



Press Release

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ACCUSED IN SECOND COMMITTEE OF BRINGING PALESTINIAN ECONOMY TO BRINK OF COLLAPSE, ISRAEL CALLS REPORT PESSIMISTIC, UNBALANCED

In Earlier Debate, Delegates Conclude Consideration of Developing Countries in Special Situations

Israel's continued occupation of Palestinian territories and its destruction and exploitation of their resources had brought the Palestinian economy to the brink of collapse, the Observer for Palestine said this morning as the Second Committee (Economic and Financial) began its discussion of permanent sovereignty of Arab peoples in occupied lands over their natural resources.

She said Israel had continued unlawfully to confiscate Palestinian land, build and expand its illegal settlements and bypass roads and raze agricultural land and productive trees. Israel had diverted water, destroyed irrigation wells and flattened, since 2000, more than half of the fertile land in Beit Hannoun, a major agricultural area in northern Gaza.

Noting that Israel had continued illegally to construct a Wall in and around East Jerusalem, she recalled that in its [advisory opinion](#) of 9 July 2004, the International Court of Justice had ruled that the wall was contrary to international law, concluding that Israel must halt its construction, dismantle already-built segments, repeal all related legislative and regulatory acts and make reparations for damages. Palestine called upon States to stop assisting the occupying Power in its continuing violations and stressed the permanent responsibility of the United Nations until the question of Palestine was resolved.

Similarly, the representative of the United Arab Emirates said Israel had continued to impose closures and severe restrictions on Palestinian movements, destroy infrastructure and agricultural production and demolish homes, despite numerous international resolutions affirming the inalienable rights of Arab peoples in the occupied lands over their natural resources. Settlement planning zones had absorbed 41.9 per cent of West Bank land, and Israel had confiscated 45 per cent of the land in the Gaza Strip for settlements or designated military zones.

Israeli forces and settlers had uprooted hundreds of thousands of olive, citrus and other fruit trees, he added. They had destroyed hundreds of wells and agricultural warehouses, leaving thousands of Palestinians without a source of income. In 2003, closure policies had caused heavy economic losses, leading to 50 per cent unemployment and 63 per cent extreme poverty among Palestinians. The international community must compel Israel to end its aggression immediately and comply with all relevant United Nations resolutions that called for full Israeli withdrawal from lands occupied in 1967.

Responding, Israel's delegate noted that the Committee had gathered to discuss yet another pessimistic and unbalanced report on Middle East conditions, describing it as replete with inaccuracies and misleading exaggerations. A stark example of the report's weakness was its figures portraying Israel's extravagant and wasteful water use, which were quite simply wrong. Total per capita water consumption in Israel was less than half that defined by the United Nations as the shortage red line.

He added that Palestinians had not lost a single well as a result of the security fence. The report's claim that its construction had caused the loss of 29 Palestinian wells was blatantly incorrect. Moreover, the report's assertion that Israeli army activity had damaged water and wastewater infrastructure was misleading. Any damage that Israeli forces had caused in their ongoing campaign against Palestinian terror had been repaired immediately and in full cooperation with the Palestinian Water Authority.

The report did nothing to help bring the region's people closer to peace, with its bias towards one side of the conflict, he emphasized. Reports that respected only the rights of one side while stressing only the responsibilities of the other worsened the already serious conditions in the region. The Israeli Government's disengagement initiative, which had been welcomed by the Quartet [United Nations, United States, Russian Federation and European Union] and the international community as a whole, aimed to bring about greater stability and security to both Israelis and Palestinians.

Prior to the discussion, Sulafa al-Bassam, Chief of the United Nations Regional Commissions New York Office, introduced the report of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan.

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The Second Committee will meet again at 10 a.m. on Monday, 15 November, to conclude its debate on the permanent sovereignty of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan, over their natural resources.

Background

The Second Committee (Economic and Financial) met today to conclude its discussion of countries in special situations, including least developed and landlocked developing countries. It was also expected to take up the permanent sovereignty of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan over their natural resources.

