



# Press Release

Department of Public Information · News Coverage Service · New York

Fifty-sixth General Assembly  
Fourth Committee  
15th Meeting (AM)

GA/SPD/223  
7 November 2001

## **ISRAEL'S CONSTRUCTION, EXPANSION OF SETTLEMENTS CRITICIZED,**

### **AS FOURTH COMMITTEE TAKES UP ISRAELI PRACTICES REPORT**

#### **Speakers Say End of Israeli Occupation Only Acceptable Outcome to Palestinian Struggle**

Speakers this morning criticized Israel's continuing construction and expansion of settlements in Arab territories under its occupation, as the Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) began consideration of the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.

The representative of Egypt said to the Committee the settlements were part of a strategy aimed at establishing complete Israeli control of the occupied territories through the imposition of a de facto status that would be difficult, if not impossible, to alter. That goal did not respect the rights of the occupied people and their aspirations to a free and dignified future. The struggle of the Palestinian people was a struggle for freedom from foreign occupation and its only acceptable outcome was the end of that occupation.

Syria's representative said Israel was not really seeking a just and lasting Middle East peace, but merely one that would allow it to continue occupying the Syrian Golan and the Palestinian territories. If Israel wanted peace, it must end the occupation, as well as its practices in the occupied territories.

The international community must not remain mute, but must condemn Israeli violations and exert pressure on it to end them. The occupation of the Syrian Golan had been accompanied by legislation, confiscation of lands, the building of settlements and policies to attract colonists from all over the world.

Malaysia's representative said Israel's continuing refusal to allow the Special Committee to visit the territories under its occupation only confirmed the suspicion that it did not want the international community to know the actual situation there. Ironically, the Israeli delegation continued to accuse the Special Committee of biased reporting of the situation. He noted that the Special Committee's report was corroborated by the findings of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) during a visit to the occupied Palestinian territory.

The observer for Palestine said the past year had witnessed the commission of countless war crimes and State terrorism by Israel. The current Israeli assault against the Palestinian people, which began in September 2000, had been characterized by the excessive and indiscriminate use of force by the Israeli occupying forces, using live ammunition, tanks, helicopter gunships, warplanes, missiles and bulldozers. In addition to the resulting deaths of 700 Palestinians, many of them children, more than 25,000 Palestinians had been injured. Also, Israel continued to confiscate land, demolish homes and raze Palestinian agricultural fields.

Special Committee Chairman John de Saram (Sri Lanka), introducing its report, said that since September 2000 the cycle of violence had continued, with almost daily hostile confrontations between Israeli forces and Palestinians. The Israeli system of control had been enforced with extraordinary severity. The Special Committee had sought to convey the current conditions as fully as possible, despite having again been refused access to the occupied territories.

Also speaking this morning were the representatives of Jordan, Libya, Lebanon, Algeria and Bangladesh.

Before the Committee began its consideration of the report, it heard statements in exercise of the right of reply relating to the activities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Those statements were made by the representatives of Lebanon, Syria, Israel and Jordan.

The Committee will continue its consideration of Israeli practices in the occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories when it meets at 10a.m. Thursday, 8 November.

Background

The Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) met this morning to begin considering the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories (document [A/56/491](#)).

Comprising three Member States -- Sri Lanka, Senegal and Malaysia -- the Special Committee was established by General Assembly resolution 2443 (XXIII) of 19 December 1968. Its report is based on oral testimony from people in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and the occupied Syrian Golan. While the Committee has not, since its establishment, had access to the occupied territories, as in previous years it convened in Cairo (26 to 29 July), Amman (30 July to 1 August) and Damascus (2 to 4 August) to meet with and hear statements from persons with personal knowledge of the situation. The report also contains information from the Governments of Jordan and Syria and from press reports appearing in the Jerusalem Post, Ha'aretz and the Jerusalem Times.

