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STATEMENT BY BUREAU OF COMMITTEE ON EXERCISE OF INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF PALESTINIAN

PEOPLE ON ISRAEL'S SETTLEMENT ACTIVITIES IN OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

The Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People issued the following statement today, 25 April:

The Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is deeply troubled by the recent decision by the Israeli Cabinet to "legalize" three unauthorized settlement outposts in the West Bank: "Sansana," "Rechelim" and "Bruchin". While Israel, the occupying Power, has blatantly supported and engaged in the expansion of illegal settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, these brazen actions amount to the first official establishment of new settlements in the West Bank in 20 years, according to the Israeli watchdog organization Peace Now. In the meantime, the Israeli Government is also intensifying its efforts to thwart the evacuation of the "Ulpana" outpost ordered by the Supreme Court.

It must be clearly reiterated that all Israeli settlements remain illegal under article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, as reaffirmed in numerous Security Council and General Assembly resolutions and the 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the Wall. Israeli settlement activities also run directly counter to Road Map obligations, which Israel continues to ignore. Moreover, settlements have a devastating effect on the living conditions of the Palestinian people under occupation, while acts of violence, vandalism, and harassment by settlers are escalating. The international community maintains its principled position that settlements constitute the main obstacle to a resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. By continuing to create facts on the ground, and to alter the demographic status of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Israeli Government is rapidly eroding the prospects for the two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders.

On 11 April, the Quartet expressed concern about unilateral and provocative actions, including continued settlement activity, which cannot prejudice the outcome of negotiations. It is particularly troubling that, at the moment the Palestinian leadership has conveyed to the Israeli Government its latest initiatives towards the resumption of the peace process, and the Quartet and its regional partners are redoubling their efforts in this regard, Israel, the occupying Power, has instead chosen to continue the path of intransigence and defiance of the collective will of the international community.

While Israel continues to bend the law to accommodate its settlers, it continues relentlessly pursuing its illegal campaign of house demolitions and expulsions targeting Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and particularly in Occupied East Jerusalem. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) reported that during the past week alone, 67 Palestine refugees, more than half of them children, were forcibly displaced again as a result of the eviction or demolitions, while settlers moved in, in yet another flagrant violation by Israel of its legal obligations as the occupying Power.

The Bureau of the Committee reiterates its call on the Israeli Government to immediately freeze all settlement activity, to dismantle outposts as called for by the Road Map, and to refrain from any provocative acts that undermine international efforts to revive Israeli-Palestinian talks. The Bureau calls on the Quartet to monitor and ensure Israeli compliance with the Road Map. The Security Council has determined that settlements are both contrary to international law and an impediment to peace. The Bureau calls upon the Council to meet its legal obligations as the guardian of international peace and security, and to find the resolve to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to halt and dismantle settlements in order to safeguard the two-State solution. The Bureau calls on the Depositary to urgently convene the Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to ensure accountability and to make Israel respect its legal obligations.

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