



General Assembly GA/PAL/1071

Department of Public Information • News and Media Division • New York

ALARMED AT DETERIORATING SITUATION IN OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY, PALESTINIAN

RIGHTS COMMITTEE BUREAU WARNS RECENT POLITICAL MOMENTUM COULD BE JEOPARDIZED

The following statement was issued today by the Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People:

The Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People expresses its alarm that the ever deteriorating situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, could jeopardize the political momentum achieved through recent international efforts to encourage the resumption of the peace process, including the holding of the Annapolis conference, as well as the Paris Donors' Conference.

Routine Israeli military operations in the West Bank and air strikes at the Gaza Strip, the expansion of settlements in and around East Jerusalem, the continued construction of the wall in the West Bank, and the imposition of a damaging blockade and sanctions on the Gaza Strip are undermining the implementation of the Joint Understanding achieved by the parties at Annapolis and run contrary to Israel's Road Map obligations. Hundreds of Israeli checkpoints throughout the West Bank threaten to render any economic assistance ineffective.

Moreover, the economic and humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory has steadily degraded, with the population of the Gaza Strip suffering the most because of the closure of the Territory. More than half of the Palestinians live in poverty. Basic humanitarian needs continue to be unmet. In this regard, the Bureau reminds Israel in most resolute terms that, as the occupying Power, it has a responsibility under the Fourth Geneva Convention to protect the civilian population under its occupation. The Bureau was particularly disturbed by the ruling of Israel's High Court of Justice of 30 January, upholding the 2007 Government decision to reduce deliveries of electricity and fuel supply to the Gaza Strip, which is tantamount to collective punishment of Palestinians. The Bureau wishes to restate its position of condemning the killing of innocent civilians by both sides, including Israeli operations and the firing of rockets from Gaza. At the same time, the Bureau considers it totally unacceptable and unjust that the entire civilian population of the Gaza Strip is subjected to a suffocating economic blockade for the actions of a few militant groups. The Bureau supports the Palestinian Authority proposal to assume responsibility for the Palestinian side of all of the Gaza Strip's border crossings.

The Bureau deeply regrets that the Security Council, having considered the situation at a recent meeting, once again failed to act in response to the grave situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

The Bureau calls on the international community to continue to make a contribution to alleviating the humanitarian emergency in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. It is encouraged by the generous pledges made at the 2007 Paris Donors' Conference. The Bureau also welcomed the launching of the 2008 Consolidated Appeal, and the announcement by the European Commission of the setting up of a new mechanism for channelling donor contributions in support of the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan, building on the success of the Temporary International Mechanism.

The Bureau of the Committee 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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