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**SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON ISRAELI PRACTICES CONCLUDES VISIT TO AMMAN****1 July 2008**

Members of the United Nations Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories express serious concern about the continuing deterioration of the human rights and humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in particular the grave situation in the Gaza strip, the strangulation of the economy in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the impact of the separation wall on all aspects of human rights of Palestinian people, expanding settlements, and the condition of the Palestinians detained in Israeli prisons and detention centres.

The three-member Special Committee is currently carrying out its annual field visit to the region, which began in Egypt and will continue in Syria. While in Jordan, the Special Committee spoke with witnesses of the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and in the occupied Syrian Golan, and continued to observe a serious deterioration of the human rights situation.

The Committee listened to witness accounts highlighting the strangulation of the economy in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, due to the Israeli border control regime and other trade-related restrictions and obstacles, resulting in an increasing dependency on humanitarian aid. The Committee also heard about serious obstacles to access to water and inequalities in water supply, worsening sanitary conditions in Gaza, the overall impact of the continuing build up of settlements, and deteriorating health conditions of the population, particularly children.

Many witnesses also highlighted continued measures aimed at restricting the freedom of movement of Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The Committee heard descriptions of the Occupied Palestinian Territory including East Jerusalem, as "disintegrated and disconnected", isolating its people into several separate enclaves, negatively impacting the establishment of the State of Palestine and affecting its social fabric and character of society. The serious restrictions on the right to freedom of movement has also in turn severely curtailed a wide range of other human rights including the rights to health, education, work and family life. The Special Committee also heard testimony on the uprooting of more than 20,237 trees between August 2007 and June 2008 by Israel and the replanting of trees in settlements or in Israel, in an attempt to destroy Palestinians' link with their land.

Several witnesses detailed infringements on the human rights of more than 10,000 Palestinians detainees including women and children in Israeli prisons and detention centres, among others lack of legal guarantees, torture and ill-treatment, harassment, serious concerns regarding the conditions of detention, prevention of family visits, and administrative detention.

"Such policies and practices affecting Palestinian people are a serious threat to the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people and must be halted immediately," the Special Committee said.

The Committee was particularly concerned by testimonies received concerning a draft Israeli Law regarding civil damages (before the Knesset) according to which residents of the Occupied Palestinian Territory would be prevented from submitting tort lawsuits against the State of Israel to obtain compensation for damages inflicted upon them by the Israeli security forces, even in cases where damages – to property or to the person, including torture – were caused outside the context of military operations.

The Special Committee reiterated its view that Israel must abide by its legal obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law. This includes the relevant obligations as reaffirmed in July 2004 in the International Court of Justice's Advisory Opinion on the Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The entitlement of individuals to enjoy their rights is not dependent on there being peace: indeed the protection afforded by international law is most vital in situations of conflict and volatility.

The Committee also re-emphasized its utmost concern at the impact of the siege on Gaza on the human rights and humanitarian situation and urged that immediate action is required to halt what can be termed as collective punishment. The international community has a moral and legal obligation to ensure that all international human rights and humanitarian law standards are fully implemented at all times. Human rights obligations cannot be suspended and cannot be subject to negotiation or compromise.

The group focused on developments pertaining to human rights since the adoption by the General Assembly of its thirty-ninth report in December 2007.

The Special Committee will continue its visit to the region in Syria from 1 to 5 July. The report of the Special Committee's field mission will be submitted to the General Assembly at its sixty-third session this year.

The Special Committee was established in December 1968 by General Assembly resolution 2443 (XXIII). It is composed of three Member States: Sri Lanka (Chairman), Malaysia and Senegal. Sri Lanka is currently represented by Prasad Kariyawasam, Permanent Representative of that country to the United Nations in New York. Senegal is represented by Babacar Carlos Mbaye, Permanent Representative of that country to the United Nations in Geneva. Malaysia is represented by Zainol Zainuddin, Deputy Permanent Representative of that country to the United Nations in New York. Since its establishment, the Special Committee has repeatedly been denied cooperation by the Government of Israel or access to the Occupied Territories.