Before the Committee was a note by the Secretary-General transmitting a report of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan (document [A/59/89/E/2004/21](#)).

The report states that Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory has continued to worsen economic and social conditions for Palestinians. Between October 2000 and March 2004, extrajudicial killings resulted in the deaths of 349 Palestinians and about 8,000 Palestinians remain in Israeli prisons and detention centres. Moreover, the Israeli army destroyed 511 homes in the West Bank from December 2002 to December 2003, of which 77 were refugee shelters, and completely or partially demolished at least 858 homes in the Gaza Strip in 2003, of which 776 were refugee shelters.

According to the report, the movement of goods and persons is restricted, deepening unemployment and poverty, preventing health care, interrupting education and generally humiliating the Palestinian people. Since March 2003, some 85 new checkpoints, 538 trenches, 47 road gates and blockades and innumerable "flying" (mobile) checkpoints have dissected the entire occupied territory into disconnected, isolated pockets. Various checkpoints, routes and zones have remained closed for extended periods.

Closures and curfews in 2003 led to losses and stagnated trade, increasing poverty and raising unemployment to 70 per cent in some areas, the report says. By the end of March 2003, the median household income had plummeted by 44 per cent compared to October 2000. Some 63 per cent of families borrow informally from friends and relatives to make ends meet and 20 per cent have sold jewellery and other belongings in an "erosive coping strategy". By March 2003, some 42 per cent of families were destitute and dependent upon humanitarian assistance.

Israel's confiscation of Palestinian land and water resources for settlements and work on the West Bank barrier increased during 2003, affecting one third of West Bank inhabitants, the report says. Some 280 rural communities in the occupied territory have no access to wells or running water, depending completely on municipal or private water delivery. As services are curtailed, malnutrition and other health problems afflict a growing number of Palestinians, while Israeli restrictions hamper humanitarian services to the occupied Palestinian territory.

In the occupied Syrian Golan Heights, the report continues, Israel now maintains 40 settlements, housing 15,700 Israelis. According to local sources, the remaining 18,000 indigenous Syrians control only about 6 per cent of the original territory under occupation. Israel prohibits the remaining Syrians from building needed water infrastructure, and levies heavy taxes on their water use, land and transportation. Schools remain inadequate and children are dropping out at a rising rate to enter the Israeli labour market, where they receive a lower salary than others doing the same jobs.

Introduction of Draft Resolutions

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The Committee then took up its agenda item on permanent sovereignty of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan over their natural resources.

Introduction of Report

SULAFAL-BASSAM, Chief, Regional Commissions New York Office, introduced the report on economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan (document [A/59/89-E/2004/21](#)). She said that Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory continued to be the primary cause of conflict. Israel had more than 136 settlements, with 236,000 settlers in the West Bank. Another 17 settlements housed some 7,000 settlers in the Gaza Strip, while some 180,000 settlers lived in the occupied East Jerusalem.

The West Bank barrier had led to the confiscation and fragmentation of Palestinian land, giving rise to serious concerns about the future possibility of an independent Palestinian State, she said. With the barrier, Israel would annex most of the western aquifer system, severing communities from their land and water and leaving them without other means of subsistence. Moreover, the imposition of restrictions on the movement of goods and persons, in addition to curfews, had exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in the occupied Palestinian territory, deepening unemployment and poverty and preventing adequate health care and education.

Israel's confiscation and destruction of Palestinian homes and lands had served to swell the number of homeless and internally displaced Palestinians by between 13,000 and 16,000 persons during 2003 alone, she said. Moreover, Israeli forces had destroyed 10 per cent of Gaza's arable land. In the West Bank, the Israeli army and settlers had uprooted hundreds of thousands of olive, citrus and other fruit trees, and destroyed 806 wells and 296 agricultural warehouses. In the occupied Syrian Golan, Israeli authorities had appropriated most of the land for military use and settlements. The remaining 18,000 indigenous Syrian Arabs had maintained control over only about 6 per cent of the original territory under occupation.

