged in limiting the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful association,” said Navi Pillay, Chair of the Commission. “We were particularly alarmed by the situation of Palestinian human rights defenders, who are routinely subject to a range of punitive measures as part of the occupation regime. These measures also have far-reaching consequences for children, contributing to family fragmentation and to increased psychological trauma and fear.”

The Commission conducted more than 127 interviews with victims and witnesses, experts and others for the report; these included public and closed hearings in Geneva held in November 2022 and March 2023. Its call for submissions issued on 2 November 2022 resulted in 21 submissions being received.

The Commission dedicated a significant part of the report to reviewing restrictive policies and practices, and their impact on different civil society groups, including journalists, women human rights defenders, artists and cultural activists and Palestinian cultural centres promoting diversity and the inclusion of LGBTQ persons.

The report found that Palestinian journalists are particularly targeted and subjected to frequent harassment and punitive measures, seemingly as part of an effort to deter them from continuing their work. Israeli journalists are also being monitored and harassed, and increasingly practice self-censorship out of fear of attacks and losing employment.

Women human rights defenders face significant and distinct risks due to their visibility and role in fighting for societal and political change. They have been specifically targeted by Palestinian State actors and anti-gender rights groups because they are perceived as challenging religious and cultural norms and the status quo.

The report also found that actions by Israeli and Palestinian authorities that shrink freedom of expression in the cultural space, affecting artists and cultural activists, constitute violations of cultural rights.

“We assigned significant importance to understanding the impact of the shrinking civic space on specific groups of activists, some of whom are more vulnerable to attacks and have suffered substantial personal harm as a result of being targeted,” said Commissioner Miloon Kothari.

“Women human rights advocates and protesters have been subjected to distinct gender-based stigmatization and isolation compared to their male counterparts, including sexual and gender-based violence during protests and online harassment and smear campaigns with the sole intent to discredit them and deter them from activism in public places,” Kothari said. “We are also troubled with restrictions imposed on the right to cultural life and cultural and artistic expression which we outlined in our report, and we are extremely concerned with statements made by Israeli politicians aimed at erasing elements of Palestinian culture and identity.”

Although the report focused primarily on actions undertaken by authorities, it also found that certain non-governmental organizations play key roles in silencing civil society in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel and pressuring those advocating for Palestinian rights around the world. Right-wing organizations operating in Israel and abroad effectively implement and promote the Israeli Government’s strategy against civil society. Palestinian anti-gender rights groups operating in the occupied West Bank, have targeted Palestinian women human rights defenders. Both Israeli and Palestinian authorities allow, and in some cases encourage and support, the actions of non-governmental organizations targeting civil society actors.

The report found reasonable grounds to conclude that several Israeli actions undertaken against civil society organizations amount to violations of international human rights and humanitarian law and may constitute crimes under international law. These include the arbitrary detention of

civil society organization members and their forcible transfer from the Occupied Palestinian Territory to Israel, in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, the revocation of East Jerusalem residency permits and the deportation of a human rights defender from East Jerusalem.

“We have no doubt that the revocation of Salah Hammouri’s East Jerusalem residency permit based on an alleged ‘breach of allegiance’ to the State of Israel constitutes a war crime,” said Commissioner Chris Sidoti. “Demanding allegiance from protected people in occupied territory is a reprehensible violation of international humanitarian law. We have preserved information about the individuals who bear responsibility for what may amount to the war crime of unlawful deportation, including third parties such as airlines and their staff that assisted in the deportation.”

The report recommended that all duty bearers ensure that the rights to freedoms of association, expression and opinion and peaceful assembly, and economic, social and cultural rights including health, housing and education, are respected and protected and that civil society actors, including human rights defenders, journalists and women human rights defenders, are able to conduct their activities safely, freely and without harassment or retribution.

The report also recommended that the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court prioritize the investigation into the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including the identification of direct perpetrators, those exercising command responsibility and individuals who aid or abet the commission of crimes under the Court’s jurisdiction.

The Commission’s 22-page report will be complemented by a more detailed document in the form of a conference room paper (CRP), to be distributed during the upcoming 53rd session of the Council in June.

IV. UNRWA URGES SYRIA DONORS TO INCLUDE PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

On 15 June, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East issued the following [press release](#).

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) Director of Partnerships Karim Amer urged participants at the VII Brussels conference on “Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region” to include Palestine Refugees in their humanitarian assistance.

After 12 years of conflict, COVID-19, the socio-economic crisis and, most recently, the earthquake, Palestine Refugees in Syria are increasingly vulnerable.

UNRWA Director of Partnerships Karim Amer said: “UNRWA provides essential services like education, healthcare and psychosocial support – to some 438,000 Palestine Refugees who remain in Syria and 50,000 Palestine Refugees who have fled to Jordan and Lebanon. The majority of them live in dire poverty and rely on the Agency’s cash and in-kind food assistance to meet their basic needs.”

