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**QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE
OCCUPIED ARAB TERRITORIES, INCLUDING PALESTINE**

**Letter dated 14 October 2003 from the Permanent Observer for Palestine
to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the Acting High
Commissioner for Human Rights**

The Israeli occupation authorities perpetrated, on Thursday 9 October 2003, another massacre against Palestinian civilians in the southern Gaza Strip city of Rafah and the adjacent refugee camp of Yubna, a massacre to be added to their long list of massacres which will always mark the history of Israel.

At around midnight, Thursday 9 October, Israeli occupation forces launched a massive military invasion of the Yubna refugee camp, home to thousands of Palestinians who were forced out of their homes in Israel in 1948, adjacent to the southern Gaza Strip town of Rafah.

Up to 100 Israeli occupation forces tanks, bulldozers and armoured military vehicles, supported by military attack helicopters, thrust deep into the densely populated refugee camp, near the border with Egypt, in an offensive.

At least two children were among seven Palestinians killed, identified as 8-year-old Ibrahim al-Qrainawi and 12-year old Sami Salah, shot dead by shrapnel from a tank shell. Other victims of the Israeli occupation forces' invasion were teenager Mabrouk Mohamad Judeh, Nader Ahmad Abu Taha, 22, E'taiwi Yousef Abu Muhsen, 23, A'la Mansour, 33, and Mohammad Abdulwahab, 33.

In addition to the dead, 70 Palestinians, among them eight children, were wounded when a helicopter fired a missile into the camp; 120 houses were demolished and more than 1,500 refugees made homeless, to be added to the homeless rolls in Rafah. Approximately 400 dunums of Palestinian agricultural land between Morag settlement and Sofa Crossing have been razed. Furthermore, the Israeli occupation forces also destroyed electrical, water supply, road, sewerage, telephone and the rest of the infrastructure of the Yubna camp.

A total internal and external closure of the Gaza Strip has been imposed by Israeli occupying forces from early morning on Sunday, 5 October. All main internal roads were closed, segregating the Gaza Strip into four isolated zones, in addition to all external access routes to Israel and Egypt.

In addition to the Gaza Strip closure, and in an unprecedented announcement, the Israeli authorities issued an order on Wednesday, 8 October 2003, prohibiting all Palestinian vehicular traffic in the northern West Bank. Now only are Palestinians being prohibited from entering Israel, but all West Bank cities, towns and villages have been subjected to a full closure. The entire West Bank is at a standstill. Not only are all existing checkpoints denying any movement but also multiple additional roadblocks and "flying checkpoints" are being enforced with Israeli jeeps sporadically dispersed on all roads throughout the region. Expecting only the closures in the northern parts of the region, the majority of Palestinians went about their daily business on Thursday, 9 October, only to find as the day went on that they had become trapped, many stranded between checkpoints or simply unable to return to their homes after work. At Surda checkpoint to the north of Ramallah, soldiers threw tear gas and opened fire on parents and children attempting to return to their homes from the city. These people were unarmed civilians merely trying to carry out their everyday routines.

In addition to this, and according to Dr. Mustafa Barghouti, President of Palestine Medical Relief, Israeli soldiers are implementing a new policy at the checkpoints whereby they are preventing any more than two medical staff from passing through in emergency vehicles. This has become a particular obstacle for the mobile clinics which will, at all times, be carrying more than two medical personnel, as any one team will treat up to 250 people per day. The disruption of medical aid and attacks on Palestinian medical organizations are becoming dangerously frequent and escalating in ferocity. Such actions completely violate the principles of medical neutrality, constituting a gross violation of international law.

Meanwhile, and in violation of international law, Israel is going on with the construction of its 25-foot-high separation wall and its expansion of settlements, as a result of which tens of thousands of Palestinians have difficulty reaching their workplaces and farmland, obtaining medical treatment, attending school and maintaining reasonable living conditions.

Israeli occupation authorities continue to manipulate the public's fear of suicide attacks in order to obtain political objectives under the guise of security and defence arguments, with the aim of confiscating further Palestinian lands. The Palestinian land confiscated by the wall up to this date totals 164,783 acres, 40,460 of which are public property of the district of Jenin and 124,323 the private properties in the Jerusalem area.

The wall would leave 210,000 Palestinians besieged in bantustans. This population is detained between the wall and the Israeli borders and are unable to travel out of their areas without the permission of the Israeli army.

During the period from September 2000 to September 2003 alone, the Israeli occupation forces and Israeli settlers killed at least 2,500 Palestinians. Of the martyrs, 636 were children, 128 women, 621 school students and teachers and 278 men from the Palestinian National Security forces.

Among the deceased, Israeli soldiers on military checkpoints killed 103 Palestinians; another 328 were assassinated in cold blood, while Israeli settlers killed 39.

The number of Palestinians detained by the Israeli soldiers to date totals 22,150 persons: about 7,500 are still in Israeli jails and detention centres; 350 of the prisoners are children and 1,700 are held under the law of administrative detention.

A total of 781,554 fruit trees were uprooted by Israeli military bulldozers and 40,982 homes have been damaged, 3,329 houses were wrecked and demolished completely.

In total, 23 members of medical teams were killed by Israeli gunfire while on duty, 380 attacks on Palestinian ambulances were recorded, 38 of the ambulances were destroyed and are out of service. At military checkpoints, 59 deliveries took place as mothers were not allowed to pass in order to reach a hospital; 31 infants and another 103 patients died on their way to hospitals, as they had been stopped and delayed by Israeli military checkpoints.

The persistence of the Israeli occupation forces in perpetrating these acts in all fields of life in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, in flagrant violation of human rights, the principles of international law, international humanitarian law and the resolutions of the Commission on Human Rights itself, for three decades, particularly those which condemned these acts as war crimes and crimes against humanity, namely the resolution adopted by the Commission on Human Rights at its fifth special session (S-5/1), on 19 October 2000, means in fact the persistence of the Government of Israel as well as its occupation authorities in their grave violations of these principles, as well as the provisions signed and adhered to by States of the world, including Israel. Israel treats all its international commitments today with total disregard and behaves as if it were a State above the law without any deterrent or accountability, and encourages thus other States to behave the same way. This undermines the principles of international law and plunges the world in the chaos of oppressive power, with all the consequences such a situation involves, exposing humanity to wars and bloodshed all over the world.

In the light of the ever-escalating Israeli war machine and its mounting aggression launched by its occupation authorities against Palestinian civilians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, we appeal to the Acting High Commissioner for Human Rights, and through you to the international community, to take speedy international action to stop the Israeli massacres which target our innocent civilian Palestinian population, including women and children, and to condemn in the strongest terms the wanton Israeli killings of Palestinian civilians, the destruction of their property, war crimes, human tragedy and all the Israeli violations of human rights, international law and international humanitarian law, to which the Palestinian people are exposed

on a daily basis. We also appeal to the Acting High Commissioner for Human Rights to call this last Israeli operation in Rafah a war crime and a human catastrophe, to condemn the construction of the illegal apartheid separation wall on occupied Palestinian territory, and to call on the Government of Israel immediately to halt the construction of the said wall, to condemn the Israeli policy of annexation and illegal conquest, and to denounce the Israeli plans for the construction of more illegal settlements.

I would be most grateful if you could have this letter distributed as an official document of the sixtieth session of the Commission on Human Rights, under its agenda item 8.

(Signed): Nabil RAMLAWI
Ambassador
Permanent Observer