Information presented to the Special Committee concerns Israel's policies and practices regarding closures, curfews and other restrictions on the movement of persons and goods; destruction of property, land and housing; settlements and settlers; use of disproportionate force; arrests; administrative detention; interrogation methods; and conditions of imprisonment. The overall consequences of the occupation, the continuing difficulties of Palestinians in East Jerusalem and the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan are also examined.

The Special Committee concludes that controls and the severe enforcement measures undertaken by the occupying authority appear to harshly ignore the human rights of the Palestinians. The escalating violence of the past year and the occupying Power's use of greatly disproportionate force has had the most devastating consequences in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the report says.

It adds that there is a yearning for peace on the part of both Israelis and Palestinians and that the peace process must resume. But, until such time that the peace process is satisfactorily concluded, the human rights of the Palestinians of the occupied territories must be fully honoured by the occupying authority.

The occupied Syrian Golan, while avoiding the confrontations and violence of other occupied areas, continues to experience problems described in earlier reports, according to the Special Committee. Those include problems of national and occupational identity of persons under occupation in the long-term, the results of expansion and increase of Israeli settlements, and the personal tragedies of divided families.

Also before the Committee was the first periodic report of the Special Committee (document [A/56/428](#)) covering the period from 1 August 2000 to 30 April 2001. It contains a summary of articles published in Israel during that period from Ha'aretz, a Hebrew-language daily, and the Jerusalem Post, an English-language daily.

The articles describe the restrictions on land and housing imposed on Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem, as well as the restrictions affecting the movement of Palestinians within and outside the occupied territories. The extent and impact of settlement activity is also described. Regarding the manner in which restrictions are applied, the report describes interrogation procedures; conditions of detention and imprisonment; and aspects of the administration of Justice.

The use of force by Israeli authorities occupies a large portion of the report. The economic, social and cultural effects of the Israeli system of regulation and enforcement are also discussed and a section is devoted to the human rights situation in the occupied Syrian Golan.

An additional report (document [A/56/428/Add.1](#)) contains summarized articles covering the same issues in the period from 1 May to 31 July 2001.

Also before the Committee were several reports of the Secretary-General. A report dated 4 August (document [A/56/219](#)) states that no reply had been received to the Secretary-General's request to Israel's Minister for Foreign Affairs for information on any steps taken or envisaged by his Government towards implementing General Assembly resolution 55/134 of 8 December 2000 concerning the occupied Syrian Golan.

By that resolution, the Assembly calls upon Israel to comply with the relevant resolutions, in particular Security Council resolution 497 (1981), by which the Council decided that Israel's decision to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration on the occupied Syrian Golan was null and void and without international legal effect, and demanded that Israel rescind that decision forthwith.

Resolution 55/134 also calls upon Israel to desist from changing the physical character, demographic composition and institutional and legal status of the occupied Syrian Golan and, in particular, to desist from the establishment of settlements. It determines that all legislative and administrative measures and actions by Israel that purport to alter the character and legal status of the occupied Syrian Golan constitute a flagrant violation of international law.

According to a report dated 4 August (document [A/56/218](#)), the Secretary-General had received no reply to his note verbale requesting information on Israel's steps to implement General Assembly resolution 55/133 of 8 December 2000.

That resolution condemns acts of violence, especially the excessive use of force against Palestinian civilians, resulting in injury and loss of human life. It also demands that Israel, the occupying Power, cease all practices and actions which violate the human rights of the Palestinian people. It stresses the need to preserve the territorial integrity of all the occupied Palestinian territory and to guarantee the freedom of movement of persons and goods within it, including the removal of restrictions on movement into and from East Jerusalem, and the freedom of movement to and from the outside world.

Further, the resolution calls upon Israel to accelerate the release of all remaining Palestinians arbitrarily detained or imprisoned. It also calls for complete respect by Israel of all fundamental freedoms of the Palestinian people.

Another report (document [A/56/216](#)) says that the Secretary-General had received no reply to his request for information on steps by Israel to implement General Assembly resolution 55/132 of 8 December 2000 regarding Israeli settlements.