This year, UNRWA requires US\$ 436.7 million to secure emergency humanitarian assistance to Palestine Refugees affected by the conflict in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan through its [Emergency Appeal](#). The Appeal remains significantly underfunded, with only 16 per cent of required funding received.

“UNRWA calls for the inclusion of Palestine Refugees in the humanitarian response in Syria and the region to continue our crucial services and avoid any further deterioration in their living conditions. We urgently need to rehabilitate UNRWA schools and health centres for those who return to their camps amidst debris and rubble due to their inability to pay rent outside,” Mr Amer added.

The devastating earthquake that hit the region in February affected almost 50,000 Palestine Refugees. UNRWA issued a [flash appeal](#) outlining requirements for US \$ 16.2 million to fund the emergency and early recovery response, with US\$ 5 million still required.

V. THE UN SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE ISRAELI PRACTICES CONCLUDES ITS ANNUAL MISSION TO THE REGION

On 16 June, The United Nations Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories issued the following [end-of-mission statement](#).

The United Nations Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories (the “Special Committee”) concluded its annual mission to the region today. The Committee visited Cairo, Egypt from 8-10 June, prior to travelling to Amman, Jordan until 16 June 2023.

During its mission, the Special Committee met with senior Palestinian government officials, UN organisations, and representatives of civil society organisations from the occupied Palestinian territory and occupied Syrian Golan. The Special Committee regrets that since it was established in 1968, Israel has not responded to the Committee’s annual requests for consultations with Israeli authorities, nor granted access to Israel, the occupied Palestinian territory, or the occupied Syrian Golan.

Pending complete termination of the Israeli occupation, the Special Committee is [mandated](#) to investigate Israeli policies and practices in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and the Syrian Golan. This year, the Special Committee was presented with the clearest evidence it has seen in its 55-year history of Israeli policies that systematically violate the human rights of the Palestinian people, in a manner many interlocutors see as akin to apartheid.

The Special Committee was briefed on the Israeli government’s Coalition Agreement, which states that “the prime minister will work towards the formulation and promotion of a policy whereby sovereignty is applied to Judea and Samaria” (biblical names for the occupied West Bank.) The Document of Principles and Division of Responsibilities and Authorities signed on 23 February 2023 between Israel’s Minister of Defence, Yoav Gallant, and Additional Minister in the Ministry of Defence, Bezalel Smotrich, goes further, establishing a “Settlement Administration”,

which oversees, instructs, and directs the activities of the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) and of the Israeli Civil Administration.

The Israeli government therefore intends to transfer “temporary” military control of the occupied West Bank to a civilian Minister and will attempt to formally annex the occupied West Bank. The Special Committee notes that the prohibition on the annexation of territory is fundamental to international law.

Within a week of signing this Coalition Agreement, Minister Smotrich told Israeli media that “the village of Hawara needs to be wiped out. I think that the State of Israel needs to do that – not, God forbid, private individuals.” This statement followed an Israeli settler rampage through Hawara and nearby villages on 26 February 2023, where over 400 settlers torched Palestinian homes, businesses, a school, and dozens of vehicles, and shot dead a 37-year-old Palestinian man, Sameh Aqtash, and wounded over 100 others. The military commander responsible for the region, Major General Yehuda Fuchs, described the settler rampage as a “pogrom.” However, except for the temporary detention of two settlers, to date all other perpetrators have enjoyed complete impunity, as is the case in almost all instances of Israeli settler violence.

The Special Committee notes a direct correlation between the policies of the Israeli government, as articulated in its Coalition Agreement, and Israeli practices on the ground. The Special Committee was briefed that under the current Israeli government, settler attacks have increased from an average from two a day in 2022, to three a day in 2023.

The Special Committee is appalled that the number of Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, killed by Israeli Forces in the first five months of 2023 was more than double (124 percent higher) than in the same period in 2022, noting Israeli Forces killed more Palestinians in the occupied West Bank in 2022 than any other year since the UN began compiling these statistics in 2005. The number of Palestinian injuries from live ammunition in the West Bank was almost double (94 percent increase) than in the same period in 2022, suggestive of a further loosening of Israel’s Rules of Engagement this year.

The Special Committee deplores the conduct of Israel’s “Operation Shield and Arrow” from 9-13 May, which commenced with the targeted killing of three Palestinian Islamic Jihad commanders in airstrikes on Gaza that also killed 10 civilians, including three children. Israel’s latest war of choice on Gaza followed extensive lobbying by National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, whose ultranationalist Otzma Yehudit party boycotted cabinet meetings and threatened to quit the government until the operation commenced.

