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

Security Council
Seventy-sixth year

Identical letters dated 22 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, due to the escalating illegal policies and practices of Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people.

As detailed in previous letters, Israel's evident annexation intentions have reached new heights in terms of violations, with the Israeli Prime Minister announcing plans for further settlement construction and expansion on our occupied land. In addition to the 800 settlement units announced last week, Israel has issued tenders for 2,500 illegal units, with more than 450 to be built in settlements in Occupied East Jerusalem, constituting yet another blatant breach of international law and United Nations resolutions.

Such actions must be countered as a matter of obligation under international law and United Nations resolutions, but also because they continue to obstruct the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, an *erga omnes* right; to shred the Palestinian State's contiguity; and to destroy the viability of the two-State solution based on the pre-1967 borders as envisaged by international consensus.

This cycle of settlement expansion and encroachment is not new to the Palestinian people, as, year after year, Israel steals more of their land and forcibly displaces more Palestinian families, while disguising itself as a partner for peace. According to the Israeli advocacy group Peace Now, Israel advanced construction of over 12,000 settlement units in 2020 alone, the highest number in a single year since the group began recording statistics in 2012. This construction would illegally transfer hundreds of thousands more Israeli settlers to Occupied Palestine. How do such violations and destructive actions signal any intent for peace?

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. Israel must abide by its legal obligations,



including under the Fourth Geneva Convention, as reaffirmed in Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), or bear the consequences of its rogue behaviour that has deliberately prolonged oppression and injustice and undermined the drive for peace and security.

Demolitions and forced evictions also continue apace as a central tool of this illegal occupation and its settlement colonization. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reports that in 2020 Israeli occupation forces displaced nearly 1,000 Palestinians, almost half of them children, as a result of the demolition of Palestinian homes and forced evictions. As documented by the Office, “The cumulative number of structures demolished or seized in 2020 (849) across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the number of Palestinians displaced as a result (996), are the largest since 2016. The number of donor-funded aid structures targeted in 2020 (156) is also the highest since 2016.”

On 14 January, a Palestinian family in East Jerusalem had to demolish its own home under pressure from the occupation’s demolition orders and threats. Abu Hamad, the homeowner, said that he had had to demolish his home, built 10 years earlier and inhabited by seven family members, and to remove the rubble to avoid the excessive costs and fines that would have resulted if it had been demolished by the occupation authorities, a depraved system which not only illegally and traumatically deprives people of their homes, but also cruelly imposes financial loss on them for those demolitions.

On 17 January, Israeli occupation forces also issued demolition orders for a primary school and a mosque in Masafer Yatta, south of Al-Khalil (Hebron). The school, which is funded by the European Union, expects to enrol 50 students in three marginalized Palestinian communities. On the same day, a separate demolition order was executed in Anin, west of Jenin, where Israeli occupation forces bulldozed more than 10 vendor stalls, affecting the livelihoods of many vulnerable families. On 18 January, occupation forces issued demolition orders to eight Palestinian families in the village of Duma, south of Nablus, whose homes had been built to accommodate the village’s growing population.

It is widely known that Palestinian structures continue to be demolished and seized under the pretext of them lacking occupation-issued building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain. 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. Whether it is a home, school, house of worship, health centre or donor-funded project, the occupation does not discriminate in its demolition policy, as the objective is explicit: to uproot Palestinians from their lands and replace them with fanatical Israeli settlers in ever-expanding and encroaching settlements.

The violence and harassment carried out by those settlers against the Palestinian civilian population also persist unabated. On 17 January, settler mobs from the illegal settlements of “Eli” and “Shilo” attacked Palestinians near the village of Lubban ash-Sharqiya, damaging homes and properties. As usual, the attack occurred in full sight of Israeli soldiers, who stood by as the settlers carried out their State-backed violence, proving once again that accountability is the exception, not the rule, when it relates to the occupation.

Even in this time of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, Israeli attacks and military raids have escalated. In a single night, Israeli occupation forces conducted 17 military raids across the West Bank and arrested 41 Palestinians. Many of those arrested take part in weekly demonstrations against their lands being confiscated for the construction of illegal settlements and outposts, revealing the extent to which Israel rejects any form of civilian protest of its illegal occupation.

Further disregarding its legal obligations as an occupying Power, Israel's exploitation of the pandemic is evident through its discriminatory vaccination campaign. Israeli and international human rights groups have criticized Israel's vaccination campaign, pointing to the fact that hundreds of thousands of illegal settlers have clear access to the vaccine, while the millions of Palestinians living under its 53-year belligerent occupation are excluded, further exposing the occupation's institutionalized discrimination in the West Bank and Gaza.

On 18 January, the World Health Organization office in the Occupied Palestinian Territory raised a number of public health concerns over Israel's unequal distribution and access to vaccines. While Israel boasts about its vaccination campaign and success in acquiring millions of doses, its total disregard for international law vis-à-vis obligations must be given due and urgent attention. Israel must be demanded to respect its legal obligations. Article 56 of the Fourth Geneva 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".

In this regard, we draw urgent attention to the plight of Palestinian prisoners, including children, who are being detained in occupation jails in the time of the pandemic. On 16 January, Abdul Muizz Al-Jubeh, aged 59, was transferred to a medical centre because of complications resulting from contracting COVID-19. On 21 January, Fo'ad al-Shobaki, the eldest Palestinian political prisoner in occupation jails, contracted the virus after coming into contact with an Israeli prison guard. Like many Palestinian prisoners, Mr. al-Shobaki has an extensive medical history, including prostate cancer and heart disease. Israel must heed the international community's call and release vulnerable prisoners, in particular women, children, older persons and those with pre-existing medical conditions, and must release administrative detainees being held in Israeli prisons.

It is clear that the occupying Power has intensified its attacks and violations in recent weeks, in preparation for yet another round of elections. Unfortunately, the current Israeli political landscape offers little to no hope for respite, as officials and candidates cynically compete over who can do more harm to the Palestinian people and the two-State solution. Impunity is enjoyed by the occupation because of international inaction, resulting in Israel advancing its colonial project at the expense of Palestinian rights and deepening hardships. The cycle of violations suffered by the Palestinian people continues because Israel's preference to maintain the status quo, or worse, has not been countered by international action aimed at ending the occupation and injustice.

As Newton's third law of motion states, for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Likewise, the international community is obligated to hold Israel accountable through tangible action. The Security Council in particular has duties under the Charter of the United Nations and moral duties and must implement its own resolutions to that end, including resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#). Only such responsible action can help end one of the gravest injustices of our time. The Palestinian people look to the Council, the General Assembly and the international community as a whole to give them hope in this new year by joining together to confront the harsh reality that we face with concerted action, in order to uphold the rule of law, protect human rights and ensure justice, the foundations of a just peace and security between Palestine and Israel.

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*) Riyad **Mansour**
Minister
Permanent Observer
