

## **Item 10: Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**

*Oral Intervention submitted by the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights and Al Haq  
– Law in the Service of Man  
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We condemn the widespread and systematic violation of economic, social and cultural rights of Palestinians civilians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs) by the Israeli military. In the past year, the Israeli military closure and curfew policy, the property destruction and house demolition policy, and ongoing Israeli military operations throughout the OPTs have effectively suffocated the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights.

Of particular concern is the deepening humanitarian crisis directly precipitated by the Israeli military policy of closure and curfew. The severe restrictions on freedom of movement and goods have resulted in an escalation in poverty levels to more than 60% throughout the territories (more than 80% in the Gaza Strip); unemployment rates have reached as high as 80% in some areas; and there are severe food and water shortages. Access to medical care and supplies, including emergency treatment, has been subjected to increasingly regular delays, often resulting in loss of life, including to children and infants. Education has been severely disrupted and both schools and hospitals have been subjected to targeted attacks by the Israeli military or used as military posts. The physical and mental health of the wider population, and in particular among children and women, continues to deteriorate. Recent surveys estimate acute and chronic malnutrition among Palestinian children as high as 22%. Approximately 54.6% of children in the Gaza Strip suffer symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. More than 1.8 million Palestinians are currently dependent on humanitarian assistance from international aid agencies, including food packages.

As many as 5381 Palestinian homes have been destroyed during Israeli military operations, affecting more than 56,000 Palestinians. In addition there has been widespread destruction to other property including water, electricity, sewage and communications infrastructure; agricultural land and crops; commercial, NGO and civilian governmental buildings; media offices; important historic cultural and religious sites. The demolition of homes has occurred in different contexts; as a state-sanctioned punishment for relatives of Palestinians alleged to have orchestrated, facilitated or carried out attacks against Israeli targets; during the context of military incursions into towns, refugee camps and villages; ostensibly for failure to obtain building permits; to create so-called security areas around illegal settlements and border areas. Without exception, this destruction has been conducted without recourse to effective judicial procedures and with a total failure to provide compensation. Attempts at securing judicial oversight and review of demolition orders have been consistently rejected by the Israeli high court, which has consistently failed to effectively halt these violations.

We assert that the escalating levels of destruction, particularly surrounding the illegal Jewish settlements and the borders with Israel, are conducted for the purposes of territorial expansion or illegal annexation. The expansionist aims of the State of Israel are now most clearly evidenced in the construction of the separation wall in the West Bank which will effectively expand Israeli territory to incorporate at least 10% of the

West Bank. This figure is expected to be higher as Israel has recently announced plans to extend the wall further into the West Bank.

Israel's consistent claims that such destruction and the closures and curfews are necessary to protect Israel's security ring increasingly hollow. As the Special Rapporteur noted in his report to this Commission, "*How action that causes so much suffering to so many can ever be seen as a proportional response to terrorism is beyond comprehension*". We assert that these policies are largely imposed as a form of collective punishment. In so far as these policies have been implemented in an increasingly widespread and systematic manner, they constitute war crimes and may constitute crimes against humanity as defined in the Rome Statute.

We call upon this Commission to

- Condemn Israel's widespread and systematic violations of the economic, social and cultural rights of Palestinians in the OPTs
- Call for an immediate halt to the Israeli military policies of closure and curfew and house and other property destruction.
- Call for an immediate halt to the construction of the so-called security wall upon territory of the West Bank