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*The Bulletin can be found in the United Nations Information System
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I. WORLD BANK REPORTS ON GENDER DIMENSION OF ISRAELI CLOSURES

On 1 February 2009, the World Bank issued the report entitled “Checkpoints and Barriers: Searching for Livelihoods in the West Bank and Gaza: Gender Dimensions of Economic Collapse”. Excerpts from the executive summary and recommendations of the report are reproduced below:

Executive summary

...

As controls on movement became more entrenched following the second intifada (2000), a massive economic decline ensued, leading to a drop in male employment and real wages resulting from job losses in Israel and a corresponding rise in unemployment. Poverty rates, including deep poverty rates, rose as gross domestic product (GDP) fell, and increasing numbers of households found themselves living on food handouts and devising endless coping mechanisms to make ends meet. Thus, the West Bank and Gaza — in the span of a decade — moved from being a middle-income economy to one that is now massively aid dependent. This same period also witnessed a sharp rise in both covert and overt forms of violence. Israeli military incursions, detentions, manned checkpoints, home demolitions, the Separation Barrier (along with its associated permit regime) and the Palestinians’ own response spun a web of violence in public and private that touched the everyday lives of all Palestinians. The violence resulting from the occupation has led to loss of life, land, property and free movement of people, and has fragmented social space, a key source of material and moral support, especially for women. With neither Israeli nor Palestinian legal systems able to provide defence or

protection, these momentous changes in people’s everyday lives created a sense of collapse of the public, social and moral order (*falataan amni*).

Against this backdrop, the effects on Palestinian society have been extensive and far reaching, on relations between men and women, on intergenerational relations between the young and the old, on ties of kinship and on social networks. This study, through qualitative sources, provides insights into a chain of events that have and are moderating social behaviour and gender relations associated with work. The study also captures what the deteriorating situation has meant for Palestinian females and males of all ages in terms of their economic engagement, their ability to seek alternate livelihoods, their coping strategies, their social and human investments (for example, education and marriage), and their future aspirations.

...

Recommendations

The most effective way to improve economic opportunities for Palestinian men and women in the West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem is to lift movement and access restrictions which disadvantage women in

specific gendered ways. There are four additional areas where specific local actions could create opportunities to improve family income by providing opportunities to women and men. These actions ought to be addressed by the Palestinian Authority (PA) as it prepares its new development plan, and supported by the international community, including Israel.

1. Create and support enabling environments for safe and decent work.

- Women's economic participation can increase their personal security and prevent abuse only if family members see the work as "decent" and "dignified". The PA can promote such an enabling environment through the following actions:

- Support indigenous efforts to effect positive change in the law regarding equal protection of men and women in the workplace, especially in the informal sector. The Palestinian Labour Law enacted in 2001 provides for equal protection of men and women, and includes specific provisions for women, but does not specify penalties for employers who violate these provisions of the law. Moreover, the law excludes large segments of the labour force where most of the workers are women: own-account workers, seasonal workers, unpaid family workers, domestic workers and those involved in unpaid domestic care and reproductive work at home. Mechanisms that support women in the informal labour market, for example, trade unions that provide insurance schemes, can enable workers to protect themselves.

- Enhance the role of trade unions to monitor and encourage employers to take up fairer policies. On the supply side, given

high fertility rates, provision of good-quality, affordable childcare would encourage women to join the labour market.

- Improve the regulation of the public transport sector to enhance women's mobility. In addition to Israeli-imposed restrictions on movement, women face special constraints due to the lack of a safe, well-regulated public transport system. The PA can do much to increase both safety and gender-sensitivity in the system. Such interventions could include making the routes and schedules of public transport clear and predictable to reduce waiting time, particularly from outlying villages to major towns; establishing safety and service standards and ensuring operator compliance; providing a seating area with priority access for women in vehicles that do not have dividers between seats to ensure that women can maintain proper distance from male passengers.

- As the family operates as an economic unit, livelihood programmes should focus on supporting its cohesiveness rather than promoting work for one gender over the other. This can be done by promoting home- or community-based production systems that involve men and women working together. This is especially important for agricultural production, which requires the efforts of more than one family member. There is also considerable potential for improving the production and marketing of food and artisanal products through better processing, packaging, marketing and advertising.

2. Support good-quality education and youth employment.

The West Bank and Gaza enjoy gender parity in all levels of education.