That resolution demands complete cessation of the construction of the new settlement at Jabal Abu-Ghneim and of all Israeli settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan. It reaffirms that Israeli settlements in those areas are illegal and an obstacle to peace and economic and social development.

Also by that resolution, the Assembly reiterates its call for the prevention of illegal acts of violence by Israeli settlers, particularly in the light of recent developments, also calling for measures to guarantee the safety and protection of Palestinian civilians in the occupied territory.

In another report (document [A/56/215](#)), the Secretary-General says he had received no reply to his request for information on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 55/131 of 8 December 2000, which demands that Israel accept the de jure applicability of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War to the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and other the other Arab territories.

Another report on the work of the Special Committee (document [A/56/214](#)) notes that on 14 July, a note verbale from the Secretary-General drew the attention of all States to General Assembly resolutions 56/130, 56/131, 56/132, 56/133, 55/134 of 8 December 2000.

The report states that, pursuant to resolution 55/130, the Department of Public Information (DPI) continued to provide press coverage of the Special Committee's meetings. Comprehensive audio-visual and press coverage was also provided for the meetings of the Commission on Human Rights.

According to the report, the Department continued to disseminate information on the activities of the Special Committee and the Commission on Human Rights, through the global network of information centres, services, libraries and the Internet. Through its information centres, the Department also supported the Special Committee's field mission to Egypt, Jordan and Syria in May 2000.

### Statements

JOHN DE SARAM ( Sri Lanka ), Chairman of the Special Committee, said that the Committee had in previous years reported on the existence of systems of civilian and military control in the occupied territories – laws, regulations, administrative procedures and discretionary practices that were elaborate, discriminatory and very oppressive during periods of tension.

Since September 2000, he said, a cycle of violence had continued, with hostile confrontations almost daily between Israeli forces and Palestinians. The system of controls had been enforced with extraordinary severity. The Committee sought in its report to convey as full a sense as possible of the current conditions, despite again being refused access to the occupied territories. Those conditions, the Committee found, were not in accord with contemporary human rights standards, nor with the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilians in Time of War.

FEDA ABDELHADY-NASSER, observer for Palestine, noted that Israel continued to wage a military campaign against the Palestinian people under its occupation, in violation of international law and international humanitarian law. The violations had persisted, despite repeated calls by the international community, including the Security Council and the General Assembly, to end the occupation.

The past year had witnessed the commission of countless war crimes and State terrorism by Israel, she said. The human losses and physical destruction throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, continued to mount, as a result of the current Israeli assault against the Palestinian people, which began in September 2000.

She noted that Israel's bloody military campaign had been characterized by the excessive and indiscriminate use of force by the Israeli occupying forces, using live ammunition, tanks, helicopter gunships, warplanes, missiles and bulldozers. Those actions had resulted in the killing of 700 Palestinians, many of them children. More than 25,000 Palestinians had also been injured, many seriously and many others suffering permanent disabilities.

She said Israel continued to commit other violations, such as the confiscation of land, the demolition of homes and the razing of agricultural fields, which had been widespread and worsening the already miserable socio-economic conditions of Palestinians living under Israeli occupation. Those gross violations of human rights amounted to war crimes and State terrorism, for which the perpetrators must be held responsible and brought to justice.

At the same time, she continued, Israel continued its policy of confiscating land and property for the building of illegal settlements and bypass roads, the exploitation and theft of natural resources and the transfer of more Israeli settlers into the occupied Palestinian territory. The violations perpetrated by the illegal armed settlers had caused the destruction of Palestinian land and homes, as well as many deaths and injuries among the Palestinian population. The international community must take the necessary measures to immediately end all settlement activities, which seriously aggravated tensions and instability in the area.

Despite the difficulties, she said, Palestine remained hopeful that the current tragic situation would soon change. For that to occur, Israel must cease its violations of international law, international humanitarian law and United Nations resolutions. Israel's military campaign against the Palestinian civilians must end immediately in order for both parties to resume stalled negotiations towards a final settlement.

