Human Rights Council discusses human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian and Arab Territories

MORNING/MIDDAY

Holds interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the Occupied Palestinian Territories and general debate after presentation of reports

GENEVE (21 March 2016) - The Human Rights Council this morning discussed the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and other Occupied Arab Territories, holding an interactive dialogue with Makarim Wibisono, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, then hearing the presentation of reports by the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner on the human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories, followed by a general debate.

Mr. Wibisono, presenting his final report to the Council, emphasized the desperate need to more effectively protect Palestinians in the occupied territories. He urged Israeli authorities to ensure compliance with the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials, to halt the expansion of illegal Israeli settlements, to refrain from acts causing the forced displacement of Palestinians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and to urgently implement recommendations by the United Nations Children’s Fund with respect to the detention of children.

State of Palestine, speaking as a concerned country, expressed displeasure because of Israel’s refusal to cooperate with the Special Rapporteur and grant him access to the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Israel continued to violate international human rights and humanitarian laws. As for the election of the next Special Rapporteur, Palestine called for the election of one of the candidates put forth by the Advisory Committee and urged the Council not to give in to the pressures of some countries whose candidate followed the conditions set by Israel.
The Independent Commission for Human Rights of Palestine also took the floor.

Israel, a concerned country, was not present in the room to take the floor.

During the interactive dialogue, speakers regretted Mr. Wibisono’s resignation in response to Israel’s lack of cooperation with the mandate, and called on the President of the Human Rights Council to nominate his successor as soon as possible and in accordance with recommendations of the Council’s Advisory Committee. Speakers called on Israel to fully cooperate with the Special Rapporteur and other United Nations human rights mechanisms. Some delegations expressed reservations about the mandate, which was in charge with reporting only on human rights violations committed by the Israeli side. One speaker regretted the proliferation of reports and resolutions on Israel as an unfortunate waste of the Council’s resources, calling for the nomination of a new Special Rapporteur who would be fair and balanced rather than one-sided.

Speaking in the discussion were European Union, South Africa on behalf of the African Group, Kuwait on behalf of the Arab Group, Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Qatar, New Zealand, Tunisia, Iran, Malaysia, Bolivia, Maldives, Nigeria, Egypt, Jordan, Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Djibouti, Namibia, Ireland, Libya, China, Bahrain, Brazil, Zimbabwe, Chad, Cuba, Sudan, Uganda, Turkey, Algeria, Bangladesh, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Morocco.

Also speaking were Al-Haq in a joint statement, Touro Law Centre, Adalah - Legal Centre for Arab Minority Rights in Israel in a joint statement with Al Mezan, United Nations Watch, Norwegian Refugee Council, International-Lawyers.org, World Jewish Congress, and Union of Arab Jurists.

The Council then heard a presentation by Kate Gilmore, United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, of reports by the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General, concerning the human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories. The High Commissioner’s report addressed the continued building of Israeli settlements, settler violence, Palestinian detainees, and business and human rights in the context of settlements. As for the report on Israeli settlements, it provided an update on Israeli laws, policies and practices that aimed to expand the settlements. The Secretary-General had submitted a report on the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including East Jerusalem. Both the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General had made numerous constructive recommendations to all duty bearers. However, very many of them remained unimplemented. Meanwhile, the human rights situation in the
Occupied Palestinian Territories remained grave.

Speaking as a concerned country, the State of Palestine said that the occupied power continued its settlements and settlers continued their intimidation with impunity, and referred to acts of reprisals against civil society activists. The Israeli military occupation had only generated violence and instability in the region, and human rights could not be protected while it still continued.

Syria, also speaking as a concerned country, regretted that some countries were refusing to discuss this agenda item. Natural resources continued to be exploited by Israeli authorities, while it imposed restrictions on human rights for people under occupation. The international community should pressure Israel to release all political prisoners.

Israel, a concerned country, was still not present to take the floor.

In the ensuing general debate, speakers expressed concerns about the recent escalation of violence and attacks against civilians. Speakers condemned attacks against Israeli citizens and the disproportionate use of force by Israeli police forces. They called for an end of the Gaza blockade and of illegal settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, while stressing the need for accountability and reiterating support for the two-State solution. Several speakers expressed the view that the human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories should be addressed as any other country-specific situation, rather than as a stand-alone item. International law and human rights applied to both Israel and Palestine. All acts of violence were deplorable and had to be universally condemned. The underlying causes of the tension had to be addressed.

Speaking were South Africa on behalf of the African Group, Kuwait on behalf of the Arab Group, Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Ghana, Switzerland, Ecuador, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Namibia, Indonesia, Maldives, Venezuela, Russian Federation, Slovenia, China, United Arab Emirates, Nigeria, Cuba, Tunisia, Egypt, Senegal, Turkey, Malaysia, Jordan, Iran, Pakistan, Sweden, Chile, Oman, Yemen, Lebanon, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Bahrain, Malta, Gulf Cooperation Council, Sri Lanka, Luxembourg, and Nicaragua.

The following non-governmental organizations also spoke: Palestinian Return Centre, Norwegian Refugee Council, World Jewish Congress, Human Rights Now, Al-Haq, Adalah - Legal Centre for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, Arab

The Council is having a full day of meetings today. At 2:30 p.m., it will hold a general debate on the follow-up to and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. Around 4:30 p.m., it will hear the presentation of reports and hold a general debate on issues related to racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance, and the follow-up to and implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. Later today, the Council will hold separate interactive dialogues on Burundi and on the Central African Republic.