Families value and invest in their children's education — a contributing factor to high rates of educational attainment. Households' investments in their children's secondary and higher education need to be matched by public investment in good-quality education that leads to employment. Young men should not be left behind in the process of empowering young women's entry to the labor market; young women's gains and social well-being depend not only on parental and family attitudes, but on whether young men also have meaningful opportunities and purposeful lives. Lack of hope and opportunity among young men has a debilitating effect throughout the whole of society — but especially on the possibilities and aspirations of young women. The PA can do much to harness the potential of its youthful population through the following actions:

- Develop innovative programmes that promote first-time employment for young men and women equally, especially among those with a tertiary education, by drawing on partnerships with the private sector and civil society organizations. Even under the current dismal economic conditions, short-term, voluntary and make-work programmes for new graduates have proven effective in Gaza — especially for young women (as this report has shown). Short-term income to families from such programmes affirms that investing in daughters' education is worthwhile.
- Expand the skills base of the young so they become more market-oriented and market ready — favouring skills that lead to products that can cross borders without restrictions, for example, information technology (IT) design, telecommunications and electronics.

3. Facilitate social cohesion, especially in Area C and others isolated by movement and access restrictions.

This report shows that, when communities are able to organize, drawing on all segments of their population (including male and female youth), they are more resilient in coping with stress factors resulting from the occupation. Civil society and social networks play an important role in sustaining the social capital of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza under these conditions of duress. These enabling networks are key to supporting communities that are under stress and ensure that communities do not break down under the pressure of conflict.

- Promote and encourage the development of local institutions for community empowerment as these ultimately also protect women: they can be formal or informal and can be a good source of involvement and experience for youth, both male and female. These institutions can also provide much needed support (in the form of legal advice, counselling, income support; transport, skills development; and marketing assistance) to unemployed men and women facing tensions in the household.
- Support indigenous efforts to promote outlets of expression and debate. These can lead to greater social cohesion and community-building and instil positive changes in attitude towards and practice of gender roles through, for example, theatre, soap operas, chat shows, art exhibitions and film on broadcast media.

4. Collect better data on gender-disaggregated economic participation.

Much effort has gone into the collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data in the West Bank and Gaza. However, the changing conditions on the ground require continual rethinking of tools and methods for gathering information that captures as much of the situation on the ground as possible. For example, labour

market surveys tend to focus on formal employment and often miss the hidden forms of employment in which women are engaged, particularly in these past few years. More careful and rigorous research on these hidden forms needs to be carried out to better capture the full extent of women's economic participation and provide guidance to policymakers on supporting the three areas highlighted above.

II. SECRETARY-GENERAL REPORTS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RESOLUTION 64/10 ON FOLLOW-UP TO THE GOLDSTONE REPORT

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on 4 February 2010 issued a report (A/64/651) on the Follow-up to the Report of the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict after receiving written information from the Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations and the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations on steps taken or in the process of being taken by the Palestinian Authority and Israel pursuant to General Assembly resolution 64/10 of 5 November 2009. The report also included observations by the Secretary-General, which are reproduced below:

II. Observations

8. At the beginning of 2009, I visited both Gaza and southern Israel in order to help to end the fighting and to show my respect and concern for the deaths and injuries of so many people during the conflict in and around Gaza. I was, and remain, deeply affected by the widespread death, destruction and suffering in the Gaza Strip, as well as moved by the plight of civilians in southern Israel who have been subjected to indiscriminate rocket and mortar fire.

9. I believe that, as a matter of principle, international humanitarian law needs to be fully respected and civilians must be protected in all situations and circumstances. Accordingly, on several occasions, I have called upon all of the parties to carry out

credible domestic investigations into the conduct of the Gaza conflict. I hope that such steps will be taken wherever there are credible allegations of human rights abuses.

10. It is my sincere hope that General Assembly resolution 64/10 has served to encourage investigations by the Government of Israel and the Palestinian side that are independent, credible and in conformity with international standards.

11. I note from the materials received that the processes initiated by the Government of Israel and the Government of Switzerland are ongoing, and that the Palestinian side initiated its process on 25 January 2010. As such, no determination can be made on the implementation of the resolution by the parties concerned.

