



UNITED NATIONS

Press Release

HIGH COMMISSIONER CALLS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK IN SEARCH FOR LASTING SOLUTION BETWEEN PALESTINIANS AND ISRAELIS

United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour issued the following statement today.

This week marks forty years of occupation of the Palestinian territory, a regime which has led to wide-ranging and serious violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people, first and foremost among them the right to self-determination. The occupation must give way to a lasting political solution allowing both the Palestinian and Israeli peoples to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized borders.

In the long-standing search for this solution, however, human rights have for too long taken a back seat. It need not and must not be so. In fact, the protection afforded by international law is most vital in situations of conflict and volatility.

Both flaring crises and longer term resolution of the conflict must be addressed within a framework of international human rights and humanitarian law. This includes the relevant obligations as re-affirmed in July 2004 in the International Court of Justice's Advisory Opinion on the Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

The right to life continues to be violated within a general climate of impunity in the region. Whether through extrajudicial executions or indiscriminate artillery attacks carried out by the Israeli Defense Forces, or internal Palestinian violence, or indiscriminate Palestinian attacks on Israeli civilians, the right to life has been stripped of its fundamental value. What needs to be urgently and concretely addressed is the paramount obligation to ensure protection of civilians in all circumstances. This also means ensuring appropriate redress in situations where such protection has failed.

Furthermore, greater efforts must be made to counter a growing sense of disempowerment among Palestinians throughout the occupied territory. Principal among these, immediate steps can and should be taken to remove obstacles, including settlements, impeding Palestinians' right to freedom of movement: within the West Bank in particular, including Jerusalem, but also between the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This right is seriously compromised and has severely curtailed Palestinians' exercise of a wide range of other human rights, including health, education, work and family life. The plight and rights of those imprisoned, captured or otherwise detained – particularly children – should also be urgently addressed.

The international community has a moral and legal obligation to ensure that international human rights and humanitarian law is fully implemented by all in efforts towards a lasting solution. Achieving the highest possible level of respect for human rights in the region is an end in itself. Significantly, however, it can also contribute to building greater confidence among the parties and facilitate the search for a lasting solution. The human rights of Palestinians and Israelis cannot be subject to negotiation or compromise.