The economy of the occupied Palestinian territory had reverted to the status of "war-torn economy", she said. Humanitarian assistance was insufficient to ensure a sustainable life with dignity and rights for Palestinian civilians under occupation. The only option to address their current economic and social deprivation lay in lifting the occupation from the Palestinian territory and the Golan Heights.

Questions and Answers

Responding to a question on how conditions in the occupied territories affected the Palestinians' ability to meet the Millennium Development Goals, Ms. AL-BASSAM said that the regional commissions were preparing reports on the achievement of those goals in their respective areas. The reports would be issued in early 2005 and would be available to delegations.

Asked why the report had not included comments by the Israeli Prime Minister and the United Nations Secretary-General on expected improvements in Gaza, she said the report did make references to the Secretary-General's comments on the situation in that area. The report only covered the period July 2003 to July 2004, during which time there had been no improvement in the situation of the people living in Gaza and the overall situation on the ground.

Statements

ABDULLAH AL-EMADI ([Qatar](#)), speaking in his national capacity, said that the wall Israel was building in the most fertile zones of the West Bank failed to conform with international legal norms. Israeli settlements had become towns and villages and were now the principal cause of conflict between Palestinians and Israelis. The entire world was watching with concern the deteriorating economic situation in East Jerusalem, where restrictions were having the disastrous effects of poverty and unemployment, as well as giving rise to violence. Many individuals had lost all hope in the [Road Map](#) and the peace initiative.

He expressed concern about Israel's continuing illegitimate occupation and its effect on living conditions in the occupied territories. Many children had been killed and more than 9,000 wounded since 2000. The Israelis had carried out arbitrary arrests, and many people had been tortured in Israeli prisons. Land had been confiscated and people were unfairly taxed.

In the Syrian Golan, resources had been depleted, trees burnt, and chemical wastes buried, he said. Israeli occupation was leading to broad-scale destruction, with harmful effects on freedom and employment. Qatar strongly denounced Israeli policies that defied Security Council resolutions, which were the political framework for resuming peace negotiations. The international community must encourage Israel to end its occupation of Palestine and the Golan Heights.

SOMAI BARGHOUTI, Observer for Palestine, said that Israel's continued occupation, destruction and exploitation of Palestinian natural resources had been extensive. Ongoing serious human rights violations had caused further deterioration of the situation on the ground. Israel continued unlawfully to confiscate Palestinian land, build and expand its illegal settlements and bypass roads, and illegally construct a Wall in and around East Jerusalem. The razing of agricultural land and productive trees, constant water diversion and destruction of irrigation wells had continued. Since 2000, Israel had flattened more than half of the fertile land in Beit Hannoun, a major agricultural area in northern Gaza, bringing the Palestinian economy to the brink of collapse.

In its 9 July 2004 advisory opinion, the International Court of Justice had said that the construction of the wall and its associated regime was contrary to international law, she recalled. The Court had concluded that Israel was under obligation to terminate those breaches, halt construction of and dismantle already-built segments of the wall, repeal all related legislative and regulatory acts and make reparations for damages. The Wall departed from the 1949 Armistice Line and cut deep into Palestinian territory, destroying thousands of dunums of Palestinian land, property and best water wells in grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention. The international community must ensure compliance with the advisory opinion.

States should not render aid or assistance to the occupying Power, enabling it to continue such violations, she said. In that regard, the 19 August 2004 Ministerial Declaration of the Non-Aligned Movement called for specific actions by the United Nations, Member States and the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention. Palestinian unemployment had reached 62.3 per cent, and poverty in Gaza was at 75 per cent. The United Nations must continue monitoring the situation closely, under its permanent responsibility on the question of Palestine, until it was effectively resolved in all its aspects and in accordance with international law.