Documentation

The Council has before it the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 A/HRC/31/73

Presentation of Report

MAKARIM WIBISONO, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territories occupied since 1967, said that the escalation of violence that began in October 2015 in the West Bank continued to threaten the security and stability of the occupied Palestinian territories, with significant negative impacts on the human rights situation of Palestinians. He noted that any act of violence was unacceptable, whether committed by Israelis or Palestinians, but added that the excessive use of force by Israeli security forces were arising in a pre-existing context. He reviewed that context, underlining the need to look at the root causes
of heightened tensions. He emphasized the desperate need to more effectively protect Palestinians in the occupied territory, which required the efforts of both Israel and the international community. He had observed a significant disconnect between the rights and protections offered to Palestinians under international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and the situation on the ground, where they were often deprived of basic rights and protections. Regarding what he called the excessive use of force by Israeli authorities in the context of security incidents at checkpoints, he urged Israeli authorities to ensure compliance with the Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials. On the question of the expansion of illegal Israeli settlements, he called on Israeli authorities to halt their expansion and refrain from acts causing the forced displacement of Palestinians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

Administrative detention was only exceptionally permissible for the shortest possible period of time, but hundreds of Palestinians had been detained for repeated six-month periods. The number of children in Israeli detention facilities was also concerning, and Israeli authorities were urged to urgently implement recommendations by the United Nations Children’s Fund with respect to the detention of children. He reviewed his own actions as Special Rapporteur, noting that he had transmitted numerous communications to the Israeli Government. Those communications had sought both to intervene in individual cases, and to raise broader concerns regarding the legislation, policies, and practices of the Government of Israel that gave rise to human rights violations of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. He had received no formal response to any of his written requests, and meetings had proved fruitless, he said. The lack of cooperation signalled the continuation of a situation under which Palestinians suffered daily human rights violations under the Israeli occupation. Acknowledging the Government of Palestine’s full cooperation with his mandate, he called on the international community to redouble efforts and insist on Israel’s cooperation with the mandate. There was room for meaningful engagement on critical human rights issues, he said, expressing hope that Israel would recognize the value of engaging with the mandate holder in order to help address those issues.

**Statement by the Concerned Country**

Israel did not take the floor as a concerned country.

State of Palestine, speaking as a concerned country, expressed displeasure because of Israel’s refusal to cooperate with the Special Rapporteur and to grant him access
to the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Israel continued to violate international human rights and humanitarian laws. As for the election of the next Special Rapporteur, Palestine called for the election of one of the candidates put forth by the Advisory Committee and urged the Council not to give in to the pressures of some countries whose candidate followed the conditions set by Israel. Israel’s intervention in the Occupied Palestinian Territories continued with grave human rights violations. The occupying power continued to build illegal settlements and confiscate Palestinian land, such as the recent seizure of land in Jericho. Israel had wounded some 14,000 Palestinian since 2014 and had killed more than 2,000, among them children. Around 1.8 million Palestinians did not have access to education, healthcare and work as a result of collective punishment. The United Nations had said that if the conditions continued as they were today, the situation in Gaza would become catastrophic by 2020. There was deliberate negligence of medical care and the continued use of arbitrary detention. Palestine called on the Human Rights Council to remind Israel to respect international humanitarian law.

Independent Commission for Human Rights of Palestine expressed deep concern over the excessive use of force and extrajudicial killings of Palestinians by Israeli forces. Between September 2015 and March 2016, 124 Palestinians, including 39 children and 12 women, had been killed. There had been repeated failure to prosecute crimes committed against Palestinians, which had spread fear that they would be arbitrarily attacked. Those murders stemmed from the ongoing occupation, Israeli laws and policies, incitement, and settler violence. The intentional use of firearms was prohibited by international law and it was clear that those killed had not represented a clear threat to Israeli security forces. Israel had an internationally recognized legal obligation to protect Palestinian civilians. The Commission called on the international community to end Israel’s occupation of the Occupied Palestinian Territories and to pressure Israel to respect its international obligations.

**Interactive Dialogue with the Special Rapporteur**

European Union was deeply concerned that continued violence at led to the loss of so many lives in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory, but reiterated its reservation regarding this mandate, as well as its view that the human rights situation in Palestine should be addressed by the Council as any other specific country situation. South Africa, speaking on behalf of the African Group, condemned in the strongest terms the systematic and serious human rights violations as a result of the Israeli military aggression, and urged all Member States to participate actively in item 7 and to avoid impunity and ensure
accountability for those responsible for such serious crimes. Kuwait, speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, strongly condemned Israel’s refusal to cooperate with the Special Rapporteur, in violation of its international commitments, and stressed the need to respect the rights of Palestinian Peoples. The Human Rights Council had to assume its responsibility in this area.