III. INTERNATIONAL MEETING IN SUPPORT OF ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE CONVENES IN MALTA

The International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace was held under the auspices of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean and the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in Qawra, Malta, on 12 and 13 February 2010. The theme of the Meeting was “The urgency of addressing the permanent status issues — Borders, Jerusalem, settlements, refugees, water.” The concluding remarks of the organizers are reproduced below.

1. The International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace was organized by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean and the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in Qawra, Malta, on 12 and 13 February 2010.

2. The objectives of the meeting were to provide a forum for the exchange of views on the current state of the peace efforts and to encourage a constructive dialogue among the stakeholders on how to create a political climate conducive to the resumption of the peace negotiations on permanent status issues: border, Jerusalem, settlements, refugees and water. The meeting, among other things, discussed the terms of reference for all permanent status issues, including in the context of peace initiatives. It also looked into (a) modalities for bridging gaps and building trust between the parties; (b) international and regional approaches to promoting a comprehensive, just and lasting solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; and (c) the role of parliamentarians and inter-parliamentary organizations in supporting Israeli-Palestinian peace and stability in the region.

3. The organizers were encouraged by the consensual view among participants that achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine, the

core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, was imperative for the attainment of peace and stability in the Middle East. During the meeting the participants had expressed serious concern about the prolonged stagnation and impasse of the peace efforts between the Israelis and Palestinians. They had reiterated their full support for the revival of the Middle East peace process, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace, the Quartet’s Road Map, the Arab Peace Initiative and the existing agreements between the Israeli and Palestinian sides. The organizers appreciated that the participants had stated their firm commitment to ending Israeli occupation, which started on 4 June 1967, in order to achieve a permanent two-State solution in which Israel and Palestine would live side by side in peace and security within mutually recognized borders. The participants had urged the parties to resume, without delay, serious negotiations that would lead, within an agreed time frame, to the resolution of the permanent status issues: borders, Jerusalem, settlements, refugees and water.

4. The organizers understood that participants had called upon the parties to build on the progress made to date in the implementation of their road map obligations. They had noted the Israeli

redeployment in 2005 from the Gaza Strip and parts of the northern West Bank and the dismantlement of the settlements therein as a step in that direction. In that connection, many participants reiterated the global consensus in calling on Israel, the occupying Power, to immediately stop all settlement activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, including the so-called “natural growth”, and to dismantle all outposts as required by the Road Map. They had recognized the efforts undertaken by the Palestinian Authority, with international support, to rebuild, reform and strengthen its institutions, and welcomed, in particular, the efforts and progress made in the security sector. They had encouraged the parties to strengthen measures aimed at promoting trust and confidence. In that regard, participants had emphasized the importance of the safety, protection and well-being of all civilians in the whole Middle East region, and condemned all acts of violence, military incursions and terror against civilians perpetrated by any side.

5. The organizers emphasized that developments on the ground had played a crucial part in creating a climate conducive to a resumption of the political dialogue and successful negotiations. They reiterated that Israeli settlements and the separation wall had been built on occupied Palestinian land, and that the demolition of houses and the eviction of Palestinian residents were illegal under international law, constituted an obstacle to peace and threatened to make a two-State solution impossible. They expressed their hope that the 10-month freeze on settlement expansion declared by the Government of Israel would be comprehensive, extended to East Jerusalem and retained indefinitely. They expressed alarm at the rising number of violent acts and brutality committed against Palestinian

civilians by Israeli settlers in the West Bank, the widespread destruction of public and private Palestinian property and infrastructure, and the internal displacement of civilians. The organizers supported the firm stance by the international community not to recognize any changes to the pre-1967 borders, including with regard to occupied Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties.

6. The organizers observed that participants had expressed deep concern about the situation in East Jerusalem. Government-sanctioned settlement construction, transfer of settlers, house demolitions, evictions of Palestinian residents and other actions aimed at altering the status and character of occupied East Jerusalem constituted violations of international law and had to be rescinded. The Organizers stressed that a negotiated solution of the question of Jerusalem as the future capital of two States that would take account of the political and religious concerns of all sides were a prerequisite for lasting peace. It should include internationally guaranteed provisions to ensure the freedom of religion and of conscience of its inhabitants, as well as permanent, free and unhindered access to the holy places by the Palestinian people and peoples of all religions and nationalities. The organizers reaffirmed the legitimate interest of the international community in the question of the City of Jerusalem and the protection of its unique spiritual, religious and cultural dimensions.

