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**Written statement* submitted by the World Vision International (WVI),
a non-governmental organization in general consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[4 July 2006]

* The present document contains the statement that was to have been delivered orally by the organization(s) concerned at the first special session. It is issued, unedited and in the original language(s), as received. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the author(s).

Human Rights Situation in Occupied Palestinian Territories

1. World Vision International, the largest of the UN implementing partners, has been working in Israel and Palestine and specifically the Gaza Strip for over thirty years. During that period we have seen untold hardships in the lives of the people of the region and especially the children. We have no desire to vilify anyone, but rather to sound an alert for the children. The recent and current escalation of military activities in the Gaza Strip has forced World Vision to halt its humanitarian work with children and their communities. Over the years World Vision has reported the impact of the unrest and military action on children in both Israel and Palestine, which are today equally relevant. Here is a summary of recent reports:

2. In 2000 World Vision Palestine reported:

A number of children in the schools have experienced trauma as a result of the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank/Gaza Strip/East Jerusalem since 1967. Incidents resulting from the military occupation such as being picked up at gunpoint at military checkpoints by Israeli soldiers, being chased by soldiers in the middle of the streets or experiencing violence in the middle of the night from soldiers searching their houses for “security” reasons, have caused both psychological and physical suffering. Some of the symptoms include the inability to walk well, asthma, learning disabilities and brain dysfunctions. Both Israel and Palestine psychiatrists have helped with the extensive treatment required.

3. In 2002 World Vision Palestine reported:

In Palestine, both children and adults are affected due to the extreme ongoing stress they endure each day. They all are not necessarily traumatized, but many are showing warning symptoms that need immediate attention. “Among these symptoms that children experience are withdrawal, inability to pay attention, sleeping difficulties, nightmares, irrational fears, irritability, refusal to attend school, outbursts of anger and fighting, depression, anxiety, guilt and emotional numbing,” explains Manuela Ziskoven, a Psychologist and Trauma Specialist at the Guidance and Training Center- a WVJ partner organization.

4. In 2003 World Vision Palestine reported:

The Israeli policies of limiting the international presence in Gaza Strip keep the world largely ignorant of the humanitarian disaster that Palestinians experience today. The tight intermittent closure of Gaza transit-points aggravates the economic and psychological despair that Palestinians are going through. This leads to more trauma, and helplessness, and indeed increased violence.

5. The Gaza Strip is one of the poorest and most densely populated areas in the world. The more than 1.4 million Palestinians, half of whom are under 16, living inside the 140 square mile coastal strip are in desperate need of assistance and relief. 150,000 Gaza inhabitants benefit annually from our programmes. Private donors, mainly from the USA, sponsor some 3,300 children throughout Gaza, contributing to health care, education, food and community development.

6. Today World Vision is very concerned about the humanitarian situation in the Gaza strip in general and in WV's Southern Gaza Rafah Area Development Programme (ADP) in particular. The Southern Gaza programme serves more than 100,000 beneficiaries [including 2,740 sponsored children]. Children there are terrified by the predawn air strikes and their health condition is expected to deteriorate drastically due to the lack of food, water, and health services. We are also concerned that water scarcity could lead to an outbreak of diseases among the population we serve.

7. World Vision is currently taking urgent measures to meet the immediate needs of children in the Gaza Strip, including yesterday an organization worldwide emergency declaration and financial appeal. We urge the Council to consider the human rights of children in this deliberation and do as a body what is necessary to help bring the crisis to an end and rebuild momentum toward peace. We formally plead with our friends and colleagues in this hall, and in Israel and Palestine, to consider the impact of their actions on defenseless children in both countries who when not cared for are scarred for life. If we cannot rise to this challenge, history will show that our core spiritual values and commitment to justice have been violated. We especially appeal for the opening of all transit points for humanitarian supplies and an immediate cessation of hostilities, which only breed further violence.