Pakistan, speaking on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, strongly urged the President of the Council to expedite the selection for the position of new Special Rapporteur. It condemned continued human rights violations, colonialism, apartheid, as well as settlements and the illegal blockade of Gaza by the occupying power, and stressed the need for accountability while underlining the Responsibility to Protect the Palestinians. Qatar urged the President to resist pressure and to select a new Special Rapporteur without delay. Qatar strongly condemned Israeli’s violations, blockade and settlements, which undermined the prospect for peace and a two-State solution. New Zealand was concerned at Israel’s non-cooperation with the Special Rapporteur. It called for accountability for perpetrators of violence affecting both Israeli and Palestinian, and reaffirmed its commitment to a two-State solution.

Tunisia, in view of the Special Rapporteur’s decision to resign because of the occupying power’s lack of cooperation with him, called on the President of the Council to wrap up consultations on the appointment of a new Rapporteur during the ongoing session. Iran said it was a matter of great urgency for the Council to take effective and concrete actions to stop a frustrating and dangerous pattern adopted by Israel toward the undermining and weakening of international human rights and justice mechanisms.

Malaysia called on the Council to urgently approve a new Special Rapporteur, noted the current Rapporteur’s serious findings, and condemned Israel’s continued disrespect of international human rights and humanitarian law.

Bolivia expressed regret at Israel’s lack of cooperation and called on States with influence to use it to ensure Israeli compliance with international human rights standards. Maldives expressed regret that Israel had rejected most of the recommendations made at the Universal Periodic Review concerning the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and said that failing the expedited appointment of a new Special Rapporteur, the Council ought to look at alternate ways to fill the gap so as to ensure that the rights of Palestinians were given due attention by the Council. Nigeria expressed conviction that the solution to the Palestinian question lay in a two-State solution with the State of Palestine living side by side the State
of Israel, and added support for the renewal of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur.

Egypt stressed the need for the Human Rights Council to put an end to the human rights violations in occupied Palestine, notably extrajudicial executions and the repression of political and civil rights. Jordan expressed concern that to date no Special Rapporteur had been appointed and stressed the importance of appointing one by the end of the current Human Rights Council session. Venezuela condemned the atrocities committed by the occupying power against the Palestinian people, and called for an end to the expansion of Israeli settlements and the illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip.

Saudi Arabia regretted that the current Special Rapporteur had to submit his resignation, and added that a new Special Rapporteur had to be elected according to the established procedures. South Africa strongly condemned the Israeli settlement policies, which continued to be an obstacle to the creation of a future Palestine State, adding that the inaction by the international community was leading to greater injustices to the Palestinian people. Djibouti reiterated its strong support for the historic struggle of the Palestinian people for their right to self-determination, calling on Israel to immediately end the oppression of the Palestinian people.

Namibia called on the Occupying Power to immediately and completely cease all its illegal policies and practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and to abide scrupulously by all of its legal obligations. Mali expressed concern for the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, noted the enormous suffering of the population of Gaza, and called for the cessation of the illegal construction of settlements. Ireland expressed hope that the next Special Rapporteur would have greater success in fulfilling the mandate to promote and protect the full realisation of all human rights by all people in the occupied Palestinian Territory. Libya said that the occupying power committed on a daily basis the most brutal crimes and systematic violations of human rights, and called on the international community to shoulder its responsibility and exert pressure in order to help the Palestinian people. China expressed support for the Council paying continued attention to the situation under discussion, and added that the international community needed to call on both sides to exercise restraint. Bahrain regretted that Israel, the occupying power, had refused to cooperate with the mandate, and reiterated the fact that the question of human rights was the collective responsibility of all States of the world.
Brazil noted that the wealth of recommendations on the situation of human rights in Palestine should offer plenty of opportunities for constructive engagement and for tangible effects on the ground. Zimbabwe stated that the prolonged occupation of the Palestinian Territories contributed to the protracted conflict, which continued to take a heavy toll on the livelihoods and the fundamental human rights of Palestinians. Chad noted that the occupying power flaunted international humanitarian law, and a score of other rights of the Palestinian people, through the building of illegal settlements. Cuba condemned the ongoing flaunting by the occupying power of the Human Rights Council resolutions, calling on Israel to end its policy of apartheid in the occupied territories, to cooperate with mandate holders, and to respect international human rights law. Sudan condemned Israel’s attempts to silence the voices that spoke about its human rights violations, which had hindered the work of the Special Rapporteur. Uganda shared the concern over the dramatic rise in casualties in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, with the month of October 2015 having recorded the highest number of casualties in a single month.

Turkey spoke about the expansion of settlements, noted that the policy of Israel to separate Gaza from the West Bank and Al-Quds was continuing, and said the international community had to adopt a firm stance for the establishment of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace. Algeria condemned Israel for refusing access to the Special Rapporteur, and shared his concerns and his idea that the root of the problem had to be attacked to combat the intensification of Israeli settlements. Bangladesh said that Israel’s non-cooperation with Special Procedure mandate holders was an obvious attempt to prevent them from witnessing how the people of Palestine were being brutalized by Israeli aggression, also adding that products originated or produced in Palestine should carry that label when sold outside the country. Lebanon expressed a lack of surprise at Israel’s lack of cooperation with the Special Rapporteur, and underlined its consternation at the possibility of postponing the appointment of the next Rapporteur, noting that any postponement would show the depth of the politicization of the Council.

