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STATEMENT BY BUREAU OF COMMITTEE ON PALESTINIAN RIGHTS ON SITUATION IN GAZA STRIP

The following statement was issued on Friday, 14 November, in New York:

The Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People expresses its utmost alarm about the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip.

The Bureau unreservedly condemns Israel's decision to seal the borders between the Gaza Strip and Israel, preventing the delivery of essential humanitarian assistance, including food, medical supplies and fuel. The United Nations agencies on the ground, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), have warned that the tight Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip was forcing the suspension of food aid distribution to some 750,000 Gaza residents, because its warehouses had run out of food. As a result of the closure and the lack of fuel supplies, parts of Gaza experienced blackouts that affected many homes and hospitals. Such Israeli action is tantamount to collective punishment and is a violation of international humanitarian and human rights law.

The Bureau calls on the Israeli Government to immediately lift the siege on the Gaza Strip and allow humanitarian assistance to enter in order to help alleviate the plight of Gaza's residents, including women, children and the elderly, who have borne the brunt of the suffering brought about by months of closures. The Bureau of the Committee reminds Israel in most resolute terms that, as the occupying Power, it has a clear responsibility under the Fourth Geneva Convention to protect and ensure the well-being of the civilian population under its occupation.

The Bureau is also alarmed by the renewed violence in the Gaza Strip. Recent rocket fire into Israel and Israeli air strikes at Gaza have violated the five-month-old period of calm and could reignite the cycle of violence and jeopardize the political process. The Bureau calls for a cessation of Israeli air strikes and incursions, as well as the rocket fire by Palestinian groups.

The Bureau of the Committee stresses the permanent responsibility of the United Nations towards the question of Palestine until it is resolved in all its aspects in accordance with international law. It calls on the international community to act urgently and decisively in order to move the peace process forward towards achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine through the establishment of a sovereign and viable Palestinian State, on the basis of the 1967 borders. A settlement should be based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) and other relevant resolutions.

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