

CONFÉRENCE DE PRESSE DE DESMOND TUTU ET CHRISTINE CHINKIN SUR LA MISSION D'ENQUÊTE À BEIT HANOUN (en anglais)

13 juin 2007

"We have a passionate commitment to see a horrendous situation end," said Archbishop Desmond Mpilo Tutu at a press conference at the Palais des Nations this afternoon, referring to the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. "We believe that it is in the interest also of Israel that the situation is resolved." Archbishop Tutu spoke to the press in his capacity as Leader of the High Level Fact Finding Mission to Beit Hanoun established by the Human Rights Council, following his presentation of the Mission's report to the Council this morning. According to the report, the Mission was not able to travel to Beit Hanoun due to the non-cooperation of the Government of Israel. Archbishop Tutu was accompanied by Professor Christine Chinkin, Member of the Mission.

Asked to respond to the criticism that the High Level Mission's mandate was one-sided and the outcome preordained, Professor Chinkin responded that the mandate focused on assessing the situation and needs of the victims and survivors of the incident in Beit Hanoun, which did not seem to her to be biased in any way. It was rooted in international law. Professor Chinkin emphasized that the Mission had been committed to submitting a rounded report. "We wanted to talk with, discuss, understand the position of all concerned and that includes the Government, individuals, NGOs, other actors within Israel as well as within Gaza... Victims and survivors, at the end of the day, means everybody. We are talking about the human security of all people within the region."

"We see the encapsulation of Beit Hanoun as a vehicle for publicizing the ongoing position of the Palestinians," said Professor Chinkin when asked whether there was any point in persisting with the High Level Mission given Israel's unwillingness to cooperate. While the events of that particular night had receded, individual incidents had wider repercussions. "The ongoing impunity that arises out of that, itself feeds a continuing culture of impunity." If the Mission were able to complete its mission, its report would not be a historical record and nothing else but rather put into context of the "endless cycle that we are seeing".

In response to the likelihood of the Mission's recommendations being implemented, given the "hundreds of resolutions that had already been passed to protect the Palestinian people", Archbishop Tutu said: "One hopes very fervently that decisions will be taken seriously and that people will seek to implement them. You have to work on the basis of a certain faith in other people... We hope quite deeply that this Council and its members want to see it as a credible institution that does make a difference. Otherwise we would be consumed by a cynicism."

Asked to comment on the current situation in Gaza, which the journalist characterized as being close to civil war, Archbishop Tutu said "When you are oppressed, it is so very easy to turn on yourselves... The psychology of it is not surprising... It has to do with what happens to you and your dignity, to your sense of self-esteem. It is very difficult actually for people who have not been 'unfree' to know what oppression and injustice do to people. When you end up filled with self-hate, you get pretty annoyed with the person who actually looks like you. It just makes the situation so much more desperately urgent for us to do everything we can."

Professor Chinkin added that it was important that "the current focus on the internal violence in Gaza in particular does not distract attention away from the ongoing human rights violations, such as those relating to health, the movement of the people outside the territories, the ongoing destruction of shelter and access to... an adequate standard of living."

Archbishop Tutu indicated that given their deep commitment to the issue, he and Professor Chinkin would be available, if called on by the Council to undertake further action.