
"SEVERE VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES," REPORTS UN COMMITTEE ON ISRAELI PRACTICES

14 August 2009

GENEVA – DAMASCUS: "Violations of the international humanitarian law during the operation Cast Lead, in particular the targeting of civilian population and wanton destruction of property and religious and cultural objects", will be reported to the United Nations General Assembly by the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.

At the end of a ten-day field mission to three Middle Eastern countries, the Special Committee expressed "particular concern for an increasing number of incidents of violence by Jewish settlers against Palestinian population in the West Bank in the presence of Israeli army and police."

The three-member panel has also recorded the pressure on human rights defenders, both Israeli and Palestinians working to alleviate the suffering in occupied territories.

Furthermore, at the General Assembly sixty-fourth session this year, the Committee will be noting "continuous and in some cases worsening violations of economic and cultural rights, in particular the right to education and health, further restrictions of movement and attacks on and destruction of Palestinian farmlands and orchards."

Since its establishment in 1968, the Special Committee has repeatedly been denied cooperation by the Government of Israel or access to the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

The Special Committee began its mission in Egypt on 4 August from where it traveled to Jordan and, finally, Syria, where it recorded the testimonies of witnesses and non-governmental organizations of the human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and occupied Golan.

The panel met the Foreign Ministers in Egypt, Jordan and Syria, as well as members of the League of Arab States, government officials, activists and representatives of Palestinian and Israeli non-governmental organizations. The Committee visited the Palestinian Hospital in Cairo where it heard about the difficulties in accessing health care and obtaining needed medications in the Gaza Strip.

On its last day in Syria, the Committee visited Quneitra and received testimonies pertaining to the discrimination in access to health services in occupied Golan, restrictions of family visits and other violations of civil, political, economic and cultural rights of Palestinians and Arab populations.

In its report to the General Assembly, the Committee will draw on exhaustive interviews and testimonies taken during its visits to Cairo, Amman and Damascus, as well as numerous reports by experts including the reports by the High Commissioner of Human Rights, Special Rapporteurs and many national and international non-governmental organizations. The Committee focused its investigation on the situation in occupied Gaza, West Bank, East Jerusalem and the occupied Golan.

The Special Committee is composed of three Member States: Sri Lanka (Chairman), Malaysia and Senegal. Ambassador Hamidon Ali, Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations in New York, currently chairs the Special Committee, due to the absence of the Sri Lankan Ambassador. Senegal is represented by Ambassador Babacar Mbaye, Permanent Representative of that country to the UN in Geneva, while Ms. Samantha Jayasuriya, Counsellor at the Sri Lankan Mission to the UN in New York, is representing her country.

The Special Committee: Under varying membership, the panel has existed since 1968 when it was established by the General Assembly. Its mandate was most recently renewed on 18 December 2008, in a resolution A/RES/63/95 referring to the principles of international humanitarian law, in particular to the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949, and to international standards of human rights, in particular the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenants on Human Rights.

For further information and media requests on the Special Committee's visit, please contact Ivana Vuco (Tel: +41 22 928 9541 / e-mail: IVuco@ohchr.org).

Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, 13 August 2008: <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N08/459/12/PDF/N0845912.pdf?OpenElement>

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