As in previous rounds of Israeli attacks on Gaza in August 2022 and May 2021, this May, Israel turned its 17-year air, sea and land blockade of Gaza into a siege, closing the Erez and Kerem Shalom crossing points and denying humanitarian access, medical referrals, medical supplies, and fuel for the Gaza Power Plant whilst it bombarded Gaza’s residents with high explosives in one of the most densely populated regions on the planet. Children constitute 47 per cent of Gaza’s population, and most Gazans are not old enough to remember life before the blockade. As UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres noted on 20 May 2021, “if there is a hell on earth, it is the lives of children in Gaza.”

The Special Committee expresses concern that the Israeli settler population in the occupied Syrian Golan has now surpassed the local population for the first time. Israeli policies and practices on the Golan isolate the population from their familial and cultural links to Syria and enforce integration into the Israeli economy and education system, for lack of any alternative. The Special Committee notes that the notoriously violent Netzah Yehuda Battalion, was transferred to the occupied Syrian Golan in January 2023 for an 11-month deployment, posing grave human rights implications for the local population. It is recalled that this Battalion was disciplined for negligently causing the death of 78-year-old Palestinian-American Omar Abdalmajeed As'ad north of Ramallah in January 2022.

The Special Committee expresses its gratitude to the governments of Egypt and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for hosting its visit, and Palestinian officials for briefing the Committee. The Special Committee also expresses its gratitude to the Palestinian human rights defenders, who continue their essential work despite unrelenting attacks by the Israeli government, human rights defenders working on the Syrian Golan, and the Israeli human rights defenders who demand an end to the occupation, in the face of their government's increased suppression of civil society and human rights on both sides of the Green Line.

The Special Committee is particularly grateful for the work of UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which continues to provide highly efficient service delivery to the Palestinian people despite extremely difficult financial and operational circumstances. The Special Committee implores all UN member states to provide UNRWA with predictable and sustainable funding. Anything less will inevitably result in a regional humanitarian and security crisis that we cannot afford.

The Committee will present its next report to the General Assembly in October 2023.

VI. ALARMED BY NEW DECISION ON SETTLEMENTS, UN SECRETARY-GENERAL URGES ISRAELI GOVERNMENT TO CEASE SETTLEMENT ACTIVITIES

The following [statement](#) was issued on 19 June by the Spokesperson for United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres.

The Secretary-General is deeply troubled by yesterday's decision by the Israeli Government to amend settlement planning procedures. The changes can be expected to expedite the advancement of Israeli settlement plans in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. He is also deeply alarmed by the anticipated advancement next week of over 4,000 settlement housing units by Israeli planning authorities.

The Secretary-General reiterates that settlements are a flagrant violation of international law. They are a major obstacle to the realization of a viable two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. The expansion of these illegal settlements is a significant driver of tensions and violence and deepens humanitarian needs. It further entrenches Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory, encroaches on Palestinian land and natural resources, hampers the free movement of the Palestinian population and undermines the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and sovereignty.

The Secretary-General urges the Government of Israel to halt and reverse such decisions and to immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and to fully respect its legal obligations in that regard. He further calls for concrete steps to be taken to implement the commitments made in the joint communiqués in Aqaba, Jordan, and Sharm al-Sheik, Egypt, respectively.

VII. UN SPECIAL COORDINATOR EXPRESSED DEEP CONCERN OVER THE CHANGES TO ISRAELI SETTLEMENT ADVANCEMENT PROCEDURES

On 19 June, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland issued the following [statement](#).

I am deeply concerned by the Israeli Government's decision yesterday to alter settlement planning procedures that have been in place since 1996, which is expected to expedite settlement expansion. I am also alarmed by the anticipated advancement next week of over 4,000 settlement housing units by Israeli planning authorities.

I reiterate that the establishment by Israel of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law.

I urge the Government of Israel to halt and reverse such decisions, which are a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

At a time of increased violence and fragility on the ground, the prolonged absence of a political process, and concerted international and regional efforts to support constructive dialogue between the parties, such steps only push Israelis and Palestinians further apart and risk destabilizing an already highly tense situation on the ground.

VIII. UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS EXTREMELY WORRIED BY ESCALATION OF VIOLENCE IN OPT

The following is an excerpt from the [statement](#) of Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, delivered at the 53rd session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva on 19 June.

I am extremely worried by the deteriorating situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In the occupied West Bank, excessive use of force and unlawful killings of Palestinians by the Israeli Security Forces have increased, including apparent extrajudicial killings. The recent escalation of violence in Gaza, as well as forcible transfer of Palestinians through evictions, demolitions of homes, the expansion of settlements and settler violence also cry out for human rights-based solutions. However, although Israel's engagement with the UPR last month was constructive, its cooperation with the Special Procedures and the Independent International Commission of Inquiry is almost non-existent. In addition, for three years the authorities have not granted visas to my international colleagues to monitor issues on the ground. I sincerely hope that Israel's acceptance

of key recommendations during its fourth UPR cycle will be the basis for renewed constructive engagement with my Office and the UN human rights ecosystem.

