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**Illegal Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem and the
rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory**

Security Council
Seventy-fifth year

Identical letters dated 15 October 2020 from the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council

I write to draw your attention to the critical situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, due to the ongoing and escalating illegal policies and practices of Israel, the occupying Power, perpetrated against the Palestinian people.

Most of the letters circulated recently by the Security Council mention the effects of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, highlighting its severe and multidimensional effects. The evolving situation has brought forth several important lessons which stress the principle of collectivity and shared humanity.

Regrettably, however, this is not the case in Palestine, where Israel, the occupying Power, continues to exploit the pandemic, aggressively advancing its settlement colonization and annexation schemes, entrenching its 53-year military occupation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. As the international community focuses its collective efforts on mitigating the dire impact of the pandemic on people, societies and economies globally, Israel has instead seized it as an opportune moment to further trample the law and further harm the Palestinian civilian population under its illegal occupation. Despite Israel's claim to desire peace and stability, such dangerous and illegal actions prove otherwise, clearly pointing to its true desire: more Palestinian land.

Just this week, on 14 and 15 October, the Israeli Government approved the construction of another 5,000 settlement units in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, primarily in areas deep inside the West Bank. Such duplicity cannot be ignored as Israel persists with its violations and further undermines the two-State solution on the pre-1967 lines, paving way for an apartheid one-State reality, while it simultaneously disguises itself as a regional partner who believes in advancing peace and stability, attempting to promote its standing in the international community based on false credentials.



The international community must explicitly demand once again that Israel immediately cease all of its illegal settlement activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. Settlement activities constitute a flagrant violation of international law amounting to grave breaches, i.e. war crimes. Israel must be demanded to abide by its legal obligations, including under the Fourth Geneva Convention, as reaffirmed in Security Council resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#), or suffer the consequences for its rogue behaviour.

To Israel, “suspending” its annexation plans obviously does not mean that it intends to abide by international law as it continues to pursue all measures aimed at the colonization and annexation of our land. Annexation has not stopped, it is happening every single day with every settlement expanded, every home demolished and every Palestinian family forcibly displaced.

While many in the international community have directly called upon Israel to permanently abandon its annexation plans, the occupying Power continues to ignore these calls, proceeding apace with its illegal schemes, swallowing up more Palestinian land by the day. The lack of accountability has undoubtedly enabled and emboldened such grave breaches, which are destroying the two-State solution and constitute the main obstacle to peace.

Home demolitions and forced evictions continue to be everyday occurrences for Palestinians living under Israeli occupation. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Israel demolished more than 500 Palestinian buildings in the Occupied Palestinian Territory since the start of 2020, with a total of 134 structures demolished in East Jerusalem alone. Disregarding international law and the sensitive urgency of the pandemic, Israel has intensified its inhumane practice of home demolitions and forced evictions, leaving hundreds more Palestinians homeless.

Israel uses the pretext of “construction without a permit” to justify its illegal policies. Yet, as repeatedly reported by the Security Council, Israel, breaching all of its legal obligations as the occupying Power, makes it nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain such permits, as the objective is to deliberately restrict Palestinian development and dispossess Palestinian families, creating a coercive environment that forces them to leave their land. Moreover, as highlighted by United Nations Special Coordinator, Nikolay Mladenov, during his last Security Council briefing on the Question of Palestine, many Palestinians are actually forced to demolish their own homes in order to avoid the heavy demolition fees imposed by the Israeli Government.

The fact is that while Israeli settlers enjoy the Israeli Government’s full support for the illegal expansion and construction of settlements and outposts in occupied territory that facilitates the illegal transfer of these settlers to our land, Palestinian civilians cannot construct a single room or home in their own land without obtaining the nearly-impossible permit from Israeli authorities. Moreover, not only do Israeli occupation forces take part in attacks on Palestinian civilians through home demolitions, forced evictions, military raids, and other crimes, they also protect armed and fanatic settlers in carrying out attacks against Palestinians throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Aided and abetted by the occupation forces, Israeli settler violence has escalated recently, including the destruction of Palestinian property, vandalism, uprooting trees and direct attacks against civilians.