Syria expressed support for the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur and called for the appointment of a new Rapporteur before the end of the session, adding that Israel’s continuation of settlements policy and terrorism by groups of settlers were violations of international humanitarian law and the Fourth Geneva Convention. Iraq reiterated its full solidarity with the people of Palestine, saluting their perseverance in enduring the complicated situation. Iraq called on the occupying power to abide by reason and common sense. Morocco regretted that the Rapporteur had resigned from the mandate, and stressed that a successor had to
be appointed according to procedures established, noting also that the report stressed that violations were due essentially to the policy of expansion established by Israel and the situation of impunity which prevailed.

Al-Haq, in a joint statement, was concerned about the Israeli’s Government refusal to cooperate with the Special Rapporteur and other mechanisms with a view to avoid accountability, and referred to attacks and defamation against Israeli and Palestinian civil society activists. Touro Law Centre said failure to condemn Palestinian violence and rationalizing Palestinian terror was pushing peace away, making more death inevitable. Adalah, in a joint statement with Al Mezan, was alarmed at the politicization of the Special Rapporteur appointment procedure, and firmly rejected any postponement of the procedure. United Nations Watch regretted that today’s report was completely denying Palestinian violence and the rights of Israeli citizens. Norwegian Refugee Council said that Israeli restrictions on humanitarian access and the blockade challenged efforts for reconstruction in Gaza, and called on the Council to condemn the obstruction of humanitarian aid. International-Lawyers.org condemned Israeli laws discriminating against Palestinians, and reiterated the importance of the role of the Special Rapporteur. Delaying the appointment of a Special Rapporteur would undermine the credibility of the Council.

World Jewish Congress regretted the proliferation of reports and resolutions on Israel as an unfortunate waste of the Council’s resources, calling for the nomination of a new Special Rapporteur who would be fair and balanced rather than one-sided. Union of Arab Jurists, in a joint statement, noted that instead of protecting civilians in Palestine, Israel persisted in policies and practices that brought about discrimination and spread fear and despair.

Concluding Remarks

State of Palestine expressed deep appreciation for the efforts of the Special Rapporteur and his tireless efforts to call on the occupying power to authorize his visit to the Occupied Palestinian Territories. It expressed hope that the next Special Rapporteur would be named during the current session of the Human Rights Council, and called on all Member States to respect international law and to set aside all politicization so that the Council could maintain at least a little bit of its credibility.

MAKARIM WIBISONO, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territories occupied since 1967, said that the mandate was a crucial
one and that he therefore called on the Human Rights Council to continue to support it with vibrant efforts. With regard to civil society and human rights defenders, there was a need to ensure that legislation protected their rights and freedom, and that legislative efforts by Israel aimed at suppressing those groups’ work was refused. The Council should continue to support the work of civil society and human rights defenders.

CHOI KYONGLIM, President of the Human Rights Council, speaking on behalf of the Council, expressed deep appreciation for the contributions that the Special Rapporteur had made.

General Debate on the Human Rights Situation in Palestine and Other Occupied Arab Territories

Documentation

The Council has before it the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the implementation of Human Rights Council resolutions S-9/1 and S-12/1 (A/HRC/31/40).


The Council has before it the report of the Secretary-General on the situation of human rights in the occupied Syrian Golan (A/HRC/31/41).

The Council has before it the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the implementation of the recommendations contained in the report of the independent international fact-finding mission to investigate the implications of Israeli settlements on the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of the Palestinian people throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem (A/HRC/31/42).

The Council has before it the report of the Secretary-General on Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan (A/HRC/31/43).

The Council has before it the report of the Secretary-General on the human
rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem (A/HRC/31/44).

Presentation of Reports by the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General

KATE GILMORE, Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, introduced the reports about the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and other Occupied Arab Territories. Those reports issued recommendations to both Israel and the Government of the State of Palestine. The High Commissioner addressed the continued building of Israeli settlements, settler violence, Palestinian detainees, and business and human rights in the context of settlements. As for the report on Israeli settlements, the report provided an update on Israeli laws, policies and practices that aimed to expand the settlements. The report drew attention to the continued impunity for attacks against Palestinians, as well as the continued negative effects of the settlements on the local communities. The Secretary-General had submitted a report on the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including East Jerusalem, in which he examined the impact of Israel’s restrictions on the enjoyment of political, civil, social, economic and cultural rights by the Palestinians. He expressed serious concerns about the confrontations between Israeli and Palestinian security forces. His report also dealt with the attacks by Palestinian youth on Israeli civilians. Both the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General had made numerous constructive recommendations to all duty bearers. However, very many of them remained unimplemented. Meanwhile, the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories remained grave.