IX. ON WORLD REFUGEE DAY, UN HUMAN RIGHTS EXPERTS SAY PALESTINIAN RIGHT OF RETURN MUST BE PRIORITIZED

On 20 June, Francesca Albanese, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967; Paula Gaviria Betancur, Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons; Ashwini K.P., Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance; Obiora C. Okafor, Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity; Michael Fakhri, Special Rapporteur on the right to food; Felipe González Morales, Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants; Pedro Arrojo Agudo, Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation; Dorothy Estrada Tanck (Chair), Ivana Radačić (Vice-Chair), Elizabeth Broderick, Meskerem Geset Techane and Melissa Upreti, members of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls, issued the following [statement](#).

The world cannot overlook the enduring legacies of colonialism and racism that persist in the treatment of refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants, particularly in the countries of the Global North, UN experts said today. They issued the following statement on the occasion of World Refugee Day:

“As we observed World Refugee Day and honour the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights this year, it is imperative to recognise the enduring challenges that continue to impact the treatment of forcibly displaced persons. Within this context, it is particularly important to address the role of countries in the Global North, as the shade of racism, supremacism, patriarchy and the historical legacy of colonial endeavours still heavily influences the approach toward situations of forcibly displaced persons.

2022 marked the largest ever increase in the number of forcibly displaced persons worldwide, with over 108 million people across the globe uprooted from their homes, more than half are women and girls. In 2023, ongoing and emerging conflicts and violence continued to force more and more people to flee, showing little prospects of durable solutions. Pushed to resort to desperate measures, over 1,200 migrants died or went missing in the Mediterranean since January 2023 to date.

This reality is all too familiar for the Palestinian people, 75 years since the Nakba – the event that shattered Palestinian lives and severed their ancestral connection to their land during the establishment of the State of Israel. Since then, they have endured forced displacement, dispossession, and disenfranchisement, with their rights to self-determination, restitution, and compensation repeatedly denied. For 75 years, their cry for justice, embodied in the demand for the right to return, has resounded with unwavering determination.

For Palestinians, forced displacement has become part of their life for generations, tracing back to 1947-1949 when over 750,000 Palestinians were forced to flee massacres and mass expulsions and forcible transfers during the birth of the State of Israel. The majority, along with their descendants, are still in neighbouring Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, while 40 per cent of them remain

under occupation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, since 1967. Progressively, Palestinian exile has scattered them across various nations globally.

Since 1948, both the General Assembly and the Security Council have consistently called upon Israel to facilitate the return of Palestinian refugees and provide reparations. Despite these repeated appeals, Palestinian refugees have been systematically denied of their right to return and forced to live in exile under precarious and vulnerable conditions outside the borders of Palestine. The right of return constitutes a fundamental pillar of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination. The fragmentation of the Palestinian people, both geographically and politically, through administrative methods of control based on residency and race, tantamount to apartheid, has obstructed the realisation of the right to return and self-determination. These practices serve the settler-colonial project pursued by Israel.

We urgently call upon the international community to adopt a rights-based approach that addresses the root causes of violence and prioritises the individual and collective right of return for refugees and internally displaced persons, over political considerations. As the largest and most protracted displaced population since World War II, the Palestinian experience should serve as a poignant reminder to the international community of the suffering and vulnerability endured by refugees and internally displaced persons, urging immediate action to recognise and uphold their rights.”

X. CONDEMNING ALL VIOLENCE AGAINST CIVILIANS, TERROR, UN SECRETARY-GENERAL URGES ISRAEL TO ABIDE BY INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

The following [statement](#) was issued on 21 June by the Spokesperson for United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres.

The Secretary-General is deeply troubled by the continued violence and loss of life in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

The Secretary-General condemns all acts of violence against civilians, including acts of terror. This includes yesterday's shooting by two armed Palestinians that killed four Israelis in the occupied West Bank and injured others and the ensuing acts of vandalism and torching of land and properties, including a school, by Israeli settlers in Palestinian villages around Nablus and Ramallah.

The Secretary-General is deeply concerned about the events in Jenin on 19 June, when an Israeli security forces operation and ensuing exchange of fire resulted in seven Palestinians killed, including two children, both students at United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) schools.

It is crucial to reduce tensions and to prevent further escalation. Israel, as the occupying Power, must ensure that the civilian population is protected against all acts of violence and that perpetrators are held to account. Israel must abide by its obligations under international humanitarian law, including the proportional use of force and the taking of all feasible precautions to spare civilians in the conduct of military operations.

Ultimately, only a return to a meaningful political process and ending the occupation will bring an end to this devastating cycle of violence and senseless loss of life.

