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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by the International Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (EAFORD), 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.

[14 August 2016]

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

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Education under Occupation

Since 1948, the human rights of Palestinians continue to be violated by Israeli military forces, which regularly confiscate their lands, destroy their homes, deny them access to natural resources or limit their freedom of movement. Palestinians are often victims of arbitrary detention, summary execution, ill-treatment and torture. Those practices have especially a tragic impact on Palestinian children living in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs), who are generally the first victims of armed conflicts and occupation.

Palestinian children in OPT:

In the words of Diogenes, “the foundation of every state is the education of its youth.” Palestinian children are largely deprived of educational opportunities due to conflicts and military occupation, which impede their enjoyment of this basic right. According to former UN Special Rapporteur, Makarim Wibisono, the incessant bombardments of Gaza have massively destroyed more than one third of primary schools¹. 59.4% of Gaza children hardly feel safe neither on their way to, nor at school².

The destruction of countless schools has resulted in the remaining structures being extremely overcrowded with over 60 students per class. This greatly affected the quality of education³. Teachers do not receive qualified training to offer adequate psychological support to children⁴. According to specialists, teachers themselves have often been victims of traumatic experiences and would also require appropriate support. There is an average of one counsellor per school in Gaza, which is not enough to meet the urgent needs in an overall traumatized and overpopulated environment⁵.

The inability to access universities in other parts of the OPT or abroad has a negative impact on the future careers and livelihoods of students. Many graduate studies and doctoral programmes are not locally available⁶. With the high unemployment rate and lack of high skilled jobs, parents tend not to send their children to university.

The brutal air, land, and sea blockade makes the supply of cement to build and restore schools impossible. UN Secretary-General stressed in his report on the human rights situation in the OPT that educational institutions face difficulties in acquiring teaching materials, particularly for subjects like chemistry and engineering, which require items included on the “*dual-use items*” list⁷.

The widespread expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank is also a major obstacle in depriving Palestinian children of their right to education. According to United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) there are around 183 schools in Area C, which enrol approximately 50,000 students⁸. The harsh policies of the Occupying Power, including the creation of checkpoints and restrictions on movement by permits, make access to roads on children’s way to schools difficult. A survey of 33 communities showed that almost one in five students in the West Bank must pass a checkpoint to reach school and 29% of children in Area C have to cross the so called Separation

¹ UNHRC, “Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, Makarim Wibisono”, A/HRC/28/78, 22 January 2015, para. 34.

² UNESCO, “Psychosocial Assessment of Education in Gaza and Recommendations for Response”, Report on the findings of an assessment conducted by Kathleen Kostelny, PhD and Michael Wessells, PhD of the Columbia Group for Children in Adversity, September 2010.

³ UNHRC, “Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, Makarim Wibisono”, A/HRC/28/78, 22 January 2015, para. 35.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ UNHRC, “Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, Makarim Wibisono”, A/HRC/28/78, 22 January 2015, para. 34.

⁶ UNHRC, “Human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem”, A/HRC/31/44, 20 January 2016, para. 51.

⁷ Ibid., para. 47.

⁸ UNICEF Press Release, “Over one million go back to school in occupied Palestinian territory, Schools continue to fight for survival in Area C of the West Bank”, 4 September 2011.

Wall⁹. Barring children from reaching their schools has severe ramifications because education is a better weapon in their struggle for self-determination than a standing army. Older university students suffer equally from obstacles towards the fulfilment of their right to education, which in the long-run reduce their chances of success. For instance, Al-Quds University in Jerusalem reported that at least 38 of its students have been forced to delay their final exams after being stopped at the checkpoint¹⁰. Children attending school in the H2 area of Hebron have been particularly adversely affected in the first 10 schooldays of October 2015 when more than 140 tear gas canisters were fired by Israeli forces from two military checkpoints as Palestinian children walked to and from school¹¹.

In 2015, UNICEF documented 247 cases of attacks on students, including physical assault, detention and checkpoint harassment affecting 32,055 Palestinian children¹². Some students have to walk 7-10 kilometres to reach the nearest school while facing restrictions on movement, displacement and demolitions. Schools in Area C of the West Bank are often threatened to be demolished by Israeli bombardments. UNICEF estimated that at least 23 schools in this area and in East Jerusalem could be demolished at anytime¹³.

Palestinian children in Israel:

The world tends to forget there are Palestinians living in Israel, who are systematically suffering discrimination from kindergarten through high school. The Israeli government invests three times the amount of money for a Jewish student than it does for a Palestinian. Within Israel, the government gives certain communities a “high-priority status” in order to improve the local educational system. In recent years, Israel has designated 553 Jewish communities with high-priority status, compared to a ridiculous low number of 4 Palestinian communities¹⁴.

The discrepancies are also considerably apparent in higher education. A mere 22% of young Palestinians in Israel meet the minimum requirement for university admission, in contrast with 44% of Israeli Jews. Even those Palestinians who meet the requirements are less likely to be accepted to university. Around 45% of Palestinian applicants are turned down for admission to Israeli universities, compared to only 16% of Jewish applicants¹⁵.

The harsh fact is that only 11% of undergraduate students in Israeli academic institutions are Palestinian and the proportion is even lower for postgraduate studies. Palestinians comprise 7% of masters degree students and only 3% of doctoral students¹⁶.