On behalf of the High Commissioner, Ms. Gilmore highlighted the issue of settlements, which were at the root of gradual fragmentation of the West Bank and restricted access to natural resources by the Palestinian people. Israeli practices on the expansion of the settlements continued to have a profound effect on freedom of movement, land and property. The High Commissioner welcomed the steps taken by the Israeli Government to reduce settler violence. However, a concern remained that those efforts had not yet translated into ensuring accountability for those attacks. The involvement of businesses in the exploitation of natural resources in the Palestinian territories was also of concern. As for Gaza, the illegal blockade and slow reconstruction remained the most significant obstacle to sustainable recovery. The perpetual reliance on food aid and the collapse of the economy contributed to the continued suffering of the Palestinian population there. The High Commissioner condemned all attacks by Palestinian armed groups in Gaza on Israel.
As the High Commissioner noted, although progress had been made in some aspects, a number of other recommendations were yet to be implemented, notably those on accountability, law enforcement activities in the context of the occupation, and respect for international humanitarian law by all parties. The High Commissioner condemned all individual attacks by Palestinians on Israeli civilians. Independent investigation of all unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings and excessive use of force, should be carried out. Displacement of women and children, due to demolition of homes, had increased recently, and such demolitions represented a form of collective punishment. Such punitive actions should immediately be stopped. Harassment of human rights defenders had been documented since the upsurge of hostilities in September 2014. The High Commissioner condemned the silencing of civil society and underscored their vital role in the context of occupation. Adherence to international humanitarian law, international human rights law, and ensuring accountability for violations were imperative to achieving long-term peace. Investigations should be carried out in an impartial and transparent manner, whereas victims should be provided with adequate reparations. The High Commissioner shared the Secretary-General’s view that the Palestinian frustration was rising due to a century-long occupation. Excessive use of force, lack of due process of law, and infringement of freedom of opinion and assembly had been documented. The High Commissioner urged the Palestinian authorities to declare a moratorium on the use of the death penalty. However, the State of Palestine’s accession to several international human rights treaties promised that the Palestinian authorities would be able to protect the human rights of their citizens. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights remained fully committed to engaging constructively with the State of Palestine and Israel on human rights issues.

**Statements by the Concerned Countries**

CHOI KYONGLIM, President of the Human Rights Council, noted that Israel was not present in the room.

State of Palestine, speaking as a concerned country, said that the Occupying Power continued building its settlements on Palestinian land and settlers continued their intimidation with impunity. Israel should put an end to settlements and to attacks against Palestinian people. Anyone buying products from the settlements was an accomplice to Israel’s policies. The Separation Wall was against the Geneva Convention. The occupying power was also continuing acts of reprisals against civil society activists. The Israeli military occupation had only generated violence
and instability in the region, and human rights could not be protected while this continued.

Syria, speaking as a concerned country, regretted that some countries were refusing to discuss this agenda item, and preferred abstaining on resolutions addressing this issue rather than speaking out against Israel’s violations. Despite scores of United Nations resolutions on the issue, there was still an expansion of settlements as well as home demolitions, settler-gangs’ activities, and deteriorating detention conditions. Israeli practices in the occupied Golan continued to violate international law. Natural resources continued to be exploited by Israeli authorities, while it imposed restrictions on human rights for people under occupation. The international community should pressure Israel to release all political prisoners.

**General Debate**

South Africa, speaking on behalf of the African Group, expressed deep concern over the findings of the reports on Israeli settlements and on the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including East Jerusalem. It called for an immediate end to Israel’s settlements, to the blockade of the Gaza Strip, and to the detention and imprisonment of thousands of Palestinians and other forms of collective punishment.

Kuwait, speaking on behalf of the Arab Group, regretted the intent of certain countries to boycott agenda item 7, adding that Israel was being allowed to remain above the law, which undermined the Human Rights Council’s credibility. The Arab Group firmly condemned active violence perpetrated by the settlers, adding that any attempts by the Israeli Government to change the reality on the ground in the occupied territories were not acceptable.

Iran, speaking on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, reminded that the illegal and brutal occupation was causing so much suffering to Palestinian civilians that it further inflamed tensions and provoked more anger and frustration with far-reaching and serious consequences for peace and security in the Middle East. The Non-Aligned Movement stressed the urgent need for the international community to uphold its duties and to act decisively to sustain international law and ensure accountability for human rights violations.

Pakistan, speaking on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, considered it shameful that some States from Western Europe had decided not to
participate in the discussion on item 7. Meanwhile, Israel was allowed to continue with its grave violations of international law. The illegal Israeli blockade on Gaza, a form of collective punishment amounting to a war crime, continued. Israel needed to be held accountable and perpetrators brought to justice.

Ghana said that the violence had had a devastating effect on the enjoyment of the human rights of both Palestinians and Israelis, including the right to life, free movement and freedom of expression. Ghana regretted the excessive use of force and unlawful killings, collective punishment and arbitrary detention. Only a negotiated settlement could lead to a just and durable peace in the Middle East.

Switzerland stated that the high numbers of violations of human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories were linked to the continuing Israeli occupation, but the Palestinian Authority also bore some responsibility. The settlements constituted a violation of international humanitarian law and seriously affected Palestinians’ civil, economic, social and cultural rights. Switzerland demanded the immediate lifting of the Gaza blockade.

Ecuador was deeply concerned at ongoing and systematic violations of international human rights and humanitarian laws by Israel, Israeli settlements, as well as impunity for acts of violence by settlers. These policies constituted a situation of apartheid against the Palestinian people. Israel should repeal national security laws that violated the rights of the child, and ensure that perpetrators of torture, extrajudicial executions, excessive use of force and other violations were brought to justice.

Qatar said that this agenda item was crucial to shine a light on violations against Palestinian people. This was a colonial occupation aiming to achieve ethnic cleansing through dehumanizing the Palestinian people. Qatar condemned violence by settlers, as well as the blockade of Gaza. The international community should redouble its efforts to put an end to the occupation and ensure that the Palestinian people could enjoy their right to self-determination.