XI. UNRWA DEPLORES THE KILLING OF TWO UNRWA STUDENTS IN JENIN REFUGEE CAMP

The following [statement](#) was issued on 21 June by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in the West Bank deplores the death by live ammunition of two Palestine Refugee children during the violent escalation in Jenin refugee camp on 19 June 2023. The children were a 15-year-old boy who was a Grade 9 student at the UNRWA Jenin Boys' Preparatory School, and a 14-year-old girl in Grade 8 at the UNRWA Jenin Girls' School 1.

UNRWA condemns the violence that erupted during an Israeli Security Force (ISF) operation that quickly escalated into a wider confrontation between the ISF and Palestinian armed actors involving the use of at least one improvised explosive device and the firing of explosive weapons from helicopter aircraft. These events highlight the extent to which security conditions are rapidly deteriorating in the occupied West Bank, and the disproportionate impact of this conflict on Palestine Refugees. UNRWA calls on all parties to refrain from using such violent methods that place people's lives at risk, sometimes leading to their death.

The events on 19 June also led to widespread damage to at least 75 refugee homes. UNRWA is continuing to assess damage and disruptions to its installations and services.

Daily life in the West Bank is becoming untenable. Students will return to school to see the empty seats of their now deceased friends. Shopkeepers will need to start their days repairing damage from the violence. Health professionals will try to support numerous traumatized refugees. UNRWA has already recorded the highest number of Palestine Refugee fatalities, including the highest number of child refugee fatalities, in a single year since 2005 when the UN started systematically documenting them. The highest refugee fatality figures prior to this year were recorded in 2022.

Immediate measures are needed to avoid further escalating violence within refugee camps and prevent further loss of life.

XII. OIC CONDEMNS “ORGANIZED TERRORISM” BY GANGS OF SETTLERS AND ISRAELI FORCES

On 22 June, the General Secretariat of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) issued the following [statement](#).

The General Secretariat of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) condemned in the strongest terms the heightening organized terrorism by gangs of settlers and Israeli occupation forces targeting several Palestinian towns which has caused many Palestinians to be martyred or injured and many vehicles and houses to be burnt and property damaged. The General Secretariat

views this as ongoing war crime which requires measures to hold the criminals accountable and achieve justice.

The OIC holds the Israeli occupation fully and directly responsible for the continuation of this crime, stressing that impunity and the failure of the international community to assume its responsibility regarding the organized terrorism practiced by Israel, the occupying power, could encourage it to continue its illegal colonial occupation of Palestinian lands. The OIC, at the same time, called for international protection for the Palestinian people.

XIII. UN HUMAN RIGHTS HIGH COMMISSIONER WARNS OF WEST BANK VIOLENCE SPIRALLING OUT OF CONTROL

On 23 June, Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, issued the following [statement](#).

UN Human Rights Chief Volker Türk today warned this week's violence in the Occupied West Bank risks spiralling out of control, fuelled by strident political rhetoric and an escalation in the use of advanced military weaponry by Israel.

The High Commissioner for Human Rights said the sharp deterioration was having a terrible impact on both Palestinians and Israelis, and called for an immediate end to the violence.

Following Monday's Israeli Security Forces' operation in Jenin Refugee Camp that killed at least seven Palestinians, including a boy and a girl, and injured at least 91 Palestinians and seven Israeli soldiers, Türk issued a reminder to Israeli authorities of their obligations under international law with respect to the use of lethal force.

The Israeli Security Forces conducted a series of airstrikes on Jenin Refugee camp in the Occupied West Bank, in a major intensification of the use of weaponry more generally associated with the conduct of armed hostilities rather than a law enforcement operation. On Wednesday evening, there were further reports of an Israeli military drone strike near Jenin, killing three Palestinian men alleged to be members of a militant group.

International human rights law requires Israeli authorities to ensure that all operations are planned and implemented to minimize the use of lethal force. Furthermore, every death caused in such context by Israeli forces requires an effective investigation and, where there is sufficient evidence that there have been violations of national or international law, suspected perpetrators must be held to account.

“Israel must urgently reset its policies and actions in the Occupied West Bank in line with international human rights standards, including protecting and respecting the right to life,” the High Commissioner said. “As the occupying power, Israel also has obligations under international humanitarian law to ensure public order and safety within the Occupied Palestinian Territory.”

Following the Jenin raid, four Israeli settlers were killed on Tuesday by two armed Palestinian men near the Israeli settlement of Eli in the Occupied West Bank. The High Commissioner was appalled that such killings were celebrated by some Palestinians.

