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Background Release

UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL MEETING ON QUESTION OF PALESTINE TO CONSIDER URGENCY OF ADDRESSING PLIGHT OF PALESTINIAN POLITICAL PRISONERS, IN VIENNA, 7-8 MARCH

The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People will convene the United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine. The Meeting will be held at the United Nations Office at Vienna on 7 and 8 March.

The theme of the Meeting is "The urgency of addressing the plight of Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli prisons and detention facilities".

The purpose of the Meeting is to raise awareness of the plight of Palestinian political prisoners and to strengthen the support of the international community for a solution to this issue. The Meeting, among other things, will look into the current situation and conditions of imprisonment of Palestinians in Israeli prisons and detention facilities, including the situation of women and minors. It will discuss legal aspects of the arrests and detentions of Palestinians by the occupying Power. The Meeting will also consider the issue of Palestinian political prisoners in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian political process and discuss ways of strengthening the role of the wider international community, including non-governmental actors, in promoting a solution.

The opening session, on 7 March, from 10:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., will include statements by Maxwell Gaylard, Deputy United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory, representing United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon; Abdou Salam Diallo, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People; Issa Qaraqe, Minister of Prisoners' Affairs of the Palestinian Authority as the representative of Palestine; Ann Clwyd, President of the Committee on Middle East Questions of the Inter-Parliamentary Union; and Sergio Piazzi, Secretary-General of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean. Mr. Qaraqe will also deliver a keynote address following the opening session.

Plenary I, on the current situation and conditions of imprisonment of Palestinians in Israeli prisons and detention facilities, will run from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. on 7 March. The sub-themes of the session will be: The history, scope and conditions of imprisonment of Palestinians from the Occupied Palestinian Territory; The situation of Palestinian women and minors in Israeli detention facilities; Physical and psychological concerns and denial of family visitation rights; The urgency of protection; and The effect of detention on Palestinian families and the whole society, and the need for integration of former prisoners. Speakers in this session include: Qadura Fares, Head, Palestinian Prisoners' Club, Ramallah; Roberto Garretón, Human Rights Lawyer, United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detentions, Santiago de Chile; Fabrizia Falcione, Project Manager, Women Human Rights Unit, UN Women; Iyad Misk, Coordinator of the Legal Unit, Defence for Children International — Palestine Section, Jerusalem; Niv Michaeli, Intervention Coordinator, Prisoners and Detainees Project, Physicians for Human Rights — Israel; and Jawad Ammawi, General Director of the Legal Unit, Ministry of Prisoners' Affairs of the Palestinian Authority, Ramallah.

Plenary II, entitled "Arrests and detentions of Palestinians by the occupying Power: Legal aspects" will run from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on 8 March. The sub-themes of the session will be: Israeli legal claims and arguments used for arresting and detaining Palestinians from the Occupied Palestinian Territory; The use of administrative detention and the denial of due process; Responsibilities of the occupying Power under international humanitarian and human rights law — The need for compliance with international standards; and Available legal mechanisms to ensure compliance with international law and responsibility of Third Party.

Speakers in this session include: Shawan Jabarin, General-Director, Al-Haq, Ramallah, who will participate via video link; Tamar Pelleg-Snyck, Advocate, Legal Department, HaMoked — Center for the Defence of the Individual, Jerusalem; Sahar Francis, Director, Addameer, Jerusalem; Said Benarbia, Legal Advisor, Middle East and North Africa Programme, International Commission of Jurists, Geneva; and Shawqi Al Issa, Director, Ensan Center for Democracy and Human Rights, Bethlehem.

Plenary III, on the issue of Palestinian political prisoners and the Israeli-Palestinian political process, will run from 3 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. on 8 March. The sub-themes of the session will be: The importance of addressing the question of political prisoners in the peace process; Strengthening the support of the international community for a solution to the question of Palestinian political prisoners; and the role of non-governmental actors, including parliamentarians and civil society in raising awareness about the issue. Speakers include: Aisling Byrne, Project Coordinator, Conflicts Forum, Beirut; Ms. Clwyd, Member of the British Parliament for Cynon Valley, London; Nasser Ayyes, Legal Researcher, Al-Haq, Ramallah; Bana Shoughry-Badame, Director, Legal Department, Public Committee against Torture in Israel, Jerusalem; and Saleh Hijazi, Researcher, Human Rights Watch, Ramallah.

In the closing session, on 8 March, from 5:30 p.m. to 6 p.m., Saviour F. Borg, Rapporteur of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, will present the concluding statement of the organizers. Also, Abdou Salam Diallo, Committee Chairman and a representative of Palestine, will make closing remarks.

A press conference is scheduled for Monday, 7 March at 1:00 p.m. in the press room of the MBuilding (MOE79). Registered media representatives will also have the opportunity to arrange individual interviews with members of the Committee's delegation and participating speakers.

Media registration will be possible in the Pass Office at Gate I at the Vienna International Centre on Monday, 7 March, starting at 8 a.m. If you arrive at any other time, please contact the Secretariat. As of Thursday, 3 March the Secretariat will be operating at the United Nations Office at Vienna and can be reached at: 3-4 March, Room MOE12, tel.: + (43-1) 26060-4724, 26060-4182; 8 March, Room MO122, tel.: + (43-1) 26060-4663, 26060-4664; or e-mail: dpr-meeting@un.org.

All sessions of the Meeting will be open to the media. The official languages will be Arabic, English and French.

Updated versions of the programme, as well as information on previous Meetings, will be available on the website of the Division for Palestinian Rights, United Nations Secretariat, at <http://www.un.org/depts/dpa/qpal/calendar.htm>.

The report on the Meeting will be issued, in due course, as a publication of the Division for Palestinian Rights.

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