

LE COMITÉ SPÉCIAL SUR LES PRATIQUES ISRAËLIENNES EST PRÉOCCUPÉ PAR LA DÉTÉRIORATION DE L'ÉTAT DE SANTÉ DE DÉTENUS PALESTINIENS EN GRÈVE DE LA FAIM (en anglais)

5 juin 2014

GENEVA / CAIRO (5 June 2014) – The UN Special Committee* to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories on Thursday expressed grave concerns about the reported worsening health conditions of more than 75 Palestinian detainees on hunger strike now in hospital protesting Israel's continued use of administrative detention.

At the end of its annual fact-finding visit to Amman and Cairo (1 to 5 June 2014), members** of the Special Committee urged Israel to heed the demand of the hunger strikers to end the practice of arbitrary administrative detention of Palestinians.

"It is a desperate plea by these detainees to be afforded a very basic standard of due process: to know what they are accused of and to be able to defend themselves," said the Committee.

A first group of around 100 Palestinian administrative detainees launched a peaceful protest on 24 April 2014 and were later joined by more detainees. The total number of hunger strikers now stands at 290, with more expected to join in the coming weeks.

"International humanitarian law only exceptionally allows for the use of administrative detention, yet the Israeli authorities have detained a large number of Palestinians for reasons not explicitly indicated. Initial administrative detention orders of six-month periods can be renewed an indefinite number of times without producing charges," the Committee noted.

The Committee learnt that there are 11 elected Palestinian Legislators serving prison terms, including 8 held under administrative detention.

The Special Committee is further alarmed by reports that the Israeli Government is pushing for an early vote on a bill in the Knesset that would allow the force-feeding of hunger striking detainees. The Special Committee stated that force-feeding would contravene accepted principles of international human rights law and violate the rights of the detainees.

"Concerns over the health of Palestinian prisoners extend more widely," said the Committee, noting that, "this year again, we have a number of testimonies indicating that medical needs of Palestinian detainees within the Israeli prison system have been neglected, in some cases leading to deaths which might have been avoided with proper care and timely diagnosis."

"Given that there are more than 5,000 Palestinian detainees in Israeli custody, we strongly appeal to the Israeli authorities to allow all Palestinian detainees, especially women and children, to be periodically seen by Palestinian doctors in order to avoid losing more lives," stated the Special Committee.

During its annual mission to the region, the Committee met a number of witnesses, non-governmental organisations, Palestinian government officials, and UN agencies operating in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and in the occupied Syrian Golan to be briefed on human rights and humanitarian concerns.

"In all Israeli occupied territories, settlement expansion continues at an alarming pace and scale, with new policies and procedures allowing for the confiscation of Palestinian lands and property. The Special Committee is also concerned about excavations under the Al-Aqsa holy site.

"However, Israel continues to turn a deaf ear to repeated calls by the UN to comply with international law and to halt and dismantle settlements," noted the Committee members.

"Next month will mark the tenth anniversary of the International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion on the Wall," they added. Committee members recalled that the Court Opinion referred not only to the illegality of the Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, but also its associated regime.

The Committee was also briefed on the continuing exploitation of natural resources in Palestine by the Israeli occupying Power, in violation of its international obligations. The experts were also informed of the involvement of some international companies in settlement-related activities, in contradiction with

their corporate social responsibilities.

In the West Bank, settler violence continues unabated, including the destruction of Palestinian property, agriculture and livestock, in the absence of protection by Israel and with perpetrators failing to be held accountable. This extends to settler acts of vandalism on religious places of worship including churches and mosques. Witnesses briefed the Committee on how Bedouin communities are being forced off their land through settler violence, land seizures and demolition orders.

"We have heard troubling personal accounts of excessive use of force by Israeli security forces against Palestinian children, especially in and around refugee camps," noted the Committee. They raised serious concerns over the detention of over 200 children and the recent killing of two teenagers during Nakba Day demonstrations, who as documented by CCTV footage, presented no direct threat at the time that they were killed.

"It is not a humane existence for these children, women and men to be living under such constant threats."

Committee members also heard disturbing testimonies that even the limited humanitarian assistance that international donors are allowed to provide to the Palestinian population, was being confiscated, destroyed or transferred to settler communities by Israeli authorities.

In Gaza, the situation was described by witnesses as "dire". Even the worrying UN projection that Gaza might not be liveable in 2020 was seen as possibly too optimistic.

The current water supply and food crisis and the soaring unemployment all result from Israel's land and maritime blockade. Israel's enforcement of the Access Restricted Areas further deprives farmers and fishermen of their livelihood.

One witness noted that fishing off the shore of Gaza remains restricted especially during the fishing season, and that the destruction and confiscation of fishermen's boats and equipment by Israeli naval forces impose huge financial burdens on the fishing community.

"It is hard to predict how long Gazans can continue living under current conditions," they noted, and reiterated their call to immediately lift the blockade on the Gaza Strip.

"In the face of such monumental hardships on the Palestinian people, the Special Committee welcomes the resolve on the part of the Palestinian leadership to unify the West Bank and Gaza under one Palestinian Government," said its members.

The Special Committee will present a full report on its mission and other activities to the sixty-ninth session of the United Nations General Assembly.

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() The United Nations Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories was established by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1968 to examine the human rights situation in the occupied Syrian Golan, the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip.*

*(**) The Special Committee is composed of three Member States: Sri Lanka (Chair), Malaysia and Senegal. This year the Member States are represented by H.E. Mr. Palitha T.B. Kohona, Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the UN in New York, H.E. Mr. Haniff Hussein; Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the UN in New York; and H.E. Fode Seck, Permanent Representative of Senegal to the UN in Geneva. During the annual mission of the Special Committee (1 to 5 June 2014), Mrs. Samantha Jayasuriya, Minister/Head of Chancery at the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Brussels represented Sri Lanka and H.E. Mr. Haniff Hussein served as Acting Chair.*

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