7. Grave concern was expressed by most participants over the crisis in the Gaza Strip as a result of the prolonged Israeli closures and movement restrictions that amounted to a blockade. These policies represented a severe form of collective punishment of the

entire population of the Gaza Strip. The hardship endured by the Palestinian people in Gaza was further exacerbated by the Israeli military operation “Cast Lead”, which caused extensive loss of life and injury, particularly among Palestinian civilians, widespread damage and destruction of Palestinian homes, infrastructure and public institutions, and the internal displacement of civilians. The organizers urged Israel to open all crossing terminals for the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods, including reconstruction materials, and to persons in accordance with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009).

8. Participants had drawn attention to the plight of Palestine refugees, whose status and suffering had been passed down from generation to generation over the past six decades. The inherent vulnerability of the refugees and the dire conditions of their exile called for a just and lasting solution anchored in the principles of international law and the lessons drawn from successful examples of conflict resolution in other parts of the world. The organizers supported the view that justice for Palestine refugees and the Palestinian people as a whole also encompassed fair recompense and recourse for the wrongs inflicted upon them under occupation. They welcomed that the participants had acknowledged the crucial role that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was playing in providing the Palestine refugees with basic services. They commended the selfless efforts of the many staff of UNRWA throughout the 60 years of its existence and encouraged them to continue their humanitarian work and to contribute to the international discourse on a just solution of the question of Palestine refugees on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

9. The organizers welcomed the emphasis on the need for the parties to arrive at a just solution to the question of water. They believed that any permanent status agreement should honour international law with respect to the sharing and allocation of ground and surface water resources in the Israeli and Palestinian regions, namely equitable and reasonable allocation on a per capita basis, avoidance of significant harm, and respect for the obligation of prior notification before undertaking major projects that may affect the neighbour’s water allocation. The organizers reaffirmed that, with the assistance of the international community, the parties should apply modern technologies to augment water supplies and utilize all supplies in more efficient and economic ways and be guided by international law.

10. The organizers supported the participants’ emphasis on the importance of the active involvement of the international community, in particular the United Nations and its Security Council, the Quartet, the League of Arab States and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, for the resumption and successful conduct of the peace process. They called upon the international donor community to continue to support generously the Palestinian efforts towards rehabilitation, reconstruction, economic development and State-building.

11. The organizers also welcomed that the participants of the meeting, hosted by Malta, a European Union Member State, had appreciated the absolutely critical role played by the European Union and individual European States in achieving a durable peace in the Middle East. In that connection, they were encouraged to note that the participants had welcomed the declaration of the Council of the European Union of 8 December 2009. On that basis,

the organizers encourage the policymaking organs of the European Union to play a more active role in various aspects of the political process, in addition to the European Commission's substantial economic assistance.

12. The organizers were of the view that national parliaments and inter-parliamentary organizations had a special role to play in advancing the Israeli-Palestinian political process. Such organizations as the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, the European Parliament, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Western European Union and the Arab Inter-Parliamentary Union had worked towards upholding international law and promoting an effective political dialogue aimed at resolving all permanent status issues. The organizers encouraged those inter-parliamentary organizations to develop closer cooperation among themselves, with Israeli and Palestinian lawmakers, and with the United Nations and its Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, with a view to supporting a comprehensive, just and lasting

peace in the region, including a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine. In that context, the organizers noted the valid recommendations and suggestions made during the meeting to strengthen the role of parliamentarians at the national, regional and international levels in contributing towards the resolution of the question of Palestine.

13. The organizers of the international meeting, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean and the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, were gratified by the newly developed partnership between themselves and were committed to continue working together and individually towards bringing about a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

14. The organizers commended Malta for its proactive and constructive role in the search for a comprehensive, just and lasting solution of the Middle East conflict and encouraged its continuation. They expressed gratitude to the Government and Parliament of Malta for hosting the meeting and for the generous hospitality extended to them.

IV. UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST INTRODUCES GENDER EQUALITY INITIATIVE IN GAZA

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) on 15 February 2010 issued a press release outlining the "Equality in Action" initiative, which is reproduced below:

Equality in Action

UNRWA introduced the "Equality in Action" initiative to address the needs of

Palestinian girls and women in the Gaza Strip. This comprehensive initiative is designed to improve the capacity of women to exercise freedom of choice, take

advantage of opportunities for personal and professional development and to address inequality at all levels of social, economic and political life.

