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**COLLECTIVE PUNISHMENT IN GAZA MUST END: ISRAEL'S BLOCKADE ENTERS ITS 7th YEAR – UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL  
RAPPORTEUR**  
14 June 2013

GENEVA, 14 June 2013 – The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967, Richard Falk, called today on Israel to end its blockade over the Gaza Strip, six years after it was tightened following the Hamas takeover in June 2007. The human suffering of the land, sea and air blockade imposed on the 1.75 million Palestinians living in one of the most densely populated and impoverished areas of the world has been devastating.

"Six years of Israel's calculated strangulation of the Gaza Strip has stunted the economy and has kept most Gazans in a state of perpetual poverty and aid dependency," said the UN expert. "Whether it is fishermen unable to go beyond six nautical miles from the shore, farmers unable to access their land near the Israeli fence, businessmen suffering from severe restrictions on the export of goods, students denied access to education in the West Bank, or patients in need of urgent medical attention refused access to Palestinian hospitals in the West Bank, the destructive designs of blockade have been felt by every single household in Gaza. It is especially felt by Palestinian families separated by the blockade," he added.

"The people of Gaza have endured the unendurable and suffered what is insufferable for six years. Israel's collective punishment of the civilian population in Gaza must end today," said the Special Rapporteur.

"Israel has the responsibility as the Occupying Power to protect the civilian population. But instead of allowing a healthy people and economy to flourish, Israeli authorities have sealed off the Gaza Strip. According to statistics released by the Israeli Ministry of Defense, last month's exports out of Gaza consisted of 49 truckloads of empty boxes, three truckloads of spices, one truckload of cut flowers, and one truckload of furniture," he said. In 2012, the total number of truckloads of exports leaving Gaza was 254, compared to 9,787 in 2005 before the tightening of the blockade.

"It does not take an economist to figure out that such a trickle of goods out of Gaza is not the basis of a viable economy," noted the UN expert. "The easing of the blockade announced by Israel in June 2010 after its deadly assault on the flotilla of ships carrying aid to the besieged population resulted only in an increase in consumer goods entering Gaza, and has not improved living conditions for most Gazans. Since 2007, the productive capacity of Gaza has dwindled with 80 percent of factories in Gaza now closed or operating at half capacity or less due to the loss of export markets and prohibitively high operating costs as a result of the blockade. 34 percent of Gaza's workforce is unemployed including up to half the youth population, 44 percent of Gazans are food insecure, 80 percent of Gazans are aid recipients," Mr. Falk said.

"To make matters worse, 90 percent of the water from the Gaza aquifer is unsafe for human consumption without treatment, and severe fuel and electricity shortage results in outages of up to 12 hours a day. Only a small proportion of Gazans who can afford to obtain supplies through the tunnel economy are buffered from the full blow of the blockade, but tunnels alone cannot meet the daily needs of the population in Gaza."

"Last year, the United Nations forecast that under existing conditions, Gaza would be uninhabitable by 2020. Less optimistic forecasts presented to me were that the Gaza Strip may no longer be viable only three years from now," said the Special Rapporteur. "It's clear that the Israeli authorities set out six years ago to devitalize the Gazan population and economy," he said, referring to a study undertaken by the Israeli Ministry of Defense in early 2008 detailing the minimum number of calories Palestinians in Gaza need to consume on a daily basis to avoid malnutrition. The myriad of restrictions imposed by Israel do not permit civilians in Gaza to develop to their full potential, and enjoy and exercise fully their human rights.

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*In 2008, the UN Human Rights Council designated Richard Falk (United States of America) as the fifth Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights on Palestinian territories occupied since 1967. The mandate was originally established in 1993 by the UN Commission on Human Rights.*

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