This week there have also been reports of several Palestinian communities being assaulted by Israeli settlers, as well as reports of confrontations between Israeli settlers, accompanied by Israeli Security Forces, and Palestinians at Tumusai'ya village in Ramallah, where Israeli settlers allegedly set fire to dozens of Palestinian vehicles and homes. Reports indicate that four Palestinians were shot, one fatally, with live ammunition at Tumusai'ya.

Türk said, “these latest killings and the violence, along with the inflammatory rhetoric, serve only to drive Israelis and Palestinians deeper into an abyss.”

So far this year, Israeli Security Forces have killed at least 126 Palestinians in the Occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Among them were 21 boys and one girl. Over the whole of 2022, 155 Palestinians were killed by Israeli Security Forces in the Occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, representing the highest number in the past 17 years. The highest number of Israelis were killed last year since 2016.

Türk reiterated that the underlying dynamics leading to the widespread violence and arbitrary loss of life needs to be addressed with urgency, requiring political will from Israel and Palestinians as well as the international community:

“For this violence to end, the occupation must end,” he said. “On all sides, the people with the political power know this and must instigate immediate steps to realize this.”

XIV. UN SPECIAL COORDINATOR WENNESLAND BRIEFS SECURITY COUNCIL ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RESOLUTION 2334 (2016)

On 27 June, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Tor Wennesland, made the following [statement](#) during the Security Council meeting on “The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.”

I am devoting my regular briefing on the situation in the Middle East to the twenty-sixth report on the implementation of Security Council Resolution [2334](#) (2016). The Secretary-General's written report that you have already received covers the period between 14 March and 14 June 2023.

Let me start by saying that the two weeks since the submission of the report have been terrible. Since the submission of the written report, we have seen an alarming spike in violence across the northern and central occupied West Bank, leading to numerous Palestinian and Israeli casualties. Military operations – including airstrikes in the West Bank – clashes, attacks and extremely high levels of settler-related violence have continued and intensified dramatically, alongside the use of more sophisticated weapons by Palestinians, including advanced improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and rockets launched towards Israel.

Unless decisive steps are taken now to rein in the violence, there is a significant risk that events could deteriorate further.

The mounting violence is taking place against the backdrop of deeply worrying settlement-related developments that alter the already fragile dynamics on the ground, as well as a worrying

deterioration in relations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. In that regard, I welcome today's calls between Presidents Isaac Herzog and Mahmoud Abbas, and between Defence Minister Yoav Gallant and PLO Secretary-General Hussein al-Sheikh on the occasion of Eid al Adha, in which, according to Israeli statements released to the media, Israel officials denounced recent settler attacks in the West Bank and recommitted to holding perpetrators accountable.

On 19 June, an Israeli military operation in the Jenin Refugee Camp, in Area A of the occupied West Bank, led to heavy armed exchanges. An Israeli security force (ISF) vehicle was struck by a Palestinian improvised explosive device, injuring eight ISF personnel; Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) claimed responsibility for the attack. According to the IDF, military helicopters carried out airstrikes – the first in the West Bank since the second intifada – to facilitate the extraction of military personnel and disabled vehicles. Over the course of the day, seven Palestinians were killed by ISF, including two children, and 90 injured.

On 20 June, two Palestinians shot and killed four Israeli civilians, including two children, and injured four others at a gas station near Eli settlement, north of Ramallah. One of the perpetrators was shot and killed by an Israeli civilian at the scene, while the other was later killed by Israeli forces near Tubas. Hamas claimed the assailants as members and said the attack was a “natural response” to the ISF operation in Jenin.

From the night of 20 June through 25 June, Israeli settlers perpetrated 28 violent attacks against Palestinian villages across the northern and central occupied West Bank. In total, one Palestinian was killed and 54 others were injured – 37 by ISF and 16 by settlers and one undetermined – while four settlers or other Israeli civilians and one ISF personnel were injured by Palestinians. The attacks followed a similar pattern, with large numbers of settlers, many armed, in some cases in the presence of ISF, setting fire to dozens of houses and vehicles, as well as fields owned by Palestinians, followed by confrontations, in many cases leading to casualties. In some instances, ISF fired live and rubber-coated metal bullets at Palestinians.

On 20 June, in al-Lubban ash-Sharqiya, settler arson also targeted a gas station and three Palestinians, including a child, were injured.

On 21 June, over 300 Israeli settlers attacked the Palestinian village of Turmus'ayyeh, northwest of Ramallah. In the ensuing confrontations, one Palestinian was shot and killed by ISF, and eight others were injured by live ammunition.

The settler rampage continued that evening in Urif, south of Nablus, with hundreds of Israeli settlers again attacking Palestinians, their property and other structures, including a school and a mosque.

Over the following days, settlers attacked villages situated between Nablus and Ramallah, including Jalud, Sinjil, Deir Dibwan, Umm Safa, al-Mugayyir and, again, Turmus'ayyeh.