ZAID AL-HADIDI ( Jordan ) thanked the Committee and its chairman for their efforts to unveil facts that were counter to the road to peace, a peace for which Jordan reaffirmed its commitment. He said Israel's practices made peace difficult to achieve; building settlements was illegal and counter to all the bases of the peace process. The issue of Jerusalem was key; Palestinian sovereignty was valid in East Jerusalem and access to and protection of all holy sites was imperative. He called for Israeli forces to be withdrawn from all Palestinian areas; security arrangements must be based on agreements.

Jordan, he said, had been working for peace for many years, and the 1994 accords were meant to be a step on the way to a comprehensive peace. Peace would not be permanent if not comprehensive. An agreement must, therefore, be achieved on the Syrian Golan and, in all areas of the conflict, root causes must be addressed, resolutions complied with and human rights respected. The Israeli practices described in the report had a negative socio-economic impact in the occupied territories and fostered an atmosphere of despair and misery that shook confidence in peace. A just and lasting peace must be based on all relevant resolutions and the Palestinian right to self-determination.

HOSSAM ZAKI ( Egypt ) expressed support for the Special Committee's work until a just and final settlement of the Middle East conflict was reached. He said the practices described in the report aimed at the realization of Israel's complete control of the occupied territories through the imposition of a de facto status which would be difficult, if not impossible, to alter. That goal did not respect the rights of the occupied people and their aspirations to a free and dignified future. The struggle of the Palestinian people was a struggle for freedom from foreign occupation; the only acceptable outcome was the end of that occupation.

He drew attention to the report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission of Human Rights on the issue. From the information in that report, he said, as well as that in the report of the Special Committee, he concluded that the Israeli practices in question represented grave violations of human rights and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. He said many of those practices, such as destruction of homes, closures and assassinations, were crimes.

Israeli settlements, he went on, were explosive points which had to be removed. Israeli practices in the occupied Syrian Golan were no less dangerous, and Egypt expressed full solidarity with the Syrian people under that occupation and supported complete return of the area to Syrian sovereignty. Peace in the Middle East was conditional on the end of Israel's occupation of all the territories, and its cessation of all acts of oppression and provocation. If Israel failed to comply with those conditions, it must assume responsibility before the international community.

ZAINUDDIN YAHYA ( Malaysia ) said Israel's continued refusal to allow the Special Committee to visit the territories under its occupation only confirmed the suspicion that it did not want the international community to know the actual situation there. Yet, ironically, the Israeli delegation continued to accuse the Special Committee of biased reporting of the situation.

He noted that the Special Committee's findings were corroborated by those of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) during a visit to the occupied Palestinian territory. They were also supported by the findings of the Human Rights Inquiry Commission established by the Commission on Human Rights to investigate violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in the occupied Palestinian territory after 28 September 2000.

The human rights situation was particularly acute in respect of Palestinians living in East Jerusalem, he said. That was due to Israel's policy aimed at discouraging Arabs in East Jerusalem from continuing to stay in the city. That policy, motivated by Israel's avowed intention to make Jerusalem its undivided capital, took the form of systematic confiscation of Arab property, confiscation and cancellation of residence permits and disqualification of residence rights.

He said the intention was clearly the Judaization of Arab East Jerusalem by bringing in Jews to replace the Arabs, thereby demographically changing the city's character. Jerusalem's rapidly growing Jewish population, now around 200,000, was the demographic weapon by which the Arab character of the city would be drastically transformed. In spite of strong criticism by the international community, including Israel's close friends and supporters, that provocative policy continued unabated through, among other things, the relentless construction and expansion of the new Jewish settlements at Jabal Abu-Ghneim and Ras Al Mud.

ABDOU AL-HAMED YAHA ( Libya ) expressed thanks for the work of the Special Committee, though he would have liked it to include the condition of the Palestinians living in refugee camps. In addition, because access to the occupied territories was denied to the Special Committee, it could not adequately describe the suffering of the Palestinian people, who were being killed daily and were subject to numerous violations of their rights. They were obliged by natural law to defend themselves, even if only armed with stones.