Saudi Arabia regretted that the European Union and a number of countries were boycotting this agenda item, showing their double-standard approach when it came to Israel. Saudi Arabia said that Israel should be obliged to implement United Nations resolutions. It condemned Israel’s occupation and blockade of Gaza, and its violation of Arab Holy sites in East Jerusalem. It called upon Mahmoud Abbas to organize an international peace conference, and welcomed France’s proposal to host it.
Algeria expressed its concern over the situation in the Occupied Palestinian and Occupied Arab Territories, whose populations were deprived of their human rights by the Occupying Power. A number of practices were in contradiction with international human rights law and international humanitarian law. The international community was called upon to assume its responsibility and put an end to the activities by Israel.

Namibia reiterated its commitment to the Middle East peace process. Namibia believed that the focus should be on peaceful negotiations within the framework of United Nations resolutions. The establishment of an independent Palestinian State, existing side-by-side with Israel, was the only way to achieve lasting peace and security in the Middle East.

Indonesia was gravely concerned over the denied access for the Special Rapporteur to enter the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Indonesia urged, once again, the Occupying Power to respect and fully comply with international human rights and humanitarian laws. At the beginning of March, Indonesia had hosted an extraordinary Organization of Islamic Cooperation summit, which had produced the Jakarta Declaration and Resolution. Indonesia continued to provide capacity building training for Palestinians.

Maldives said settler violence was directly related to the continued expansion of illegal settlements throughout the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, adding that it was intolerable that human rights were denied to Palestinian people. Israeli authorities were urged to cooperate with the Special Procedure mandate holders and halt violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Venezuela welcomed the reports by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and said it was regrettable to witness Israel’s total disregard for United Nations mechanisms. Venezuela rejected the colonialist policy of the occupying power, which was ignoring all calls for dialogue and peace, and added that the detention of children was a breach of their fundamental rights.

Russian Federation said it was essential for the international community as a whole to bring the current situation out of deadlock. The inability to resolve the conflict was one of the causes of radicalisation in the Middle East and the rise of terrorism. Emphasising the importance of Palestinian national unity, she added that the international community’s main strategic goal should be the resumption of
the negotiating track.

Slovenia recalled the European Union’s principled position on this agenda item, and expressed concerns that the human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories had not changed. It underscored the importance of respecting the rights to education and to health in all circumstances by ensuring free and unhindered access to those services. Slovenia emphasized the mutual responsibility of both parties to resume peace talks and refrain from all actions undermining the credibility of a two-State solution.

China condemned all human rights violations in the occupied Palestinian territories, and called for effective measures to be taken to promote peace, end occupation and ensure humanitarian access and the reconstruction of Gaza. China expressed support for a Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital, and called on all parties to undertake efforts to relaunch the negotiations as soon as possible.

United Arab Emirates expressed concern about the catastrophic human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, and flagrant violations of international law by the occupying force. The Human Rights Council had to ensure that Israel did not enjoy impunity for crimes described as crimes against humanity. The Council had to call on Israel to stop the settlements in Palestinian territories, and had to appoint a new Special Rapporteur during this session.

Nigeria supported the fact-finding mission of the High Commissioner and the calls on Israel to halt and reverse its settlement activities, in the interest of peace. Nigeria agreed with the conclusion of the fact-finding mission that the existence of the settlements had a heavy impact on a wide range of Palestinian human rights. Nigeria remained convinced that the solution to the Palestinian question lay in the two-State formula, which Israel continued to reject.

Cuba said that the question of Palestine had been on the United Nations’ agenda for 67 years, but Israel continued its serious human rights violations with impunity. Israel ignored advisory opinions of the International Court of Justice and was continuing to construct the illegal wall. Since October 2015, Israeli occupying forces had killed more than 190 Palestinians, many of them children. Cuba condemned the ongoing construction of illegal settlements, including in East Jerusalem.
Tunisia said that the Israeli Occupying Power was continuing violations of Palestinians’ rights on a daily basis. Palestinians were simply asking for the same rights enjoyed by other peoples around the world. The Human Rights Council should not just sit back and observe the ongoing violations; instead, it ought to stand by the Palestinians.

Egypt said the reports on settlements had been followed, adding that the suffering of the Palestinians in the occupied territories was still on the rise. Concern was expressed about multiple violations of Palestinians’ human rights as well as the rampant state of impunity. The Israeli occupation of the Syrian Arab Golan Heights was ongoing as were the violations of the human rights of its inhabitants.

Senegal said that restrictions against freedom of movements of Palestinians were major obstacles to exercising their fundamental human rights. Those obstacles must be done away with, and an end must be put to illegal activities aimed at modifying the cultural realities of the occupied territories. Israel was invited to work more closely with mandate holders.

Turkey noted the increase in the number of settlers who were allowed to enter Al-Haram Al-Sharif, and said Gaza urgently needed reconstruction to avoid a humanitarian disaster, and Turkey would continue its development assistance. The realization of the two-State peace vision in accordance with international law was the only viable way forward.

Malaysia condemned Israel’s continued violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. It called for the resumption of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. Israel could not simply pay lip service to a two-State solution. It had to stop settlements and other activities that made the two-State solution difficult, and must end the occupation. Israel had to end its brutality and be held accountable for its actions.

