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**Human Rights Council 46<sup>th</sup> Session**

**Agenda Item 7**



**Introductory remarks by  
Michelle Bachelet,  
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**

**Geneva, 18 March 2021**

Distinguished President of the Human Rights Council,  
Excellencies,  
Colleagues and friends,

I have the honour to present three reports under the agenda item 7 concerning the human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories.

I will start with the **thirteenth periodic report on the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (A/HRC/46/63)** pursuant to Human Rights Council resolutions S-9/1 and S-12/1. Covering the period from 1 November 2019 to 31 October 2020, this report provides an overview of recurring violations of international humanitarian law by Israel and by Palestinian armed groups as well as violations of international human rights law by all three duty-bearers, namely Israel, the State of Palestine and the de facto authorities in Gaza.

The reporting period was marked by persisting human rights violations throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including violations of the right to life and physical integrity impacting men, women, children and people with disabilities; restrictions of freedom of movement and restrictions of the rights to a fair trial, freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

The report focuses on the situation of Palestinian women and girls, who are subjected to multiple layers of violence and discrimination, in the public and private spheres. These stem from a combination of factors including the Israeli military occupation, prevailing patriarchal norms and practices and gender-based violence. The report recalls incidents of Palestinian women and girls suffering from direct physical violence by Israeli security forces, as well as from Israeli practices such as house demolitions, home raids and movement restrictions, resulting in extreme

psychological suffering and violations of women's human rights.

The report noted that the prolonged occupation compounds women's vulnerability to gender-based violence and can pose critical obstacles to the prevention and punishment of violence against women and girls, especially in areas where the occupying power exercises exclusive jurisdiction over security. Additionally, movement restrictions and the halting of in-person Government and NGO services due to the outbreak of COVID-19 increased the vulnerability of women and girls to violence. It resulted in a recorded spike of domestic violence including gender related-killings (femicides), which were often met with inadequate response.

The report highlights persisting serious concerns of unnecessary or disproportionate use of force against Palestinians. In the vast majority of cases monitored

and documented by my Office, Palestinians were killed or injured while appearing to pose no imminent threat of death or serious injury. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Israeli Security Forces killed 23 Palestinian men, including five children and one man with autism. The report notes that in several incidents, Israeli Security Forces may have resorted to disproportionate or entirely unnecessary use of force resulting in arbitrary deprivation of life, including extra-judicial execution. My report introduced last month under item 2 of the Council highlights the alarming lack of accountability for these violations.

The report notes that Israel continued to systematically use force and other means to suppress demonstrations by Palestinians and continued to hold human rights defenders under administrative or extended pre-trial detention. In East Jerusalem, Palestinian cultural and non-governmental organizations, several of them headed by women,

continued to be targeted with raids, arrests, confiscation of equipment, and closure orders. The report also recalls the cases of university students, including women, who appear to have been arbitrarily detained and ill-treated by Israeli security forces in relation to student activities.

The land, sea and air blockade of Gaza, which amounts to collective punishment, has entered its fourteenth year. The report notes the frequent fuel and electricity shortages that have a devastating impact on the living conditions, particularly of women and girls. Additionally, the outbreak of COVID-19 compounded the already-restricted freedom of movement in and out of Gaza, with the average number of Palestinians exiting through the Erez crossing dropping dramatically. The pandemic has also put a greater pressure on the already-strained health system.

The report also highlights human rights violations committed by the Palestinian Authority and the de facto authorities in Gaza. Invoking COVID-19 emergency measures, Palestinian Authority security forces violently dispersed and detained protestors in July 2020. In multiple occasions, security forces in the West Bank and in Gaza summoned and detained journalists and social media activists, including women, for posting statements and videos criticizing the authorities. In addition, extremely concerning cases of ill-treatment of detainees by Palestinian security forces in the West Bank and Gaza de facto authorities' security forces were documented. The report also recalls cases of people detained in the West Bank and Gaza for sexual offences such as adultery, incest, prostitution and other sexual or "moral misconduct", raising serious concerns of arbitrary detention.