Why a gender initiative in the Gaza Strip?

Not all women in Gaza today attain or realize their basic human rights. Women's crucial rights, responsibilities and entitlements are set down in key international instruments, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the Convention on the Political Rights of Women; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women; the Beijing Platform for Action; Security Council resolution 1325; and the third Millennium Development Goal. It is essential that UNRWA fully addresses these rights.

How women benefit

"Equality in Action" activities are designed to:

- Enhance the skills of women to improve their access to and opportunities in the labour market;
- Raise awareness of domestic violence and provide women with the skills to prevent it and to protect themselves;
- Provide women with spaces for social interaction, educational support and recreation;

- Build the capacity of organisations in Gaza that work on women's issues.

Local outreach

The following extensive and ongoing community outreach initiatives ensure that the gender initiative is practically and effectively implemented at the local level:

- Focus groups – rural women, young women, women with disabilities, employed and self-employed women and women in the home discuss their needs and concerns;
- Surveys – women, including UNRWA female staff, provide their thoughts and suggestions about internal organizational matters;
- Engagement of local community-based organizations and non-governmental organizations.

Action plan

"Equality in Action" is an inclusive initiative that responds directly to the self-stated needs of Palestinian women in the Gaza Strip. The following are the focus of action:

- Reversing the current rising rates of abuse within the home, by implementing projects that address prevention of and protection from domestic violence;
- Maximizing employment opportunities for women of all abilities and capacities in the UNRWA job creation programme and the graduate training programme;

- Targeting women who face particular socio-economic hardships and include them in skills-building and recreational activities;
- Creating space for girls and women to engage in social and recreational activities;
- Establishing educational support units to provide support in core subject areas in addition to career counselling;
- Building the capacity of organizations for women and fostering their cooperation;
- Implementing the UNRWA organization-wide gender mainstreaming strategy;

- Building on and strengthening UNRWA's successful microfinance and microenterprise programme for women and men through the implementation of a gender mainstreaming strategy.

These activities collectively reinforce UNRWA's vision of human development for all Palestinians: the realization of individual, familial and community potential; productive participation in socio-economic and cultural life; and the defence and protection of human rights.

V. UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS BRIEFS SECURITY COUNCIL

On 18 February 2010, B. Lynn Pascoe, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, briefed the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question (S/PV.6273). The following are excerpts from his briefing:

...

Efforts to bring about Israeli-Palestinian negotiations have continued. A proposal from United States [Special] Envoy George Mitchell that the parties begin indirect talks with United States mediation is currently under serious consideration. Israel has indicated its readiness to work on this basis, while President [Mahmoud] Abbas has been engaged in intensive consultations and sought clarifications.

The Secretary-General hopes that President Abbas will move forward on the basis of this practical proposal so that serious talks can begin. He notes Prime Minister [Benjamin] Netanyahu's stated

commitment to a two-State solution, although confusion as to the Israeli Government's intentions arises from statements by various officials.

We continue to stress the importance of doing everything possible to ensure that negotiations lead in a clear time frame to an agreement resolving all final status issues, including Jerusalem, borders, refugees, security, settlements and water. We believe that the international consensus on what it will take to reach a sustainable agreement is strong and that an active Quartet will be vital to support the process.

The Israeli Government's partial restraint on settlement construction in the

West Bank, excluding East Jerusalem, remains in effect and has led to a slowdown of construction activity. However, violations of the restraint orders have been identified by the Israeli authorities in at least 29 settlements, with the Defense Ministry that it is issuing demolition and stop-work orders against violators. While the Israeli Government's settlement restraint constitutes a step beyond previous positions, the settlements themselves are illegal and continued settlement activity violates Israel's Road Map obligations and prejudices the outcome of negotiations. We therefore urge additional measures to enforce the restraint. We also urge its extension into a comprehensive freeze, including in East Jerusalem, as well as its continuation beyond the current 10-month period.

There were no demolitions of Palestinian homes or evictions in East Jerusalem during the reporting period — a positive development which we hope will continue. We continue to call for the reopening of Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem in accordance with Road Map obligations. The status of Jerusalem is to be determined through negotiations, and we believe that a way must be found through negotiations for Jerusalem to emerge as the capital of two States.