Jordan said that the occupation represented a blatant and unprecedented human rights violation. This issue would be removed from the Council’s agenda once Israel ended its occupation. Jordan continued to appeal for the establishment of a Palestinian State, which would end the misuse of the aspirations of Palestinians and allow the dismantlement of terrorist groups, who used the excuse of the absence of a solution to follow unrelated goals.

Iran referred to the horrific human rights violations by the occupying force, and expressed deep concern about Israel’s continued lack of cooperation with the
Special Rapporteur. Iran asked the Council to appoint a new Special Rapporteur during this session. Iran underlined that the occupation wall was a violation of international law, and denounced the occupation and settlements as violations of the Palestinian people’s right to self-determination.

Pakistan found it regrettable that the Occupying Power was allowed to continue with its grave violations of international law. The illegal blockade on Gaza continued, while multinational corporations were still involved in illegal settlements. Companies were called to disengage from such activities. The international community was urged to take urgent action to resolve the longstanding dispute of Palestine.

Sweden said that international law and human rights applied to both Israel and Palestine. All acts of violence were deplorable and had to be universally condemned. The underlying causes of the tension had to be addressed. Sweden stressed the importance of unhindered work of civil society in both Israel and Palestine. Sweden supported the French initiative on an international peace conference.

Chile deplored the blockade of Gaza, which had to be brought to an end as it had serious humanitarian consequences on the population there. It was not possible to have a negotiated process that deviated from the Palestinians’ right to exercise self-determination. There had to be an immediate suspension of all expansion of settlements, Chile stressed.

Oman noted the destruction of natural resources, the demolition of Palestinian property, the displacement of Palestinian people, and the increase in the number of Israeli settlements. An uninhibited wave of violence had been seen. The change in the demography of East Jerusalem was a violation of international law and human rights.

Yemen requested the Council to take all necessary measures against Israel, and called for an end to the Israeli occupation and all human rights violations, including in the territories of Lebanon, also condemning measures aiming to change the legal status in terms of the demography of the occupied Arab territories.

Lebanon condemned double standards, and added that Israel was continuing violations of international humanitarian law. Arbitrary arrests and demolitions of private homes were condemned robustly, as these were almost ethnic cleansing. The Palestinian people’s right to return, as well as a number of other
rights, were reiterated.

Democratic People’s Republic of Korea said that, despite international protest and condemnation, Israel continued to expand Jewish settlements and perpetrate human rights violations. The United States and some Western countries deliberately covered up or turned a blind eye to such human rights violations. National independence and sovereignty were the essential prerequisite for the enjoyment of all human rights.

Bahrain restated the need to keep item 7 on the agenda of the Council, while it was regrettable that some wished to have it removed. Israel continued to practice inhuman activities in breach of many treaties. The blockade inflicted on the Palestinians was illegitimate, and their right to health, water and sanitation was endangered, among others.

Malta noted that the living conditions of the people in Gaza had deteriorated dramatically after three wars, and the conditions of the Palestinians in the West Bank had also worsened. Settler violence against Palestinians should be addressed more vigorously and the perpetrators brought to justice. Malta recognized the commendable work undertaken by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

Gulf Cooperation Council condemned the grabbing of Palestinian lands, with the aim of altering the demographics of the Palestinian territories. It expressed concern over the disproportionate use of force by Israel. It reiterated its support for the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Palestine and stressed the need to end the occupation of the Palestinian territories and other Arab territories.

Sri Lanka noted that the ongoing blockade of the Gaza Strip denied Palestinians access to infrastructure and economic development, as well as access to land and natural resources. It supported the implementation of the resolution on the formation of a Palestinian State in its pre-1967 borders as soon as possible. It noted that indiscriminate attacks on civilians would only postpone a solution to the conflict.

Luxembourg voiced deep concern over the situation in Palestine, noting that violence could again explode. It was high time for the international community to engage with both sides and bring about a lasting solution. The fate of the Palestinian people should not be forgotten. The suffering of the Palestinian people was a fertile ground for continued violence. More had to be done to protect
civilians and respect international humanitarian law.

Nicaragua noted with indignation the fact that the occupying force simply ignored resolutions of the Human Rights Council. Israel continued to build illegal settlements and violate international humanitarian law. It was vital that the Council continued monitoring the human rights situation in Palestinian territories. Nicaragua called on the Council to put pressure on Israel to respect its international obligations.

Palestinian Return Centre Ltd spoke about the history of the conflict, and noted that any discussion of the situation had to consider the rights of the seven million existing Palestinian refugees, noting that the right of return encompassed wider rights.

Norwegian Refugee Council spoke about the obstruction of delivery of humanitarian assistance, and noted that under international humanitarian law, the Occupying Power was obligated to accept and facilitate humanitarian relief as a duty of good governance.

World Jewish Congress said Israelis were being subjected to a vicious wave of Palestinian terror, naming two people who had been murdered. The Middle East was in flames, but the Council was continuing its obsession and demonization of Israel and was targeting it, the only democracy in the region, with a permanent agenda item.

Human Rights Now said that the perpetrators of indiscriminate attacks on civilians in Gaza during the 2014 conflict had not yet been prosecuted. The Government of Israel was called upon to cooperate with the International Criminal Court and the mandate of the Special Rapporteur, as well as other United Nations bodies.