Palestinians and their supporters, he said, feel a bitterness because of the inaction of the Security Council to rectify the situation of the occupied territories, due to the veto power of one of its members. Such bitterness created an atmosphere of instability. The international community must, therefore, end the occupation of the territories to stop the human rights violations and allow the Palestinians to control their own destiny.

IBRAHIM ASSAF ( Lebanon ) said the report dealt with a large number of violations. Forty-three pages referred to the excessive use of force, including the killing of more than 600 Palestinian civilians since the beginning of the intifadah.

Israel was still occupying five Palestinian cities in the West Bank, he noted. Its continuing construction and expansion of illegal settlements in order to change the demographic character of the territory was in direct contravention of the relevant Security Council resolutions.

He said Israeli practices against the rights of the inhabitants of the occupied Syrian Golan included its continuing refusal to withdraw from that territory, in contravention of Security Council resolutions. It had gone beyond occupation and annexed the territory, thereby challenging General Assembly resolutions. Israel continued to change the demographic character of the occupied Syrian Golan by bringing in Jewish settlers and separating Arab families.

After its withdrawal from Lebanon, Israel had left behind 130,000 landmines, which had caused death and injury to 100 Lebanese. Israel still refused to provide maps indicating the location of the mines. It also continued to violate Lebanese sovereignty by land, sea and air, with 2,400 air violations between September 2000 and September 2001. Violations of Lebanese airspace occurred almost daily and the breaking of the sound barrier by Israeli warplanes over Lebanon were provocative actions that created serious alarm among the civilian population.

LARBI JACTA ( Algeria ) said that peace in the Middle East had been close at hand, but Prime Minister Sharon and his tanks had made it a distant prospect. Israeli practices, as described in the report, violated international humanitarian law. The remedy must be the creation of the Palestinian State. He demanded that greater importance be attached to the work of the Special Committee in exposing the actions of the Israelis. It was not surprising that Israel refused to cooperate with the Special Committee, as that country had a habit of not keeping its promises. It preferred violence and destruction to peace.

The offenses of the Israelis, he said, were not limited to the acts described in the report; they also were changing the demographic and environmental nature of the occupied areas, including the Syrian Golan. The targeted attacks against Palestinian leaders were extra-judicial killings, which showed that Israel violated the Fourth Geneva Convention. More than 600 Palestinians had been killed and more than 20,000 injured by the daily Israeli aggression, with children also suffering from emotional effects.

Palestinians, however, continued to resist and Israel began to reoccupy Palestinian areas and destroy property, he said. The occupation of [Orient House](#) was designed to achieve the Judaization of Jerusalem and weaken the Palestinian Authority, and daily measures aimed at isolating Palestinians in the territories. Continuing to resist efforts to restart the peace process, Israel had a government of aggression, and not of peace. Therefore, the international community must take a stronger stance to obtain justice and affirm the human rights of the Palestinian people.

FAYSSAL MEKDAD ( [Syria](#) ) said he was not surprised by Israel's refusal to cooperate with the Special Committee, as it would highlight the continuing occupation and colonization of the Arab territories. The occupation of the Syrian Golan had been accompanied by legislation, confiscation of lands, the building of settlements and policies to attract colonists from all over the world who had nothing to do with the occupied territory.

Since 1967, he said, Israel had continued to flout all international instruments and resolutions as it pursued the colonization of the occupied Syrian Golan, exploiting natural resources, including water, and destroying the livestock practices of the territory's Palestinian inhabitants. The 500,000 Syrians chased out of the Golan were still trying to return home, while Israel continued to expand its colonies there. That was a serious obstacle to the peace process, which would necessarily entail their withdrawal.

He said Israel had colonized 97 per cent of the occupied Syrian Golan, which was now totally different from the Golan of 1967. Israel was now encircling the last existing Palestinian villages, with the aim of confiscating their land. It had exerted exorbitant taxes and the actions of its armed forces had resulted in considerable destruction of the environment, including the burial of nuclear waste.

