



High Commissioner concerned over deteriorating situation in occupied Palestinian territory

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As the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour warned that the region was on the brink of a human rights and humanitarian crisis, she called on Israel and the Palestinian Authority to respect core international human rights standards, and recalled the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), endorsed by the General Assembly, that "both Israel and Palestine are under an obligation scrupulously to observe the rules of international humanitarian law, one of the paramount purposes of which is to protect civilian life".

"The rising number of lives lost, whether as a result of targeted killings or suicide attacks, home-made missiles or artillery fire, is unacceptable", the High Commissioner said. "Civilians, particularly the most vulnerable, such as children, women and the elderly, should not pay the price for the neglect of human rights and humanitarian obligations".

The High Commissioner noted with concern reports of UN Agencies drawing attention to the risks of a humanitarian crisis for the Palestinian population as a result of the cuts in international aid to the Palestinian Authority, consequent non-payment of salaries, and predicted steep rise in poverty levels, compounded by intensified restrictions on movement of people and goods in the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT), including humanitarian aid.

"As the Governments of Israel and the Palestinian Authority assume new responsibilities", said the High Commissioner, "I urge both sides to re-affirm their commitment to international human rights and humanitarian law, and to prioritize human rights on their respective agendas. Respect for the rule of law and human rights safeguards must be guaranteed so that the Israeli and Palestinian peoples may live in an environment where their protection from attack and enjoyment of their fundamental civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights are assured".

The High Commissioner added. "As the occupying power, Israel bears responsibility under international humanitarian law, particularly under the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention, for the welfare of the Palestinian population in the OPT. Israel should also abide by the Agreement on Movement and Access regarding the movement of goods, including humanitarian assistance, into and from the Gaza Strip. As a State Party to all the major human rights treaties, Israel is required to ensure the enjoyment of human rights of all those within its jurisdiction, including the OPT, as re-affirmed by the ICJ Advisory Opinion of 2004, in light of which Israel is also required, inter alia, to dismantle and cease construction of the wall in the West Bank. The Palestinian Authority has the urgent duty to do everything in its power to maintain law and order, prevent attacks on Israeli civilians, investigate those attacks that have taken place, and bring to justice those responsible. The Palestinian Authority should also make every effort to facilitate implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access".

"I urge all High Contracting Parties to the 1949 Geneva Conventions to use their full moral authority with a view to making parties to the conflict stop this new cycle of violence and respect these Conventions, as well as to find ways to resume negotiations according to the Roadmap", the High Commissioner said.