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

Identical letters dated 13 January 2021 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 must again draw your attention to the critical situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, owing to the escalating illegal policies and practices of Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people.

In the absence of accountability, the systematic, deliberate and provocative expansion of the occupying Power's settlements in our land has regrettably continued into 2021. Yesterday, the Israeli Prime Minister announced plans for yet another 800 settlement units in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, shamefully boasting: "I am pleased to announce that we will build 800 new apartments in Judea and Samaria, including in Nofei Nehemiah and Tel Menashe, the late Esther Horgan's community. We are here to stay. We continue to build the Land of Israel!"

The Israeli occupation authorities also recently approved new plans to seize more than 1,000 dunums of privately owned Palestinian land in Qalqilyah, in the northern West Bank, for settlement construction and expansion. As Israel enters yet another round of elections, the cynical connection between this grave breach of international law and the pandering for votes by Israeli politicians is patently clear. In Israel's so-called "democracy", settler colonialism and military occupation are apparently the keys to political victories.

In fact, although Israel allegedly "suspended" its de jure annexation scheme, its de facto annexation project continues unabated, in grave breach of the law. Measures to acquire more Palestinian territory by force, home demolitions, forced displacement of Palestinian civilians and other blatant violations of human rights and international law are being carried out daily and in plain sight. Undeterred, Israel is also seizing more Palestinian land for settler-only highways, tunnels and overpasses to connect illegal settlements, while further fragmenting Palestinian cities, towns and villages.

With the expansion of settlements has, of course, come the expansion of the illegal settler population, which has grown four times faster than Israel's population in less than three decades. The international community must realize that the



demographic composition, character and status of the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, are being heavily and aggressively altered in the absence of accountability for such illegal measures.

We reiterate that, whether colonization and annexation are implemented partially or totally, gradually or in toto, de facto or de jure, the international community is obligated to respond with serious, tangible action, based on international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#). Only consequences can bring a halt to such illegal and destructive behaviour.

This includes the inhumane demolition of homes by which Palestinian civilians continue to be rendered homeless, even in this time of pandemic. Contravening the guidance and health recommendations of the World Health Organization, such as on social distancing and staying at home, and in grave breach of international humanitarian law, Israel has demolished hundreds of Palestinian homes and has displaced hundreds of Palestinians throughout Occupied Palestine, with East Jerusalem being a prime target, since the pandemic began.

In 2020 alone, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported that Israeli occupation forces had demolished 145 structures, including 2 donor-funded structures in East Jerusalem, displacing 361 Palestinians, including women and children. One week into 2021, the Office reported that Israel has already demolished 22 structures in East Jerusalem, including 4 donor-funded structures, displacing 30 Palestinians, including women and children.

Occupying forces also continue to harass, intimidate and violently attack Palestinian civilians in attempts to drive them from their land. On 7 January 2021, Israeli soldiers surrounded and invaded the village of Mughayir, near Ramallah, banning its residents from entering and exiting. The village has frequently been attacked by occupation forces and colonial settlers, with much of its land facing the threat of confiscation to facilitate the expansion of nearby illegal settlements.

On the same day, Israeli occupation forces demolished eight residential structures in Bayt Iksa, near Jerusalem, under the pretext that they had been constructed without a permit, which Palestinians have virtually no chance of obtaining from the occupation authorities. According to the Israeli non-governmental organization, Breaking the Silence, Israel has rejected nearly 99 per cent of Palestinian building permit applications over the years, stunting Palestinian development and housing needs while at the same supporting and serving the expansion of its illegal colonial settlements.

In addition to punitive home demolitions, holy sites and houses of worship remain in the cross-hairs of Israel's illegal policies and practices. Recent Israeli excavations near the Buraq Wall, also known as the Western Wall, have further exposed Israel's provocations and illegal measures affecting the Al-Haram Al-Sharif and the entire Old City through its ongoing Judaization projects and attempts to erase the city's Muslim, Christian and Arab character and identity. Not only do such provocative actions violate international law and United Nations resolutions, but also they further inflame religious sensitivities and risk further destabilizing an already volatile and fragile situation.