RADZI ABDUL RAHMAN ([Malaysia](#)) said that social and economic data had confirmed a marked deterioration of living conditions in the occupied Palestinian territories, including new forms of dispossession and destruction of private and public assets. The new separation wall was another threat that had acutely undermined the economic and social conditions of those living under Israeli occupation. It had led to the destruction of hundreds of Palestinian homes, property and commercial premises, as well as thousands of fruit and olive trees. The wall was a clear act of territorial annexation by Israel, which had confiscated water resources and fertile agricultural lands owned by Palestinians under the guise of self-defence and security.

He also expressed concern over the predicament of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan, noting that the remaining 18,000 Syrian Arabs there had maintained control over only 6 per cent of the original territory under Israeli occupation. New settlements and activities in existing settlements had increased. Israeli authorities had continued to prohibit Syrian Arabs from constructing water infrastructure to cultivate their agricultural land, and taxed them heavily on water use, land and transportation. Moreover, Syrian Arabs had continued to face the threat of landmines and had few employment opportunities or educational facilities.

AHMED ALHAY AL-HAMELI ([United Arab Emirates](#)) said that despite numerous international resolutions that affirmed the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the Arab people of the Syrian Golan to their natural resources, and called upon Israel to refrain from exploiting such resources and cease all hostile and illegal practices. Israel continued to construct new settlements, impose closures and severe restrictions on the movements of Palestinians, destroy infrastructure and agricultural production, demolish homes and violate all international laws, including the Fourth Geneva Convention. Settler planning zones had absorbed 41.9 per cent of the land in the West Bank and Israel had confiscated 45 per cent of the land in the Gaza Strip for settlements or designated military zones. Last year alone, Israel's confiscation of Palestinian lands and demolition of hundreds of homes had left an additional 16,000 Palestinians homeless and internally displaced. Some 28,000 Palestinian homes remained under threat of demolition.

Israeli forces had destroyed 10 per cent of Gaza's arable land, he said, adding that the Israeli army and settlers had uprooted hundreds of thousands of olive, citrus and other fruit trees, and destroyed hundreds of wells and agricultural warehouses, leaving hundreds of thousands of Palestinians without a source of income. Closure policies had caused heavy economic losses, leading to 50 per cent unemployment and 63 per cent extreme poverty among Palestinians in 2003. As a result of Israel's continued confiscation of lands in the occupied Syrian Golan, Syrian Arab inhabitants controlled only 6 per cent of the original land under Israeli occupation. The United Arab Emirates denounced Israel's occupation of Arab lands, war crimes, and its destruction of Palestinians' natural resources, which were an attempt to empty the occupied territory of its people. The international community must compel Israel to end its aggression immediately and comply with all relevant United Nations resolutions calling for full Israeli withdrawal from lands occupied in 1967.

DANIEL MERON ([Israel](#)) noted that the Committee had gathered to discuss yet another pessimistic and unbalanced report on Middle East conditions that was replete with inaccuracies and misleading exaggerations. Several cooperative activities on the ground regarding natural resources offered a ray of hope for all the region's inhabitants, including the Second Israeli-Palestinian Water Conference in Turkey last month; the upcoming meeting of the working group on "Dry Land Management", organized by the World Bank; and the meeting of Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian water management experts in Prague at the end of this month. Those kinds of cooperative endeavours could effectively overcome the natural resource-related challenges in the region.

One stark example of the report's weakness was its figures portraying Israel's extravagant and wasteful water use, which were quite simply wrong, he said. If the authors of the report had requested accurate figures from Israel, it would certainly have supplied them. The total per capita water consumption in Israel was less than one half of that defined by the United Nations as the shortage red line. The report's claim that the construction of Israel's security fence had caused the loss of 29 Palestinian wells was incorrect. Palestinians had not lost one well because of the fence. In addition, its claim that Israeli army activity had damaged water and wastewater infrastructure was misleading. Any damage that had been caused by the Israeli Defence Force in its ongoing campaign against Palestinian terrorism was repaired immediately, in full cooperation with the Palestinian Water Authority.

