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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE OCCUPIED ARAB TERRITORIES, INCLUDING PALESTINE

Letter dated 11 March 2003 from the Permanent Observer for Palestine to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

In a grave violation of the most basic human rights, Israeli troops, backed by scores of tanks, armoured vehicles, war planes and helicopter gunships invaded Jabalia refugee camp in Gaza Strip in the early morning hours of Thursday, 6 March 2003, targeting civilians and firing indiscriminately at residential buildings in the camp. This shooting resulted in the killing of at least 11 Palestinian civilians and the wounding of 140 others, 40 of whom are suffering from critical or irrecoverable injuries.

The following are the names of the 11 Palestinians killed in Jabalia: Muhammad Shihda Al-Bayyari, Ihab Ahmad Nabhan, Nael Muhammad Abu Sido, Naji Ismail Abu Jleleh, Abdel Karim Zyaddah, Muhammad Manar Abu Warda, Muhsen Awad Abu Odeh, Ibrahim Jamal Al-Madhoun, Hamdi Othman Ubeid, Muhammad Jamal Muhsen, Thaer Jabr Rihan.

This massacre of course followed 30 months of killing of Palestinians and grave war crimes and violations of basic human rights. Only during the last two months, about 150 Palestinians were murdered by Israeli occupation forces, at least 80 of whom were slaughtered in February alone, and hundreds others injured.

The random firing by the Israeli troops also targeted medical personnel and journalists working for local and foreign agencies, wounding two Reuter's correspondents and a cameraman.

Israeli operations in Gaza have become the norm in recent weeks. This is the third incursion into a Gaza residential neighbourhood or refugee camp in the past 10 days. Each incursion has claimed the lives of at least 11 Palestinians, including children, the elderly and women. People were killed by Israeli missiles, bullets, snipers and bulldozers which demolished homes on top of their residents.

On this same bloody day, in the West Bank city of Bethlehem, 26-year-old Osama Alisis was arrested, taken outside and shot in the head in cold blood. His arrest and execution was not ordered by a judge, but by a vigilant soldier right outside his house.

In the meanwhile, the Israeli occupation army sealed off the West Bank and Gaza Strip rather hermetically, confining the Palestinians to their immediate towns, villages and hamlets. Villagers in the Hebron hilly area reported that "trigger-happy" and widely undisciplined Israeli soldiers were opening fire on Palestinians seen driving or walking on the main roads. And as the saying goes, "when soldiers act like gangsters and common criminals, they become gangsters and common criminals"; this is what the Israeli army has become.

In the light of the continued campaign of massacres, bloodshed and destruction being waged by the Israeli occupation authorities, forces and settlers in all Palestinian towns, villages and camps, we once again reiterate our call to Your Excellency to hold Israel accountable for its actions in accordance with international and humanitarian law, not to allow such policies of hate to continue unchallenged, to take immediate action to stop such Israeli assaults against the Palestinian people, to take stance against injustice and to put an end to the illegal and immoral occupation of the Palestinian territories.

We also appeal to Your Excellency to use all your offices to provide international protection to protect the Palestinian protected persons from the ruthless Israeli attacks until Israel has withdrawn its forces from all the Palestinian Territories, occupied since June 1967, including East Jerusalem. I would be most grateful if you could arrange to have this letter distributed as an official document of the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on Human Rights under its agenda item 8.

(Signed) Nabil RAMLAWI
Ambassador
Permanent Observer

