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Human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories

Joint written statement* submitted by the International Organization for the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (EAFORD), Association Ma'onah for Human Rights and Immigration, Indian Movement "Tupaj Amaru", International-Lawyers.Org, Union of Arab Jurists, United Towns Agency for North-South Cooperation, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status, International Educational Development, Inc., World Peace Council, non-governmental organizations on the roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[03 February 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



The heavy economic cost of the Israeli occupation for Palestinian territories (Palestine)

Introduction

The economy of Palestine declined considerably after the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948. The conflict between Israel and Palestine has led to fragmentation of Palestine, whereby the Palestinians are physically and politically divided. This fragmentation is above all the result of the Oslo Peace Agreement, which laid the foundations for the isolation, and Israel's economic and political control of the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT).

The 1994 Paris Protocol was especially destructive. It imposed an unbalanced customs union, allowing Israeli businesses straight access to the Palestinian market but restricting Palestinian goods' entry into the Israel's.

On the one side there is the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, who do not hold Israeli citizenship and who are not subject to Israeli law. On the other side there are Palestinians with Israeli citizenship who live inside Israel. They make up about one fifth of Israel's population. While the conflict has separated Israeli Palestinians from other Palestinians, the Israeli government has blocked the former from its political community. The Palestinians living in Israel are considered second-class citizens. This culminated with the adoption of the Basic Law in 2018, which emphasized the Jewish nature of Israel at the expense of its democratic character, thereby reinforcing over 60 laws that discriminate against Israeli Palestinian economic, political and cultural rights.

Israel has extensive control over the Palestinian economy. The belligerent occupation allows Israel to exercise physical control over the Palestinians' daily economic activity and expand its colonization of Palestinian land. Palestinian lives are controlled by a complex licensing system. There are over a hundred different types of permits for moving in and out of the West Bank alone.

The most striking fragmentation is in East Jerusalem. The wall dividing and separating East Jerusalem has weakened the political ties between the residents in Ramallah and the West Bank. This is also evident in the region's economy: over 5,000 small and medium-sized companies have been closed in the years following the construction of the Wall, and the share of people living in poverty has increased from about 60% to 80%.

The cost of the Israeli occupation

The continuation of the occupation is a very luxurious business that raises the standard of living for most Israelis yet undermines Palestine's economic growth and hinders its ability to invest in development.

In 2016 and 2018, The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development prepared two preliminary reports (A/ 71/174 and A / 73/201), in which the economic dimension of the occupation is defined as acts by the occupying power that aim at confiscating the properties, natural resources and economic benefits of the people under occupation.

It is estimated that, Israel's illegal occupation has cost Palestine's economy US\$47,7 billion between 2000-2017, which is three times the size of the Palestinian economy just in 2017. This has had a negative impact on reconstruction of infrastructure destroyed by bombings, on trade, and on electricity production for manufacture. Almost half of the calculated occupation losses are due to the West Bank's limited access to the region's water. According to the Oslo Agreement, Israel manages almost all of Palestine's water resources.

The Palestinian Authority is losing significant possible tax revenues due to restrictions brought upon by the occupation. Jewish settlers are destroying olive trees and fruit in the area, as a tool of intimidation, which also causes heavy economic losses.

In Gaza, 35% of farmland falls inside the "buffer zone" labeled as such by the Israeli army. This places farmers at risk of coming under live fire. Other farmlands in Gaza have been regularly sprayed with herbicides by Israeli planes.

In the occupied West Bank, most of the natural resources and fertile land fall in Area C, composing 61 percent of the West Bank, which is under total Israeli control. This includes 95 percent of the Jordan Valley. The latter one is severely developed by illegal Israeli settlers. Indeed, the loss of entrance to Area C is assessed to have cost the Palestinian economy around US\$480 million per year and is responsible for the unemployment of 110,000 Palestinians. Unemployment in Palestine grew in 2018 and reached about 31 percent of the labor force compared to about 28 percent in 2017. In the West Bank registered 18 percent while the number was much higher in Gaza where 52 percent of the population is unemployed.

Economic development is also troubled by the fact that many everyday products, such as chemicals and fertilizers, are prohibited from being imported into the OPT, as Israel defines them as products that can be used for military purposes. If restrictions were removed the GDP could increase by ten percent. In Gaza, elevating the economy could result in a total of 32% growth by 2025.

The funds accumulated on behalf of Palestine by Israel have not reached the Palestinian government. This fact not only limits the ability of the Palestinian Authority (PA) to have a strategy when investing, but it also has a great impact on the region's economic advancement.

Incomes collected by Israel on behalf of the PA include taxes on indirect imports, clearance revenues, border-crossing levies, and property and income taxes on individuals and enterprises in the illegally occupied West Bank.

Effects on the future generations

The Occupation of the Palestine Territories creates by different measures an economic dependency for the current generation but also for the future generation. As the occupation denies them of the most vital human rights, comprising of right to work, right to education and safe drinking water and food security.

The Israeli measures are designed to wear down the productive sectors and to deceive the structure of the economy of the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

A cut in foreign Aid

The Palestinian government has relied on international aid and loans from local banks, as well as accumulated debt with the domestic private sector. This has forced it to reduce its spending. All these factors have reduced economic growth. Nevertheless, the financial crisis in Palestine worsened in 2019, mostly due to income withholding and international aid blocking undertaken by Israel. In 2018, the Trump administration ended roughly US\$230 million in development funding to the Palestinian people and another US\$360 million in funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. In January 2019, the World Food Program also cut food aid to about 190,000 Palestinians due to a lack of funds.

Given the dominance and advantages of the Israeli economy over the Palestine's, Palestinian businesses cannot participate or produce adequately in order to satisfy local needs. Israeli businesses are making money not only by controlling the Palestinian market and abusing their privileged status, but also by exploiting Palestinian labor made exceedingly cheap by the absence of local economic opportunities. As a result, many Palestinians find themselves forced to buy goods produced by their occupier, on land stolen from them, with money earned in labor for occupying businesses, and in currency imposed on them again by the same occupying forces.

Conclusion

As a result of the collective effects of economic and belligerent occupation, the Palestinian economy is marked by underdevelopment, weakened local production, massive unemployment, and budget cuts in national policy. The Palestinian economy will shrink substantially if no improvement is made on the political front. Israel is making immense profit from its occupation, while purposefully causing huge financial losses to the Palestinian economy. Israel must leave the settlements. Peace in the region requires the establishment of an independent Palestinian state free from Israel's military and economic control. Stopping the occupation would free up the resources needed to repair a dilapidated educational system and other social structures.

Recommendations

NGOs Signatories to this statement recommend to the United Nations and its relevant bodies to:

- Pressure Israel to end all forms of economic embargo against the Palestinians.
- Stop all Israeli economic projects that are carried out on Palestinian land.
- Stop all forms of economic discrimination by the Israeli government against the people of Palestine
- Take all necessary measures to finally bring an end to the prolonged occupation of Palestine and fulfil Palestinians' right to national self-determination
- Ensure the voluntary return and property restitution of Palestinian refugees and internally displaced persons. Furthermore, ensure compensation for suffered losses, such as the destruction of or damage to land, homes and property

Geneva International Centre for Justice (GICJ), The Arab Lawyers Association-UK, Human Rights Defenders (HRD), The Brussels Tribunal, The Iraqi Commission for Human Rights (ICHR), Association of Humanitarian Lawyers (AHL), Association of Human Rights Defenders in Iraq (AHRD), General Federation of Iraqi Women (GFIW), Organisation for Justice & Democracy in Iraq (OJDI), The Iraqi Centre for Human Rights, NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.