



General Assembly

GA/PAL/1209

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

STATEMENT BY BUREAU OF COMMITTEE ON EXERCISE OF INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF PALESTINIAN PEOPLE ON UPSURGE IN ISRAELI SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY

The Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People adopted the following statement today, 19 August:

The Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is deeply alarmed by the upsurge in illegal Israeli settlement activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including occupied East Jerusalem, since the beginning of August. On 4 August, the Israeli Government gave its approval for the construction of an additional 900 settlement units in the illegal settlement of "Har Homa" in Jabal Abu Ghneim in occupied East Jerusalem. "Har Homa's" location severs Bethlehem from East Jerusalem, inhibiting travel and territorial continuity between Palestinian towns and neighbourhoods. Notwithstanding the widespread condemnation of this provocative measure by the international community, the Israeli Government proceeded on 11 August to approve the construction of 1,600 more housing units in the East Jerusalem settlement of "Ramat Shlomo". This was followed on 15 August by the approval granted to build 277 settler apartments in the "Ariel" settlement block, which encroaches over 20 kilometres into the West Bank. The Israeli Interior Ministry also announced that in the coming days, another 2,700 units will be approved in the illegal settlements of "Pisgat Ze'ev" and "Givat Hamatos". This would bring the number of new settlement units approved in occupied East Jerusalem to over 5,200 in August alone, reflecting the intensity of continuing Israeli settlement expansion and construction in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

The Bureau strongly condemns these illegal and provocative acts by the occupying Power, undertaken with the aim to encircle and separate East Jerusalem from the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory behind a wall of settlements. They also cement Israeli control over the West Bank by fragmenting it in ways which

would render a viable, contiguous and sovereign Palestinian State impossible to achieve in accordance with the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967

borders. The Bureau calls on Israel to immediately cease and reverse these unilateral actions, freeze all settlement activity in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, including the so-called "natural growth", and dismantle outposts erected since 2001, obligations Israel undertook in accordance with the Road Map.

The Bureau also wishes to underscore that all settlements, including those in East Jerusalem, and their associated regime, such as the appropriations of Palestinian land and water, closures, checkpoints, demolitions, evictions and the separation wall, are illegal under international humanitarian law and amount to grave violations of the human rights of the Palestinians. Settlements also constitute serious impediments to the socio-economic development of the Palestinians and exacerbate their humanitarian hardship. The Bureau is particularly alarmed by the continued impunity enjoyed by settlers who commit provocative and violent acts against Palestinian civilians, including children, and their properties, especially agricultural lands and religious sites. It calls on Israel to take credible action to prevent and punish such acts.

Recent Israeli settlement announcements undermine international efforts aimed at bringing the parties back to negotiations. They have a corrosive effect on confidence and undermine goodwill, absent which serious and genuine permanent status negotiations are unlikely to succeed. The issue of settlements, as well as that of Jerusalem, are among the six core issues to be negotiated by the parties. All unilateral actions by Israel which prejudice the outcome of negotiations by creating *faits accomplis* on the ground have no legal validity and will not be recognized by the international community.

While welcoming the recent expressions of concern by the Quartet and other members of the international community, the Bureau calls for credible and decisive action to compel Israel to abide by its legal obligations and to protect Palestinian civilians under prolonged military occupation from the damaging effects of settlements and settlers. The Security Council and the High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Conventions bear a special responsibility in this regard.

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