The efforts of the Palestinian Authority (PA) to meet its Road Map obligations to combat terrorism have continued in the West Bank, reflecting impressive achievements in reform, professionalization and performance. It is important that the Palestinian Authority leadership continue to speak out against violence and incitement. On 10 February, an Israeli soldier was killed in a knife attack. The incident was condemned by Palestinian Prime Minister [Salam] Fayyad.

...

We are also concerned at continued settler violence. There have been eight reported attacks by settlers on Palestinians, including on 9 February when settlers shot and injured a Palestinian teenager. We note legitimate Israeli and Palestinian security concerns. Sustainable security will be best achieved through intensified cooperation, the continued empowerment of PA security efforts and PA performance, the curtailment of IDF incursions into Palestinian areas, full respect for legitimate non-violent protest, Israeli action to curb settler violence, Palestinian action against incitement and progress in both political negotiations and economic development.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs recorded the removal of 24 closure obstacles throughout the Hebron Governorate, continuing the gradual easing of Palestinian movement in areas to the east of the barrier. However, as of 16 February, 550 obstacles to movement remain in place throughout the West Bank, of which 89 are permanently and partially staffed checkpoints. The Israeli Government recently allowed tourist buses to use the Jalameh vehicle crossing from northern Israel into the West Bank with the aim of boosting the Palestinian tourism sector. The Israeli Government is encouraged to continue to facilitate this access and to take more far-reaching measures as well.

The important work of Palestinian State-building through institutional reform and development is continuing. However, the recurrent financing requirements facing the Palestinian Authority are still substantial and projected at about \$1.2 billion in 2010, despite reduced spending on wages and

subsidies. We encourage donors to channel their assistance first and foremost through the single treasury account and to support the priorities articulated by the Palestinian Authority for 2010. We welcome recent transfers and pledges and also strongly encourage those donors who have not yet done so to frontload financial support to allow for greater predictability. We also stress the importance of applying accepted principles of aid effectiveness to ensure better targeting and maximize programme impact.

On 8 February, the Palestinian Cabinet called for local elections to be held on 17 July 2010, in accordance with the local election law for all 335 municipal councils in the West Bank and Gaza. The Palestinian Central Election Commission is planning to start registering voters on 6 March. We take this opportunity to urge Hamas to respond positively to this important part of the democratic process.

Senior Fatah and independent figures visited Gaza during the reporting period in an effort to ease tensions and promote reconciliation. Other factions in the Gaza Strip have also been active in this direction, and an Arab parliamentary group visited the Strip on 15 and 16 February. However, to date, there has been no further progress in finalizing an agreement based on Egypt's proposal.

It is deeply regrettable that there has been no breakthrough on a prisoner exchange to secure the release of Corporal [Gilad] Shalit and Palestinian prisoners, despite intensive efforts in recent months.

While the Hamas de facto authorities are reportedly exerting efforts to prevent the launching of rockets at Israel, 19 projectiles

were fired from Gaza and 11 reached southern Israel during the reporting period, with no damage or injuries reported. Three barrels of explosives washed up on Israeli beaches between 1 and 3 February, with a further two detonating at sea. There was an improvised explosive device (IED) attack on a convoy of International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) vehicles on 4 February, which damaged one vehicle, and two other IED attacks, reportedly by Salafist elements, killing one Hamas militant and injuring four others. One Palestinian was killed in an Israeli air strike, and seven others were injured in IDF incursions and operations. We continue to condemn rocket fire, and call for its cessation and on all parties to maintain calm and to strictly observe international humanitarian law.

We continue to receive reports of the smuggling of weapons supplied from within the region. Egypt is maintaining its efforts, as all States are called on to do in Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). Egypt is also seizing explosives and installing metal sheeting in areas along its border with Gaza. Those efforts further underscore the vital importance of opening all legitimate crossings for imports and exports, as envisaged in the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access and in resolution 1860 (2009).

The Israeli closure of Gaza remains in place. That counterproductive policy is empowering smugglers and militants, destroying legitimate commerce and causing unacceptable hardship for the civilian population, more than half of whom are children.