To date, Israeli police have said that 11 Israelis have been detained, including two off-duty IDF personnel, in relation to the various attacks.

Amid these developments, on the night of 21 June, armed Palestinians fired towards al-Jalamah checkpoint, north of Jenin. An Israeli drone subsequently launched a missile at their vehicle, killing

three Palestinians, one a child. The IDF said that the three were responsible for a number of shooting attacks in the West Bank. Two were later claimed as members by Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the third by Fatah's Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades.

On 26 June, Palestinians from the so-called al-Ayyash Brigades attempted to launch two rockets from the Jenin area towards Israel. Both fell short in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, with no damage or injuries reported.

Reactions by officials to the various incidents have varied, with some rejecting the violence and condemning vigilantism; others making deeply alarming, inflammatory statements.

On 24 June, the IDF Chief of Staff, the head of the Israeli Security Agency and the Israeli Police Commissioner issued a joint statement condemning the settler attacks, which they called "nationalist terrorism," and vowing to take steps to combat them. These steps include increasing the presence of forces, stepping up arrests and widening the use of administrative detention against individuals participating in such attacks.

The previous day, an Israeli Minister and Cabinet member visited an illegal settlement outpost and called on settlers to "run to the hilltops" and establish additional outposts, illegal also under Israeli law. He also called for a widespread military campaign in the West Bank, urging ISF to "blow up buildings [and] assassinate terrorists. Not one, or two, but dozens, hundreds, or if needed, thousands." The Minister's call to establish unauthorized outposts was later repudiated by Prime Minister Netanyahu at a Cabinet meeting, where he said that "calls to grab land illegally and actions of grabbing land illegally, are unacceptable" and that Israeli authorities would act to stop them while promoting settlement expansion in approved locations.

Meanwhile, Palestinian factions, including Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, celebrated the 20 June attack against Israeli civilians as an "act of heroism" and called for additional attacks.

Several concerning developments took place during the reporting period related to Israeli settlement expansion.

On 18 June, the Israeli Government approved significant amendments to Israeli settlement planning procedures that could expedite advancement of Israeli settlements plans. The amendments remove, inter alia, the requirement for the Minister of Defence to approve interim settlement planning stages, and to delegate the Minister's authority in this regard to the Additional Minister in the Ministry of Defence-- currently Bezalel Smotrich.

In response to this decision, the Secretary-General of the PLO's Executive Committee Hussein al Sheikh announced in a Tweet that the Palestinian Authority would not participate in a long-awaited meeting of the Joint Economic Committee scheduled for 19 June. The meeting had been anticipated as an important opportunity for the parties to discuss urgent steps to improve their economic relationship and deliver on existing commitments.

Similarly, plans for a Ministerial meeting of the Negev Forum later this summer hosted by Morocco were also postponed.

On 26 June, the Israeli Civil Administration's Higher Planning Committee reportedly advanced plans for over 5,500 housing units in Israeli settlements in Area C. Some 750 units near Eli were added to the agenda after the 20 June attack there and following an announcement by the Prime Minister's Office that Israel's "answer to terrorism is to strike at it forcefully and build up our country." Plans advanced reportedly include the retroactive regularization, under Israeli law, of three outposts adjacent to Eli.

Regarding other significant developments, on 16 June, UNRWA announced that it had "resumed its service delivery to Palestine Refugees in the West Bank, after nearly four months of disruption due to a work dispute with the West Bank Staff Union and a strike." UNRWA operations in the West Bank, including 42 health clinics and 90 schools for more than 40,000 children, have since fully resumed.

I will now turn to several observations regarding the implementation of the provisions of Security Council Resolution [2334](#) (2016) during the reporting period.

I remain gravely concerned by the escalating spiral of violence we are witnessing in the occupied West Bank. I condemn all acts of violence against civilians, including all acts of terror, which exacerbate mistrust and undermine a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The violence must stop and all perpetrators must be held accountable.

I am particularly alarmed by the extreme levels of settler violence, including large numbers of settlers, many armed, systematically attacking Palestinian villages, terrorizing communities, sometimes in the proximity of Israeli security forces. Israel, as the occupying Power, has an obligation to protect Palestinians and their property in the occupied Palestinian territory and to ensure prompt, independent, impartial, and transparent investigations into all acts of violence.

I reiterate that security forces must exercise maximum restraint, apply proportional use of force and use lethal force only when it is strictly unavoidable in order to protect life, and conduct thorough, independent, impartial, and prompt investigations into all instances of possible excessive use of force.

Children in particular must never be the target of violence, used or put in harm's way.

I strongly condemn inciteful, provocative statements from officials on both sides that further enflame the volatile situation on the ground.

I remain deeply troubled by the relentless expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, that fuels violence and is impeding access by Palestinians to their land and resources, reshaping the geography of the occupied West Bank and threatening the viability of a future Palestinian State. I note with alarm the recent Israeli Government decision which may expedite expansion in Area C.

