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Statement by the Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People on the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem

29 February 2008

The Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is seriously disturbed by the escalation of violence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, especially in the Gaza Strip. During the past two days alone, 31 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip have been killed by the Israeli occupying forces, including eight children and one infant. Also, an Israeli in Sderot was killed by a rocket launched from the Gaza Strip. Moreover, while overshadowed by the crisis in Gaza, Israeli military incursions into Palestinian towns and villages in the West Bank continue unabated resulting in casualties and arrests.

The military attacks on populated areas in the Occupied Palestinian Territory by the Israeli occupying forces that inevitably cause civilian casualties are in clear violation of international law and must end. The vicious cycle of violence must be broken and a ceasefire put into place.

The Bureau reiterates its position that the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territory is the main cause of the conflict. Israel, as the occupying Power, should be held responsible for the well-being of the civilian population under its control. The 1.5 million Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip are no exception, with Israel controlling not only all the border crossings but virtually every single aspect of their life. The Israeli Government must immediately lift the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip, which is causing a serious humanitarian crisis among innocent civilians, amounting to collective punishment, which is a violation of international humanitarian law. Moreover, the suffering of the population is only strengthening the radical elements in the society.

The Bureau calls on the parties to urgently take steps at appreciably improving the daily lives of the Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, in accordance with the understandings reached in Annapolis and Paris. It is imperative for the parties to preserve the political momentum gained at the Annapolis Conference. The international community, including this Committee, is doing its utmost to create a climate conducive to the conduct of permanent settlement negotiations. The escalation of violence and military assaults are in stark contrast to these endeavours and can only result in a collapse of the process. The Bureau also calls on the international community, in particular the Security Council of the United Nations, as well as the Quartet, to urgently consider appropriate steps to bring an end to the violence, lift the blockade of Gaza and improve the living conditions of the Palestinian civilian population in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

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