Furthermore, Israeli universities systematically act against any political statements or actions made by Palestinian students, thus depriving them from voice and representation in the country. Most recently, Tel Aviv University cancelled a speaking event organized by Palestinian student groups introducing Mohammad Kana'aneh, a prominent Palestinian political leader who was imprisoned by Israel for more than four years. He was banned from entering the

⁹ UNHRC, “Human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem”, A/HRC/31/44, 20 January 2016, para. 45.

¹⁰ Ibid., para. 48.

¹¹ UNHRC, “Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967”, A/HRC/31/73 11 January 2016, A/HRC/31/73, 11 January 2016, para 27.

¹² UNHRC, “Human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem”, A/HRC/31/44, 20 January 2016. para. 46.

¹³ UN OCHA, “Humanitarian Monitor”, July 2011; UNICEF Press Release, “Over one million go back to school in occupied Palestinian territory, Schools continue to fight for survival in Area C of the West Bank”, 4 September 2011.

¹⁴ Seattle Mideast Awareness Campaign, URL: <http://www.seamac.org/equalrights.htm>, [online], Related on 12th of July 2016.

¹⁵ Sawsan Khalife', *Palestinian students “surrounded by guns” at Israeli universities*, The Electronic Intifada, 22 February 2013, URL <https://electronicintifada.net/content/palestinian-students-surrounded-guns-israeli-universities/12215>, [online], Related on the 12th of July 2016.

¹⁶ Ibid.

campus to speak about Land Day, the annual commemoration of the 1976 killing of six Palestinian citizens of Israel during protests against land confiscation¹⁷.

Conclusions:

The oppressive conditions under military occupation are leading to the rise of a feeling of hatred by the new generations, and nurturing a desire for retaliation against the Israeli government, thus considerably affecting any prospect for peace and reconciliation. However, in response to the harsh policies of discrimination in the education sector by the Occupying Power, Palestinian students have found ways to bypass them and to resist with their determination to be more engaged in the past few years¹⁸. For instance, the creation of Al-Quds Open University, offering degree programs that can be completed as distance-learning, has provided Palestinian students with easier access to higher education.

The Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign organizes seminars and tours with students in several universities all over the West Bank. The Campaign's approach is to encourage Palestinian youth to proactively change their future. Students discuss creative ways by which their studies and research can contribute to optimal courses of legal actions to fight Israeli racist policies¹⁹.

The Arab Culture Association has recently created an interactive platform, the Watch Academic Project, where every Palestinian student can denounce the infringements they have suffered. This project is an important tool for students' morale and a testament of the struggle Palestinian youth face daily. It is a communication bridge exposing Israeli policies of Apartheid, which have continued for more than 60 years unabated²⁰.

For few years now, the boycott movement has been gaining considerable strength and momentum in various West Bank universities. For instance, students in Birzeit University have organized a consumer boycott of Israeli goods, banning these products from the campus cafeterias. Further campaigns are under way or planned in other areas of Palestine²¹.

In conclusion, despite the various actions taken by Palestinian students to enable them to enjoy their fundamental right to education, it is primarily a responsibility of the Israeli government to take all the necessary measures to stop its repressive policies and give Palestinian children and students equal opportunities for paving a better future. It is often said that education is the defense of nations. If no improvement will be made, Israel's cruel and inhuman treatment will have broader social and political implications for generations to come that will have to reap what others have sown.

Recommendations:

The Human Rights Council and all relevant UN bodies must pressure the Israeli government to:

- Comply with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the obligation of states to promote access to education for all children.

¹⁷ Patrick O. Strickland, *Tel Aviv University bans Palestinian speaker*, The Electronic Intifada, 9 April 2014, URL: <https://electronicintifada.net/content/tel-aviv-university-bans-palestinian-speaker/13307>, [online], Related on 10th July 2016.

¹⁸ UNHRC, "Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, Makarim Wibisono", A/HRC/28/78, 22 January 2015, para. 36.

¹⁹ Stop the Wall: The Palestinian Grassroots Anti Apartheid Wall Campaign, *Education under occupation*, September 2007, p.43.

²⁰ Yara Sa'di, *Warmongering Hebrew University tries to muzzle Palestinian students*, The Electronic Intifada, 10 October 2014, URL: <https://electronicintifada.net/content/warmongering-hebrew-university-tries-muzzle-palestinian-students/13941>, [online], Related on 10th July 2010.

²¹ Joe Catron, *Gaza students launch "boycott Israel" campaign*, The Electronic Intifada, 12 November 2012, URL: <https://electronicintifada.net/content/gaza-students-launch-boycott-israel-campaign/11867>, [online], Related 8th July 2016.

- In accordance with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), lift the blockade on Gaza to alleviate the humanitarian and economic situation, which constitutes one of the primary obstacles to the reconstruction of new schools, and which is considered a form of collective punishment that has a disproportionate impact on the lives of innocent civilians and children.
- Strictly adhere to the fundamental rule of international humanitarian law that forbids, at all times, targeting civilians especially children with bombardments and to take responsibility for such crimes.
- Respect the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action by ending policies of discrimination against Palestinians and allowing equal education for all children, regardless their ethnicity, national origin, race, and religion, in Israel and the OPT.

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