As October marks the start of the olive harvest season in Palestine, our people face the constant threat of settler violence. In the past week, Israeli settlers perpetrated numerous attacks against Palestinians and stole olive harvests across the West Bank. In the village of al-Jabaa settlers attacked Palestinian farmers and destroyed 300 trees in two attacks. More than 1 million productive trees have been destroyed by the Israel

occupation since 2000, according to a 2019 report by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. Needless to say, the majority of the complaints against such attacks are rarely investigated by Israel.

Along with the spike in settler violence, Palestinians access to farmland continues to be undermined by the Israeli military's severe restrictions on the freedom of movement, particularly due to the Wall, military checkpoints and randomly erected roadblocks. Occupying forces routinely block agricultural roads to obstruct the movement of farmers during the olive harvest season, impairing the livelihoods of thousands of families. Furthermore, settler violence and military restrictions equally undermine the central role of olive harvest in Palestinian culture, society and history.

Israel's inhumane policy of administrative detention also continues to endanger Palestinians, including children and women. The incarceration of civilians without trial and without charge is a routine practice by the occupying Power that has inflicted untold suffering on the Palestinian people. At least 350 Palestinians are being administratively detained among the nearly 5,000 people being imprisoned by Israel. Governments, human rights groups and other international organizations have called for the release of Palestinians being held in Israeli prisons without being charged, tried or convicted.

The case of Maher al-Akhras, a 49-year-old Palestinian man and father of six children who has been on a hunger strike for more than 80 days since his arrest and administrative detention by Israeli occupation forces in July, is one such case requiring immediate attention. According to Israeli rights group B'Tselem, Maher al-Akhras is "on the verge of death" as he protests his unlawful incarceration.

As the occupying Power, Israel is responsible for the lives and well-being of prisoners, whether held in Israeli prisons in the Occupied Palestinian Territory or in Israel, which violates the Fourth Geneva Convention due to the illegality of transferring prisoners outside of occupied territories. Given the pandemic's impact and the increase in transmission rates in the region, Israel must heed the international community's call and release vulnerable prisoners, particularly women, children, older persons and those with pre-existing medical conditions, and must release administrative detainees, including Maher al-Akhras, whose life is presently in danger.

Turning to the situation in the Gaza Strip, we once again sound the alarm about the deplorable humanitarian and socioeconomic conditions there due to Israel's 13-year blockade that has inflicted such severe deprivation, hunger and misery on its 2 million inhabitants. Israel regularly bans the entry of fuel shipments, using punitive measures that endanger the livelihood of millions of vulnerable people. As previously stated by many States, United Nations agencies, and international organizations, Gaza's overburdened health-care system cannot cope with additional suspensions or reductions of power sources while facing the threat of COVID-19. In this regard, according to a report by the World Health Organization, COVID-19 cases in Gaza have risen by 84 per cent, compounding the hardships and fears being faced by the Palestinian people, who are prevented by the occupation from accessing the international tools and capabilities to deal with the challenges and consequences posed by the pandemic.

In this context, we must reiterate our appreciation for the assistance being extended to the Palestinian people from across the globe and in spite of the challenging circumstances facing countries in this era of COVID-19. This includes in particular the vital assistance being provided through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Health Organization, the World Food Programme and other United Nations agencies

and humanitarian organizations on the ground and direct assistance by the international donor community.

Considering Israel's half-century-old occupation and incessant violations, the Palestinian people are sadly not surprised at the escalation of crimes and exploitation of this time of pandemic by the occupation. This is the direct result of lack of accountability for an occupation that has expanded its territorial control by the day over the last 53 years. Given its complete departure from the two-State solution, Israel's calls for "peace" should not be trusted until the international community sees a correlation in Israeli behaviour with international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#), and the internationally-agreed parameters for a just solution, which remain at the core of the international consensus. Until then, the international community, including the Security Council, must hold the occupying Power accountable, rather than rewarding its dangerous behaviour with silence and inaction, while ignoring the pain and suffering endured by the people living under its military rule.

I should be grateful if you would arrange to have the present letter distributed as a document of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 5, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) **Riyad Mansour**
Minister
Permanent Observer