The report would not help bring the region's people closer to living together in peace with its bias towards one side of the conflict, he said. Reports that only respected the rights of one side and the responsibilities of the other by using a cut-and-paste methodology only worsened the already serious conditions in the region. The Israeli Government's disengagement initiative, which had been welcomed by the Quartet and the international community as a whole, aimed to bring about greater stability and security to both Israelis and Palestinians.

FIRDOUS ASHIQ AWAN ([Pakistan](#)) noted that the Secretary-General's report had concluded that the accumulated consequences of the Israeli occupation had brought the Palestinian territory to "war-torn economy" status and that its continuation had led to "new forms of dispossession and destruction of private and public assets of all kinds". The report had revealed that Israeli military operations in the past year had impacted negatively the lives of the Palestinian people and that the intensification of extrajudicial killings of prominent political figures had resulted in 394 Palestinian deaths since March 2004. The West Bank separation

barrier had fragmented Palestinian land and further restricted people's access to farms, jobs and services. Some 800 of the 8,000 Palestinians in Israeli prison and detention centres were being held without any judicial procedure or formal charge. Israel extracted 85 per cent of the occupied territories' water, creating a serious water shortage for Palestinians. About 47 per cent of Palestinian households had lost more than half their income and 60 per cent of Palestinians were poor.

He emphasized that Pakistan steadfastly supported the Palestinian people's just struggle for their inalienable rights, the attainment of which was necessary for the achievement of a lasting peace in the Middle East. The international community, particularly the United States, must work together to secure a fair and peaceful solution to the problem, including the realization of the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace, harmony and security.

MOHAMED ELFARNAWANY (Egypt) said that the occupying Power in the Palestinian territory and the Syrian Golan had continued to disregard the inalienable rights of the people involved. The Israeli Government had persisted with policies that undermined the international community and its efforts to achieve common development goals. It was evident that Israeli practices against the Palestinians undermined their development efforts. The Millennium Development Goals had mobilized efforts to eradicate poverty, but restrictions on the movement of goods and persons in the occupied areas had increased unemployment and poverty, exacerbating efforts to achieve the targets.

Infrastructure in the occupied Arab lands had been damaged by the Israeli army and settlers, he said. Israeli settlements, set up contrary to international norms, were having negative repercussions on the living conditions of the Palestinian people. In particular, efforts to promote education had been in vain, thwarted by demolitions, barriers and the closing of schools, while lack of access to reproductive health services had threatened women's lives. How could the international community disregard such repression, especially at a time when it was seeking economic cooperation among countries?

REHAMAL-GHANEM (Kuwait) said the Secretary-General's report revealed the dire consequences of Israel's continued occupation of Palestinian lands on the Palestinian people, economy and territory, noting that it had confiscated more than 16,000 Palestinian homes in 2003 that were not recognized as refugee housing and therefore received no international protection. Israel's occupation of main roads had interrupted daily life, fuelled unemployment and forced Palestinians to relocate to low-production areas. Palestinian family income had dropped 44 per cent, more than half of all Palestinians lived in absolute poverty, and foreign investment had dropped by 90 per cent since the beginning of 2003. Had a peaceful solution been reached last year, foreign investment would have totalled \$40 billion. Israel had attacked four bank branches and confiscated millions of dollars under the pretext that the money was held in illegal accounts.

She said that hundreds of military control points impeded the ability of humanitarian organizations to bring in aid and had forced the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), as of 30 March, to halt assistance to some Palestinian towns. In the occupied Golan, settlers had prevented Syrian Arabs from building the water infrastructure needed to cultivate fertile lands. Settlers had confiscated more than 300,000 hectares of land, destroyed fruit trees and adopted coercive measures against Syrians. The destruction of their economic and social systems was reflected in deteriorating living standards. The cessation of hostilities in the occupied territories was the only means to ensure sustainable development and to enable Palestinians to benefit from globalization. That could only occur with the Israeli withdrawal from all lands seized in 1967.

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