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**Written statement* submitted by the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions
(COHRE), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

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

[22 January 2008]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the
submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Concerning Violations of the Fundamental Rights Caused by the Blockade and Sanctions on Gaza

Today, the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), a global initiative devoted to the effective realisation by all of the fundamental human rights to housing, land, water and sanitation, released the position paper *Hostage to Politics: The Impact of Sanctions and the Blockade on the Human Right to Water and Sanitation in Gaza*. The position paper follows intensive research into the facts as they currently exist in Gaza, as well as broad consultation with relevant stakeholders.

The Israeli government has imposed a range of sanctions on the Gaza administration. It has justified these with reference to ad hoc rocket attacks emanating from the Gaza territory as well as because of the fact of a Hamas-led government of Gaza, which has called for the destruction of the state of Israel. A number of border crossings have been closed by Israeli authorities since June 2007, restricting the movement of people and goods into and out of the Gaza Strip. On Friday 18 January 2008, Israel closed all border crossings and blocked the entry of humanitarian aid except in exception circumstances. The acts of the Gaza blockade have been undertaken with the support or complicity of a number of other governments and other agencies.

The blockade has prevented the entry of essential materials required to operate and maintain water and sewage services as well as the entry of chemicals and filters necessary for water purification, putting the people of Gaza's health at risk. Financial sanctions imposed on the Gaza administration have caused the near collapse of basic service provision in the water and waste-water sectors. As a result of the sanctions, and an inability to import materials, many donors and international agencies have suspended projects relating to water and sewage infrastructure. Many households now struggle to pay for clean drinking water and can no longer afford the cost of emptying their septic tanks. The blockade, financial and economic sanctions are together contributing to the collapse of basic services and causing severe suffering for the civilian population.

Israeli restrictions on the amount of fuel entering the Gaza Strip have also hindered the operation of water wells, pumping stations and sewage treatment facilities. Since December 2007, due to the non-arrival of spare parts, as well as due to fuel restrictions, some 250,000 people in Gaza were not receiving a sufficient and continuous supply of water to their homes. The Coastal Municipal Water Utility (CMWU), the water service provider in Gaza, is currently not delivering water for up to 18 hours per day, depending on the area.

Due to a lack of fuel, since 5 January the Gaza Power Generating Company has had to reduce the power supply, leaving Gaza's 1.5 million people with daily power outages of up to eight hours. Among other effects, a lack of electricity has resulted in reduced access to drinking water, especially for those who live in high rise buildings which require electricity to pump the water to higher levels. On 20 January, the Gaza power plant was shut down and Gaza City was plunged into darkness. The CMWU announced that if fuel did not arrive by 22 January, the water and sewage systems of one and a half million people would cease to operate. This could cause a health crisis and the outbreak of water-borne disease. On 21 January, the Palestinian Water Authority announced that 40 percent of homes in the Gaza Strip, affecting some 600,000 people had no running water.

In addition, the waste-water treatment facilities in Beit Lahia (northern Gaza), Gaza City and Khan Younis (southern Gaza) are reportedly at high risk of flooding due to their state of disrepair, a lack of spare parts for necessary maintenance, and disruptions to the supply of fuel and electricity required to operate the systems pumps. Heavy winter rains could cause the waste-water reservoir in Beit Lahia to overflow sending 1.5 million cubic metres of sewage into surrounding districts, directly threatening the life and property of 50,000 people and potentially contaminating the water supply of up to 300,000 people.

The Israeli government is also now reportedly threatening to disconnect electricity supplies to Gaza. A petition to stop the proposed electricity cuts, due to the disruptions they would cause to essential services, has been brought before the Israeli Supreme Court by ten Israeli and Palestinian human rights organizations. A decision in that matter is currently pending.

COHRE recognises that the blockade and sanctions are motivated by threat to Israel's security, including the doubts Israel and several other States hold about the intentions of the Hamas organisation. However, these concerns do not justify the denial of the fundamental rights of the people of Gaza. The blockade, as well as the full range of economic and financial sanctions imposed on the Gaza administration, are not essential in order to protect Israel's security and do not contribute to the peace process.

The deliberate infliction of extreme levels of deprivation on civilians, constitute grave violations of fundamental human rights. The actions of Israel arguably constitute violations of international humanitarian law, which prohibits punishment for an offence a person has not committed, collective penalties and all measures of intimidation against protected persons including civilians taking no part in hostilities. As an occupying power, Israel has a legal obligation to ensure that the basic needs of the people of Gaza are met.

COHRE urges the government of Israel to immediately lift the blockade on the Gaza Strip and allow the free flow of essential goods and equipment into Gaza. It further calls on Israel to cease its policy of restricting fuel supplies to Gaza and withdraw proposals to limit electricity. Further, COHRE calls on all states to lift banking restrictions imposed on the Gaza administration in order to permit the funding of necessary public services and calls on donor countries and agencies to immediately resume funding in the water and waste water sectors to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe from occurring.

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