Ranging from home demolitions to night raids, and from occupation-backed settler violence to forced displacement, the occupying Power has intensified its repressive measures against Palestinian civilians during the pandemic. With the international community focused on overcoming the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and its severe impact on peoples, societies and economies everywhere, the occupation blatantly exploits the situation, reaffirming not only Israel's rejection

of international law, but also its callous disregard for the challenges collectively facing our world. Instead, Israel repeatedly proves that it prefers to pursue its narrow and illegal self-interest, to the grave detriment of the rights of the Palestinian people, the stability of our region and the viability of international law globally.

Rejecting recent attempts to undermine international law and multilateralism, it is the Security Council's duty to ensure that the law is safeguarded and applied. Continued inaction is politically dangerous and morally unacceptable. Israel must be demanded to cease its violations or bear the consequences. It is Israel that is in the wrong, not the Council for upholding its duties.

In addition, Israel must be reminded of its legal obligations to ensure the health and safety of all civilians under its occupation, without discrimination, including access to proper medical care for Palestinian detainees and prisoners, including those afflicted with COVID-19, who face deliberate medical negligence as a cruel form of punishment. In this regard, we must refer to the tragic death of a young Palestinian man, 20-year-old Mohammed Ayed Salaheldin, who had been imprisoned by Israel and died this week of cancer, just months after his recent release. Moreover, to date, it has been reported that at least 191 Palestinians imprisoned by Israel have contracted COVID-19, that several are in serious condition and that Israel continues to inoculate prison authorities, while denying the vaccine to Palestinians whom they are holding captive. We reiterate our appeal to the international community to give this matter urgent attention and to act to ensure respect for obligations to save lives and to pursue immediate accountability in case of continued violations.

The impact of the pandemic has also made the situation more dire in the Gaza Strip, where the health-care system has been crippled by Israel's 13-year blockade and repeated military aggressions. That Israel maintains full control over Gaza's crossings and borders, as well as its airspace and maritime zones, is without question, and this imposes on Israel clear legal obligations as the occupying Power, including to ensure access to essential medicines and supplies. The disrespect for these obligations is striking, as we witness Israel boasting about its vaccination campaign even as it excludes Palestinians living under Israeli occupation, while providing the vaccine to its settlers in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. As stated on 6 January 2021 by Amnesty International, as "millions of Palestinians living under Israeli control in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip will receive no vaccine or have to wait much longer, there could hardly be a better illustration of how Israeli lives are valued above Palestinian ones".

Israel must be demanded to respect its legal obligations and, specifically, as prescribed in the Fourth Geneva Convention. Article 56 of that Convention specifically stipulates that an occupier has the duty of ensuring "the adoption and application of the prophylactic and preventive measures necessary to combat the spread of contagious diseases and epidemics".

Against a backdrop of inaction, Israel's ongoing crimes and violations prove that the occupying Power has no regard for the well-being of the Palestinian civilian population under its control, no respect for international law and no intentions whatsoever to actualize the two-State solution, on the 1967 lines, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#). While Israel chooses occupation and oppression over peace and justice, the international community must choose responsibility and accountability. Specifically, the Security Council must be faithful to its principles by upholding its duties under the Charter of the United Nations to end this grave injustice and justly and finally end this illegal occupation and resolve this conflict. Continued inaction will reward immoral violators, whose goal is to destroy any chance of a just peace.

The present letter is in follow-up to our 703 letters regarding the ongoing crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, which constitutes the territory of the State of Palestine. These letters, dated from 29 September 2000 (A/55/432-S/2000/921) to 4 February 2021 (A/ES-10/849-S/2021/108) constitute a basic record of the crimes being committed by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people since September 2000. For all of these war crimes, acts of State terrorism and systematic human rights violations being committed against the Palestinian people, Israel, the occupying Power, must be held accountable and the perpetrators must be brought to justice.

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

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