During the reporting period, food and hygiene products comprised 84 per cent of imports and a weekly average of 561 trucks

entered the Strip, which is slightly more than in the previous reporting period, but far short of the weekly average of 2,087 trucks before the Hamas takeover in June 2007. Cooking gas supplies met only 48 per cent of estimated weekly needs during the reporting period. We take positive note of the entry of a slightly wider range of materials, such as glass, electricity spare parts and one elevator for a maternity hospital. The first phase of the northern Gaza wastewater treatment plant project was completed in late January. We also note that the export of cut flowers and strawberries continued.

However, the scale and quantity of goods entering Gaza through the Israeli crossings, as well as the level of exports, remain far short of requirements. Sufficient materials to restart civilian reconstruction are still not entering Gaza through the Israeli crossings. We again express our disappointment that there has been no satisfactory Israeli response to the United

Nations proposal to complete stalled projects for housing, schools and health facilities. We also continue to be concerned about fuel shortages at the Gaza power plant as a result of funding shortfalls and technical failures, leading to rolling blackouts.

...

We remain deeply concerned at the current stalemate. We call for the resumption of talks on final status issues, implementation of Road Map commitments, continued efforts to improve economic and security conditions, and a different and more positive approach to Gaza. We remain committed to an end to the occupation that began in 1967, an end to the conflict through the creation of an independent Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security, and comprehensive regional peace, in accordance with Security Council resolutions, previous agreements, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

VI. UNITED NATIONS SPECIAL COORDINATOR FOR THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS EXPRESSES CONCERN ABOUT THE ISRAELI HERITAGE SITES DECISION, HEIGHTENING TENSIONS

The United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert H. Serry issued on 22 February 2010 a statement following the Israeli decision to include the Tomb of the Patriarchs (Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi) in Hebron and Rachel's Tomb (Masjid Bilal or Qubbat Rakhil) in Bethlehem on the list of Israel's "National Heritage Infrastructure", and the resulting tensions in Hebron. The text of the statement is reproduced below:

I am concerned at the announcement of the Israeli Government regarding holy sites in Hebron and Bethlehem and the heightened tensions that have resulted. These sites are in occupied Palestinian territory and are of historical and religious significance not only to Judaism but also to Islam, and to Christianity as well. I urge Israel not to take any steps on the ground which undermine trust or could prejudice

negotiations, the resumption of which should be the highest shared priority of all who seek peace. I also call for restraint and calm. As I underscored in my visit to Hebron last week, I would like to see more positive steps by Israel to enable Palestinian development and State-building in the area and throughout the West Bank, reflecting a genuine commitment to the two-State solution.

**VII. BUREAU OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE OF THE
INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE
ISSUES STATEMENT ON RELIGIOUS SITES IN THE
OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY**

The Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People issued on 24 February 2010 the following statement (GA/PAL/1151) in connection with the announcement by the Government of Israel concerning religious sites in the Occupied Palestinian Territory:

The Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People expresses its serious concern about Israeli Prime Minister [Benjamin] Netanyahu's declared intention to include the Tomb of the Patriarchs (Al-Haram Al-Ibrahimi) in Hebron (Al-Khalil) and Rachel's Tomb (Masjid Bilal or Qubbat Rakhil) in Bethlehem in the occupied West Bank in a list of Israel's "National Heritage Infrastructures".

This announcement is a further proof of the Israeli Government's resolve to entrench its control over the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Laying official claims to religious and historical places throughout the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem and attempts by the Government of Israel purporting itself to be the sole custodian of those sites is yet another measure aimed at consolidating Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian lands. The planned "heritage trail" throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory and continuing excavations near the Al-Haram Al-Sharif compound in East Jerusalem are stark examples of this provocative and dangerous policy.

If instituted, this intended step by the Israeli Government may have far-reaching consequences. It is bound to increase tension on the ground, fuel extremism and foment violence along religious lines. It is

important to remember that the sites in question are of great spiritual significance not only to the Jewish people, but also to Muslims and Christians. The announcement is likely to incense millions of believers not only in the region, but also around the world. By deliberately escalating the religious dimension of the conflict, such a decision would only further complicate the efforts to achieve a just, permanent and peaceful settlement.