Al-Haq, Law in the Service of Man, in a joint statement with, BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, stated that house demolitions had been increasingly used as punitive measures against alleged Palestinian attackers as a form of collective punishment. Concern was raised over the alarming increase in serious threats against members of civil society organizations.

ADALAH – Legal Centre for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, called upon the Council to demand that Israel immediately lift the closure of the Gaza Strip and cease collective punishments, and requested that Israel remove all barriers for
Palestinians to access Israeli courts to pursue civil claims against the Israeli military’s unlawful actions.

Arab Commission for Human Rights noted that some States remained silent while the international community was not able to protect human rights in the occupied Arab and Palestinian territories. The occupying power had to assume responsibility for protecting civilians. It was thus essential to end impunity for human rights violations and occupation of Palestinian territories.

Maarij Foundation for Peace and Development noted that the Israeli occupation forces took Palestinian children from their home, often at night, to transfer them handcuffed and blindfolded to interrogation centres where they suffered physical and psychological torture. They were denied access to parents or a lawyer, and were tried before Israeli military courts.

Charitable Institute for Protecting Social Victims reminded that the High Commissioner for Human Rights had recognized in March 2014 that the construction of illegal settlements and settler violence against Palestinians had been the primary source of human rights violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

International-Lawyers.org said Israeli practices were becoming increasingly dangerous, noting that American polls showed that 50 per cent of Jews in Israel supported the expulsion of 1.5 million Arab nationals in Israel from the country. Israel still used emergency laws which enabled it to carry out cruel measures.


International Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination spoke about the blockade of Gaza, stating that it was incontrovertible that it was unlawful. The Human Rights Council was called on to take measures toward denouncing and ending it.

American Association of Jurists expressed deep concern about the attacks by different actors linked to the Israeli Government, not only against independent experts uncovering human rights violations committed by Israel, but also against
the candidates for the mandate of the Special Rapporteur.

Union of Arab Jurists said the Israeli authorities were attempting to distort the characteristics of villages and areas through the building of illegal settlements. Recently, a gang of Israeli settlers burnt down the house of a Palestinian man, who had witnessed a previous crime against Palestinians.

International Federation for Human Rights Leagues drew attention to smear campaigns by Israeli newspapers, organizations and institutions against both Palestinian and Israeli human rights organizations. Those smear campaigns had taken a dangerous turn with Al-Haq staff receiving death threats.

International Association of Democratic Lawyers said that in the face of Israel’s persistent non-compliance with international law, the reaction of the international community should be unanimous and resolute and the Council had to redouble its efforts.

Organization for Defending Victims of Violence quoted declarations of concern made by persons in leadership positions of the United Nations, and called on the Council to construct a mechanism by which Israel would cooperate with the Special Procedures.

Federacion de Asociaciones de Defensa y Promocion de los Derechos Humanos said that Israel was using the law to be above the law, and that the state of emergency went back to the time of the British mandate, adding that it was important that certain unlawful methods were stopped.

Institut international pour la paix, la justice et les droits de l’homme voiced deep concern over the religious restrictions on Palestinian Christians and Muslims. They were refused access to places of worship. The Commission of Inquiry had reported attacks on mosques and churches since 2008.

Khiam Rehabilitation Centre for Victims of Torture noted that there had been a marked rise in the number of Palestinians in Israeli custody, including administrative detainees, women and children. At the end of 2015, 6,066 Palestinians had been held on contentious security grounds, the highest number since July 2010.

United Nations Watch reminded that the Human Rights Council had been founded to eliminate double standards, selectivity and politicization. Israel had been
subjected to special treatment, even though it was the only democracy in the Middle East where Arabs could participate in free and fair elections, and be elected for office.

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, in a joint statement with BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights; Al-Haq, Law in the Service of Man; and Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights, said that impunity for violations of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories had to end. Among other measures, the Council should create a list of businesses profiting from settlement activities.

Global Network for Rights and Development reviewed recent events relating to Palestinian issues, including the raising of the Palestinian flag at the United Nations, and listed fundamental rights that Palestinians were being denied, such as housing, food, and water.

Coordinating Board of Jewish Organisation, in a joint statement with B’nai B’rith International, spoke about recent violent attacks against Israeli citizens, which included stabbings and vehicle ramming, and also discussed recent rumours regarding prayers at the Temple Mount.

World Council of Churches expressed grave concern about the large scale unlawful evictions and demolitions in the West Bank, in particular in Area C. Very worrying also was the unprecedented increase in demolitions and confiscation of donor funded structures, many of which had been provided as post-demolition humanitarian relief.

European Union of Jewish Students regretted that Israel was the only country singled out in a specific agenda item, while the Council remained silent about mass killings and obscene human rights violations of which some were being perpetrated by its own Member States. Due to its aggressive nature, the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement targeted Jewish students, boycotted peace activists and did not support the two-State solution.

International Association of Jewish Lawyers and Justice said that Hamas was responsible for the blockade of Gaza. Israel had withdrawn from Gaza, and provided financial aid which had been used by Hamas for military expenses. Both Palestinians and Israelis were trapped in a Hamas blockade of terror, resulting in human rights violations.
Amuta for NGO Responsibility said that the Palestinian Authority promoted hatred and violence against Israelis. Israel was a Jewish democratic State committed to peace. The Council should address the situation with impartiality and balance to truly promote peace in the region.

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