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**Human rights situation in Palestine and other
occupied Arab territories**

Written statement* submitted by the Amuta for NGO Responsibility, 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.


[15 May 2017]

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

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Palestinian Prisoners Propaganda Campaign Erases Terrorism, Funded by European Governments

Allegations regarding Israeli treatment of Palestinian prisoners – a group that primarily comprises convicted terrorists guilty of murder; bombings of buses, malls, and cafes; and other atrocities – are often accompanied by hunger strikes and other stunts to attract attention. As part of this campaign, the PLO instituted an annual “day of solidarity with prisoners” on April 17, to mark the release of a Fatah terrorist in exchange for a kidnapped civilian. Featured prisoners include members of terrorist organizations including Fatah terror groups, the PFLP, and Islamic Jihad.

In 2017, the media campaign included an op-ed by Marwan Barghouti in *The New York Times*, accusing Israel of a “dual legal regime, a form of judicial apartheid” and an “inhumane system of colonial and military occupation aim[ing] to break the spirit of prisoners and the nation to which they belong.” Barghouti was the leader of the armed wing of Fatah and a founder of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, and was convicted in 2004 on five counts of murder and one count of attempted murder.¹ The Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade was responsible for dozens of suicide bombings and shooting attacks, most notably at a Bat Mitzvah in 2002 and at the Tel Aviv bus station in 2003, killing dozens. The group also employed children to carry out attacks including suicide bombings. The failure of the *Times* to note this information drew significant condemnation. His criminal history and confinement in an Israeli jail notwithstanding, Barghouti is considered a leading candidate to replace Mahmoud Abbas as head of the Fatah organization.

As in previous years, NGOs played a central role in disseminating campaign propaganda. Many of these NGOs receive European government and EU funding, including from Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and Ireland. These NGOs accuse Israel of widespread abuse, while erasing the criminal acts and other violations of human rights, including murder, for which these prisoners were convicted. Many of these groups spearhead discriminatory BDS (boycott, divestment, and sanctions) campaigns and abuse the term “human rights defender” to whitewash incitement and violent acts targeting civilians. Several are affiliates of or have links to terrorist organizations, including the PFLP.

Despite these troubling terror links and erasing of violence, particularly directed at civilians, these propagandistic claims are frequently repeated without verification in UN reports, including those authored by the Special Committee and the Special Rapporteur. Inclusion of these NGO claims is symptomatic of significant problems plaguing the UN reporting process and the urgent need for standards and reforms.

Recommendations:

- Governments must immediately end financing for NGOs that minimize and erase terror attacks on civilians, groups that abuse the concept of “human rights defenders” in promotion of incitement and violent acts, and organizations affiliated with designated terrorist organizations.
- The UN should adopt a definition of political prisoners. This would aid in preventing NGOs from abusing the term and using it to describe individuals convicted of violent crimes.
- The UN, and in particular OHCHR, must reform its reporting process and exclude propaganda and unverified and false claims from NGOs affiliated with designated terror organizations.

¹ Statement of indictment available here:

[http://embassies.gov.il/MFA/FOREIGNPOLICY/Terrorism/Palestinian/Pages/Statement of Indictment- Marwan Barghouti - Aug 14.aspx](http://embassies.gov.il/MFA/FOREIGNPOLICY/Terrorism/Palestinian/Pages/Statement%20of%20Indictment-Marwan%20Barghouti-Aug%2014.aspx); List of offenses:

[http://embassies.gov.il/MFA/FOREIGNPOLICY/Terrorism/Palestinian/Pages/Marwan Barghouti Indictment - Appendix- Terrorist.aspx](http://embassies.gov.il/MFA/FOREIGNPOLICY/Terrorism/Palestinian/Pages/Marwan%20Barghouti%20Indictment-Appendix-Terrorist.aspx)