The Bureau of the Committee is deeply troubled by Prime Minister Netanyahu's statement of 21 February 2010 and wishes to remind Israel, the occupying Power, of its obligations as a High Contracting Party to the Fourth Geneva Convention. At the same time, the Bureau wishes to draw the attention of Israel to the fact that at this crucial time when the international community is looking for ways of reviving the long-stalled political process, such provocative declarations are utterly unhelpful, harmful and dangerous. The Bureau calls on the Government of Israel to retract the announcement and refrain completely from any other actions that may undermine the chances of restarting the Israeli-Palestinian permanent status negotiations aimed at ending the occupation that began in 1967 and achieving the two-State solution.

VIII. UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION DIRECTOR-GENERAL EXPRESSES CONCERN ABOUT RELIGIOUS SITES IN THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) issued on 25 February 2010 the following press release:

The Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, expressed on 25 February her concern at the announcement by the Israeli Prime Minister that two sites located in the occupied Palestinian territory, the Tomb of the Patriarchs and Rachel's Tomb, are to be included in a National Heritage Programme. She also expressed concern at the resulting escalation of tension in the area.

Endorsing the statement by Robert H. Serry, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, that these sites are "of historical and religious significance not only to Judaism but also to Islam, and to Christianity as well", the Director-General reiterated UNESCO's long-standing conviction that cultural heritage should serve as a means for dialogue.

UNESCO has been mandated by its Member States to provide assistance to the Palestinian Authority in the fields of education and culture. In this regard, UNESCO has been working for many years with the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities of the Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian civil society to protect and preserve the cultural heritage sites in the West Bank and is committed to continue doing so.

Indeed, the Director-General is committed to strengthening "UNESCO's financial and technical assistance to the Palestinian educational and cultural institutions in order to address new needs and problems resulting from recent developments", as requested by UNESCO's General Conference at its 35th session (resolution 35 C/Resolution 75).

IX. GENERAL ASSEMBLY ADOPTS SECOND RESOLUTION ON THE FOLLOW-UP TO THE REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS FACT-FINDING MISSION ON THE GAZA CONFLICT

Under agenda item 64 of its sixty-fourth session, the General Assembly on 26 February 2010 adopted resolution 64/254 "Second follow-up to the report of the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict". The text of the resolution is reproduced below:

The General Assembly,

Recalling its relevant resolutions, including resolution 64/10, adopted on 5 November 2009, in follow-up to the report

of the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict,¹

¹ A/HRC/12/48.

Recalling also the relevant rules and principles of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law, in particular the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949,² which is applicable to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem,

Recalling further the Universal Declaration of Human Rights³ and the other human rights covenants, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,⁴ the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights⁴ and the Convention on the Rights of the Child,⁵

Reaffirming the obligation of all parties to respect international humanitarian law and international human rights law,

Reiterating the importance of the safety and well-being of all civilians, and reaffirming the obligations under international law regarding the protection of civilians in armed conflict,

Stressing the need to ensure accountability for all violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in order to prevent impunity, ensure justice, deter further violations and promote peace,

Convinced that achieving a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the question of Palestine, the core of the Arab-

Israeli conflict, is imperative for the attainment of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace and stability in the Middle East,

1. *Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General of 4 February 2010,⁶ submitted pursuant to paragraph 6 of its resolution 64/10;

2. *Reiterates its call upon* the Government of Israel to conduct investigations that are independent, credible and in conformity with international standards into the serious violations of international humanitarian and international human rights law reported by the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission, towards ensuring accountability and justice;

3. *Reiterates its urging* for the conduct by the Palestinian side of investigations that are independent, credible and in conformity with international standards into the serious violations of international humanitarian and international human rights law reported by the Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict, towards ensuring accountability and justice;

4. *Reiterates its recommendation* to the Government of Switzerland, in its capacity as depositary of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War,² to reconvene as soon as possible a Conference of High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention on measures to enforce the Convention in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and to ensure its respect in accordance with common article 1, bearing in mind the

² United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 75, No. 973.

³ Resolution 217 A (III).

⁴ See resolution 2200 A (XXI), annex.

⁵ United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1577, No. 27531.

⁶ A/64/651.

convening of such a Conference and the statement adopted on 15 July 1999 as well as the reconvening of the Conference and the declaration adopted on 5 December 2001;

5. *Requests* the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly, within a period of five months, on the implementation of the present resolution,

with a view to the consideration of further action, if necessary, by the relevant United Nations organs and bodies, including the Security Council;

6. *Decides* to remain seized of the matter.

*72nd plenary meeting
26 February 2010*