Finally, the report also notes that the Government of Israel announced a freeze in relations with my Office, which has continued over the last year. The Government has failed to make determinations within a reasonable time on requests for visas or visa extensions for international staff of my Office in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, who have been obliged to leave their duty station there as a result. I renew my call for the Government to duly decide on such requests, in order to avoid further obstruction of the important work which the General Assembly and this Council have mandated be performed.

The second report is on **Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan (A/HRC/46/65)**, submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 43/31. It describes the continued expansion of Israeli settlement activities, their negative impact on the human rights of the Palestinian people, as



well as the contiguity of the Palestinian Territory, particularly in and around East Jerusalem. It also addresses issues relating to Israeli settlements in the occupied Syrian Golan.

The report notes that during the reporting period – between 1 November 2019 and 31 October 2020 -- plans for new housing units in Israeli settlements advanced at a rapid pace. The announcement of tenders accelerated, including in the strategic area of E-1, which is of particular concern as this would isolate East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank and threaten to fragment the contiguity of the West Bank. Policies and acts contributing to a coercive environment, including demolition of Palestinian property and the resulting displacement, reached the highest levels since 2016, despite the COVID-19 pandemic. The demolition of residences, as well as of health, water, and sanitation and hygiene facilities during a public health crisis further exposed many Palestinians to associated risks.

During the period under review, high levels of settler violence persisted, with significant lack of accountability. Three hundred and thirty-nine incidents of settler violence were documented during which 142 Palestinians were injured, and a total of 8,700 trees and 477 vehicles owned by Palestinians were vandalized. In this reporting period, there were concerning incidents of settler violence targeting people in vulnerable situations, including children, older people and those with disabilities. In many instances, incidents took place in the presence of Israeli Security Forces, who failed to protect the Palestinian population, and in some instances even participated in the incidents of harassment and attacks. Impunity continued to prevail for most of these acts.

Settler violence has dramatically escalated since the end of the reporting period. A spike in the number and severity of incidents has since been recorded across

the West Bank. These include continued stone throwing attacks at key junctions and in the vicinity of Israeli outposts and settlements, armed house assaults, and Palestinians held at gunpoint. I reiterate the obligation of Israel, as the occupying power, to ensure security and well-being of the Palestinian population.

Finally, on a related issue, questions have been raised in the course of this session with respect to my report to the Council's 43<sup>rd</sup> session issued under resolution 31/36 (A/HRC/42/71) and associated process. Operative paragraph 17, which mandated that the data contained in the database be reported to the Council's 34<sup>th</sup> session, also contemplated the database "to be updated annually". In the Statement of Programme Budget Implications read out prior to the Council's adoption of resolution 31/36 in March 2016, however, it was clearly stated that resource implications of the resolution set out in the Statement were on a one-time basis.

In my statement last June to the Council's resumed 43<sup>rd</sup> session on introduction of this report, I also specifically noted the question of resource requirements for any further work. It is not possible for the Office to absorb, on an open-ended recurring basis into the future, the substantial resources that updating the database and reporting to the Council would annually imply. Any further work in this area can only be discharged consistent with the Organization's budgetary process applicable to funding mandates of the Council.

The third report is on **human rights in the occupied Syrian Golan (A/HRC/46/64)**, as requested by Human Rights Council resolution 43/30. As per usual practice, this report is based on information received from Member States. For the present report, the Permanent Missions of the Syrian Arab Republic, the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, the Republic of Cuba, the Democratic People's Republic of

Korea, the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Republic of Iraq, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the State of Kuwait, and the Russian Federation responded to the request to provide information.

Excellencies,

These reports describe the persistence of human rights violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and in the occupied Syrian Golan, with a concerning lack of accountability.

My Office urges all duty-bearers to address these and other critical human rights concerns outlined in the reports.

Thank you very much.