Israeli settlements constitute a flagrant violation of United Nations resolutions and international law. I call on the Government of Israel to cease the advancement of all settlement activity immediately.

I call upon the Israeli Government to end the demolition of Palestinian-owned property and prevent the possible displacement and eviction of Palestinians, in line with its obligations under international humanitarian and international human rights law.

I urge Israel to approve plans that would enable Palestinian communities in Area C and East Jerusalem to build legally and address their development needs.

In closing, I underscore that the speed and intensity of the security deterioration we have witnessed on the ground are extremely dangerous. The unfolding events seriously challenge broader stability and undermine the Palestinian Authority.

While the ceasefire following the Gaza escalation in May has held, there is a constant risk that events in the West Bank could spill over to Gaza.

Likewise, the Palestinian Authority's fiscal and institutional challenges, exacerbated by funding shortages – including for UN agencies – that impact the delivery of crucial basic services remain concerning and may further aggravate the deterioration on the ground. Let there be no doubt, neither the PA nor the UN will be able to provide humanitarian assistance without donors urgently stepping up financial support.

In recent days and weeks, the UN has remained in close contact with all parties to help restore a relative calm and change the current disastrous trajectory.

We must urgently act collectively to stop the violence. At the same time, it is crucial to bring the parties back onto a path that addresses the political issues driving the current dynamics, so that a process to resolve the core issues can begin.

The deepening occupation, settlement expansion, the high levels of violence against civilians, including acts of terror, and, critically, the absence of a political horizon are rapidly eroding hope among Palestinians and Israelis, and particularly among youth, that a resolution of the conflict is achievable.

I urge all leaders to put on the brakes and rethink the options.

The choice is clear: either continue along the downward spiral of violence and provocations leading to a political vacuum; or turn towards constructive dialogue linked to concrete actions that can create hope and a political horizon.

The UN remains committed to assisting these efforts, and to supporting Palestinians and Israelis to resolve the conflict and end the occupation through the achievement of a two-State solution, in line with relevant United Nations resolutions, international law and bilateral agreements.

XV. UN SECRETARY-GENERAL CONDEMS ADVANCEMENT OF PLANS FOR 5,500 SETTLEMENT UNITS

The following [statement](#) was issued on 28 June by the Spokesperson for United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres.

The Secretary-General condemns Monday's advancement of plans for over 5,500 housing units in Israeli settlements in Area C of the occupied West Bank, including the retroactive regularization, under Israeli law, of three settlement outposts adjacent to the settlement of Eli.

The Secretary-General reiterates that settlements are a flagrant violation of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. He once again urges the Government of Israel to halt and reverse the expansion of settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, to immediately and completely cease all settlement activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and to fully respect its legal obligations in that regard.

Israel's persistent expansion of its settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, deepens humanitarian needs, significantly fuels violence, increases the risk of confrontation, further entrenches the occupation and undermines the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.

These ongoing settlements are eroding the possibility of establishing a contiguous and viable sovereign Palestinian State, based on the pre-1967 lines, thereby impeding the ability to achieve a viable two-State solution, and a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

XVI. OHCHR ISSUES AN UPDATED DATABASE OF BUSINESSES INVOLVED IN SETTLEMENTS

On 30 June, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) issued the following [press release](#).

We have today issued an update to the [database of business enterprises](#) involved in certain activities relating to settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Those of you who have been following this issue closely will recall that the UN Human Rights Council, in a resolution in 2016, mandated our Office to produce a database of business enterprises involved in such activities. We subsequently issued a [report in 2018](#) on the methodology used, and then a [report in 2020](#) containing the database itself.

The [2020 report](#) identified 112 business entities which we had reasonable grounds to conclude were involved in one or more of the specific activities referenced in the HRC resolution. While the resolution calls for annual updating, no regular resources were provided for that purpose, limiting our ability to undertake further work. However, a number of companies continued to engage with us, seeking their removal from the database.

With limited funds, and on an exceptional basis, in July 2022, we sent each of the 112 entities a letter, informing them that we were reviewing the database, on the basis of information available to us. We invited them to provide any further relevant information on their structure, ownership or

involvement with the listed activities. This process was important, in fairness to the companies that had reached out to us. We received responses from 13 enterprises, and engaged in dialogue with some companies that requested it.

Following our review, we found reasonable grounds for the removal of 15 business enterprises on the basis that they were ceasing or were no longer involved in one or more of the listed activities in the OPT.

The update was formally transmitted to the Human Rights Council President this morning and is available on our website.

We hope this serves as a tool for constructive engagement to ensure full compliance with obligations and responsibilities under international human rights law. The High Commissioner expresses hope for it to become a tool that could be used in other country contexts too.