Israel was not really seeking a just and lasting peace, but merely one that would allow it to continue occupying the Golan and the Palestinian territory, he said. But Israel knew that the persecution could not continue indefinitely. The occupied Golan was Syrian and would one day revert to Syria. If Israel wanted peace, it must end the occupation, as well as its practices in the occupied territories. The international community must not remain mute and must condemn Israeli practices and exert pressure on Israel to stop its violations.

IFTEKHAR AHMED CHOWDHURY ( [Bangladesh](#) ) called the report of the Special Committee comprehensive in detailing the systematic violation of Palestinian rights, which had created an untenable situation fraught with the gravest potential danger. Foreign occupation in itself, he said, constituted a serious violation of human rights. Israel's continued disregard for those rights was shameful at best, and dangerous at worst.

Israeli settlements, he said, were a major obstacle to the peace process and they must cease forthwith. He expressed deep concern over disproportionate use of force against the Palestinian uprising that had resulted in so many dead and wounded civilians. He also deplored Israeli incursions into areas under Palestinian control. He condemned terrorism, but also condemned Israel's use of State apparatus to assassinate political activists engaged in a just struggle for the right of self-determination.

Bangladesh, he said, fully endorsed the recommendations of the Mitchel Committee to restore dialogue and commended the Palestinian leadership for accepting the report in its entirety, while Israel continued to demand certain conditions for their acceptance. Pressure should be exerted on Israel to start implementing them and a monitoring mechanism should be put in place. Israeli practices in the occupied territories were of grave concern to Bangladesh, which expressed total solidarity with the Palestinian people and support for their right to an independent homeland.

#### Right of Reply

Before it began its consideration of Israeli practices, the Committee heard statements in exercise of the right of reply carried over from last week's concluding meeting on the activities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

IBRAHIM ASSAF ( [Lebanon](#) ) said the representative of Israel had referred to Palestinian refugees as "Arab refugees", with the aim of distorting the issue and dispersing its responsibility for it. The UNRWA was established exclusively for Palestinian refugees and not Arab refugees. Regarding the Israeli representative's claim that the Commissioner-General's report was biased, he cited Commissioner-General Peter Hansen's concluding statement last week, in which he emphasized that the situation on the ground and the contents of the report were identical.

LOUAY FALLOUH ( [Syria](#) ) said the Israeli representative's statement was full of falsity and the only possible response to it was firm rejection. The statement was proof of the aggressive attitude of the Israeli Government. Its arrogance was further evidence that it was responsible for the deadlock in the peace negotiations. It was clear that Israel recognized neither international law nor United Nations resolutions.

MOSHE BENZIONI ( [Israel](#) ) reemphasized that his country supported the UNRWA's humanitarian efforts and was sensitive to the conditions of the Palestinian refugees. However, the UNRWA's personnel had not been sensitive to the urgency of Israel's security concerns. It would continue to facilitate the Agency's ability to fulfil its mandate vis-à-vis the Palestinian refugees, and to cooperate to the best of its ability to ensure that the refugees received the necessary humanitarian assistance despite the present security situation.

Furthermore, Israel was committed to pursuing a more lasting and comprehensive solution to the refugee problem. However, such a solution could only be achieved within the context of direct bilateral negotiations between the parties. Israel rejected initiatives in the Fourth Committee and in other United Nations organs and bodies that sought to prejudge the outcome of those negotiations.

He said a genuine solution to the refugee issue – one that would relieve the international community of the financial burdens associated with their care and economic social rehabilitation — would only result from a viable political process conducted in an atmosphere free of violence and intimidation. Israel hoped it would soon be able to engage in such a process that would address the legitimate needs of Israelis and

Palestinians alike.

ZAID AL-HADIDI ( Jordan ) said Jordan had received the refugees; they were registered and had not lost the right of return or to compensation. The responsibility was Israel's. Jordan's hosting of the Palestinian refugees was a moral duty, which did not mean they lost their rights as refugees as far as Israel was concerned, or as provided for under international law.

\* \* \* \* \*

---

For information media - not an official record