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**QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE
OCCUPIED ARAB TERRITORIES, INCLUDING PALESTINE**

**Letter dated 13 February 2004 from the Permanent Observer
for Palestine to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed
to the Acting High Commissioner for Human Rights**

The Israeli occupation authorities continue to commit grave breaches and serious violations of the International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, and also violations of the principles of international law and international humanitarian law, against the Palestinian civilian population in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, as they continue to persist in their use of excessive and indiscriminate force against the Palestinian people in countless acts amounting to war crimes and State terror, in addition to the systematic violation of the human rights of the Palestinian civilian population under Israeli occupation.

Last Wednesday, 11 February 2004, the Israeli occupation forces committed another massacre in the Gaza Strip, during a twin invasion of two densely populated areas east of Gaza city and in Rafah, killing at least 15 Palestinians and wounding 62 others.

Israeli occupation forces backed by tanks started by storming into the Al-Sajae'iyeh neighbourhood east of Gaza city early Wednesday, opening sporadic heavy machine gun fire from the invading tanks on a Palestinian police checkpoint, killing a policeman and a teenager, and injuring at least three children.

Separately, Israeli occupation forces, backed by 10 tanks and 3 armoured bulldozers, invaded the Rafah refugee camp on the Gaze-Egyptian border. At least 13 Palestinians were wounded, including three children.

The martyrs were 17-year-old Mahammad Ahmad Hals, Hani Mahmoud Abu Skhailah, 25, Mohammad al-Ijlal, 34, Ahmad Kamal Abu A'rmana, 22, Haitham Ribhi A'abed, 28, Ismael Mohammad Abu El-A'ta, 22, Mahdi Ya'coub Zaidiyah, 25, Akram Ekailan, 22, Amer Mohamed Al-Ghamri, Ayman Nasr Al-Shiekh Kahlil, Ashraf Farouk Hassanein, Mohammed Jihad Al-Hazek, Mohammed Zahran Tantawi, Ibrahim Mohammed Za'rab. The fifteenth martyr is still unidentified.

Furthermore, the Israeli occupation forces, as is usually the case after their raids, invasions and massacres, made it impossible for Palestinian medics to evacuate many wounded.

Meanwhile, on Thursday morning, 12 February 2004, Israeli occupation forces shot dead a Palestinian in the village of Karawat Bani Zaid, situated north-west of the West Bank city of Ramallah.

In addition, on Tuesday, 10 February, Israeli occupation forces stormed into A'ayda refugee camp, imposed a curfew on Husan, west of Bethlehem, detained at least 10 Palestinians in Bethlehem, al-Dahriyah, near Hebron, villages west of Ramallah, and Nablus in the West Bank, and detained six fishermen in the Gaza Strip.

On Monday, 9 February 2004, two days before the massacre on Wednesday, 11 February, Israeli occupation forces shot dead Ahmed Mahdi, 23, in the northern West Bank town of Jenin, 23-year-old Khalil Ibrahim Bawadi and 17-year-old Rami Salah abu Mandil near al-Mintar crossing point between the Gaza Strip and Israel. They detained four Palestinians during a raid into the northern West Bank town of Tulkarem, including Waleed Ahmad Hattab whose brother Majeed was wounded in the raid. They demolished the houses of Ibrahim Atiyah, Mohammad Baragheeth and Amal Sulaiman Abdul Muhsen Kawazbeh in the Beit Hanina neighbourhood of occupied East Jerusalem.

On Sunday, 8 February 2004, Israeli occupation forces ended an 18-hour invasion of Rafah, wounding 20 Palestinians, mostly bystanders, 9 of them children, stormed into Bethlehem, south of the West Bank and Qalqilya in the north, detained several Palestinians, sealed off and imposed a curfew on the village of Turms A'yya north of Ramallah and kidnapped a wounded Palestinian in Balata refugee camp near Nablus.

Also on Sunday, Israeli occupation forces declared Budrus and the surrounding area a closed military zone as a prelude to building the second stage of Israel's Apartheid Wall, which will confiscate vast areas of the land of the West Bank villages.

Furthermore, the Israeli occupation forces continue to destroy more homes by explosive charges and armoured bulldozers, leaving yet more Palestinian families dispossessed and homeless all over the already desperate and impoverished Palestinian territories. Since 16 January 2004, 17 buildings, home to 170 people, have been demolished. In the night and morning of 20 January 2004, a further 36 homes were destroyed, leaving 414 people homeless. On the early morning of 22 January another incursion ended, leaving behind another four demolished homes. The demolitions, carried out by Israeli military bulldozers, have added to the severe humanitarian crisis in Rafah, where a total of 9,970 people have lost their homes since October 2000. In the Gaza Strip as a whole 14,852 people have been made homeless by Israeli actions since that date.

The Israeli occupation forces also continue to impose severe suffocating restrictions, including curfews, on the freedom of movement of persons and goods, including for medical and humanitarian purposes. They continue to fervently pursue the Israeli colonial settlement campaign and the construction of the Israeli expansionist wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, including all forms of confiscation and destruction of Palestinian land and infrastructure. They also persist in the policy of arrest and detention of thousands of Palestinians, including women and children.

Through the continuation of such illegal, violent and oppressive policies and practices, Israel has ensured the continued rise of tensions and mounting devastation and desperation throughout the Occupied Territory, sabotaging any Palestinian efforts to conclude a ceasefire with militant groups and undermining any other efforts to calm the situation on the ground and resume peace negotiations.

Indeed, those illegal policies and practices have exacerbated the tense situation on the ground and deepened the humanitarian crises being faced by the Palestinian people.

For all of those war crimes, State terrorism and systematic human rights violations committed against the Palestinian people, Israel, the occupying Power, must be held accountable and the perpetrators must be brought to justice.

As the occupation forces continue to carry out such violent and deadly raids throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, using excessive and indiscriminate force against the civilian population, the death toll continues to rise along with the number of civilians injured and the toll of destruction and loss. At least 2,760 Palestinian martyrs have lost their lives since September 2000 and over 25,000 others have been injured.

In the light of the ever-escalating drastic situation prevailing throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the suffering all the Palestinian civilian people are exposed to on a daily basis, we once again appeal to Your Excellency, and through you to the international community to call on Israel to immediately put an end to the escalating cycle of violence that its forces are perpetrating in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, to refrain from the collective punishments that the Israeli Government is imposing on the whole Palestinian civilian population, to abide by the signed bilateral and multilateral agreements, to commit to its international engagements and to comply with the principles of international law and international humanitarian law.

I would be grateful if you would arrange to have the present letter distributed as an official document of the sixtieth session of the Commission on Human Rights, under agenda item 8.

(Signed): Nabil RAMLAWI
Ambassador
Permanent Observer
