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**QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE
OCCUPIED ARAB TERRITORIES, INCLUDING PALESTINE**

**Letter dated 17 December 2002 from the Permanent Observer for Palestine
to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the United Nations
High Commissioner for Human Rights**

The Israeli occupation forces continue to conduct intensive shelling of Palestinian-controlled areas, open heavy machine gun-fire at Palestinian neighbourhoods, damage citizen's homes and public and private institutions, bulldoze buildings that used to house tens of Palestinian families, use tanks and armoured vehicles to raid Palestinian localities, spreading panic among citizens, especially women and children, seal roads, and prevent hundreds of citizens from reaching their homes, jobs, schools and even hospitals to get urgent medical treatment. Mothers are systematically denied access to hospitals to give birth to their babies. Tens of babies have died during the last couple of weeks at Israeli roadblocks because their mothers were unable to reach hospitals on time.

Early last week, Israeli occupation forces gunned down five Palestinian workers near the "Karni" crossing point to the Gaza Strip and prevented ambulances and medical teams from reaching them.

The victims were identified as Ahmad, 19, Mohamad, 21, Ahmad, 35, Mohamad, 27 and Asaf, 26, all from the Al-Astal family. They were labourers trying to get into Israel in search of work with unemployment and poverty soaring in the Gaza Strip.

The Israeli occupation troops shot dead Jadallah Shawkat, 32 years old, in the village of Thabra near the southern West Bank city of Bethlehem.

On Friday, 13 December, Tareq Abed Rabbo was shot dead in cold blood by Israeli occupation forces soldiers, who raided his home in the northern West Bank town of Tulkarem.

On Thursday, 12 December, Israeli occupation forces shot and killed a Palestinian near the illegal settlement of "Gush Katif", in the Gaza Strip.

On Wednesday, 11 December, Israeli occupation forces killed 23-year-old Hassan Badrah, after raiding his house in the Al-Hashashin neighbourhood, south of the Balatta refugee camp. Israeli occupation forces killed Badrah in cold blood after they detained him just outside his house.

Israeli occupation forces assassinated a Palestinian identified as Yassin Al-Agha, 25, when Israeli undercover units and soldiers stormed his house located in the Gaza Strip city of Khan Younis.

On Monday, 9 December, Rihana Al-Arda, 25, was driving home when an Israeli soldier opened fire on the car and Rihana was shot in the chest, and died.

In his village of Beit Lid, east of Tulkarem, 28-year-old Bassel Mustafa Al-Quoh was walking in an open area of his town when soldiers at the nearby Israeli settlement of Erez opened fire and killed him. Tragically, Bassel was mentally disabled, and was merely taking a walk.

Azzan Abdul Qadar Alawaney suffered a heart attack. The 47-year-old attempted to get from his village of Azmout to a hospital in Nablus, but was unable to pass through any Israeli checkpoint. Denying him access to medical treatment killed him.

Meanwhile, Israeli occupation forces bulldozers continue to raze agricultural lands, demolish densely populated residential homes, destroy water and electricity networks and detain tens of Palestinians in Israeli prisons without trial.

These are dramatic cases in which the soldiers' power and impunity of action led to the deaths of innocent Palestinians. A decision to prevent an ambulance is the same as the decision to pull the trigger and open fire on a car, when both result in the deaths of Palestinians.

The humiliation of Palestinians at checkpoints, using Palestinians as human shields, preventing medical staff from carrying out their work without

interference, opening fire on civilians, exploding a house without informing and removing all the residents, shooting and killing first - and investigating later, all stem from the same cause.

Young Israeli soldiers feel they act with impunity, because no one is watching them and no one really cares. The fact that over 2,070 Palestinians have died in the last two years and three months - that is an average of almost three Palestinian deaths every day - bears out this fact.

In view of the persistence of the escalation of the Israeli acts, aggressions and practices violating the human rights of the Palestinian people and which constitute grave and flagrant violations of the principles of international law, international humanitarian law and the Fourth Geneva Convention, we once again appeal to Your Excellency to condemn the Israeli war crimes and atrocities against the Palestinian people, to urge the Government of Israel to take serious measures to bring a halt to such Israeli crimes and violations of international law and international humanitarian law and to ensure that the Israeli occupation forces behave with greater restraint and discipline and in conformity with international humanitarian law.

We also appeal to Your Excellency to use all your offices to provide for an international protection force and presence in Palestine to monitor these Israeli daily aggressions and crimes and protect the Palestinian protected persons until Israel has withdrawn its forces from all the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.

I would be most grateful if you could arrange to have this letter distributed to the members of the Commission on Human Rights, as an official document of the fifty-ninth session of the Commission on Human Rights under its agenda item 8.

(Signed): Nabil RAMLAWI
Ambassador
Permanent Observer
