

**United Nations Commission on Human Rights
58th Session**

Item 10: Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

*Oral Intervention by the **Palestinian Centre for Human Rights**, a non-governmental organisation with Special Consultative Status, together with LAW, the Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment*

(Speaker: Jaber Wishah, PCHR Deputy Director)

We condemn Israel's ongoing systematic violations of the economic, social and cultural rights of Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) and express particular concern regarding Israel's intensified policies of closure and house demolition, which constitute collective punishment in violation of international humanitarian law. We welcome the Committee Against Torture's ruling in November 2001 that these policies may constitute cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, in violation of the Torture Convention.

Israeli occupying forces are currently engaged in widespread violations of the right to adequate medical care in the context of the current unprecedented, all-out offensive throughout the OPT. In a flagrant violation of the basic principles of international humanitarian law, access to medical supplies and services are being regularly refused or delayed; emergency medical evacuations have been blocked, leaving numerous wounded to bleed to death. Medical staff have even been prevented from collecting corpses in some areas. Deliberate attacks on medical staff and ambulances have escalated; 17 clearly identifiable medical personnel have been killed in Israeli attacks in the course of their duties, and many hundreds more have been injured. Hospitals and clinics have been damaged in military attacks.

The ongoing external and internal closure policy continues to deprive Palestinian civilians access to food, water, medical aid and supplies, education, work, and family, as recognised by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural rights last year. The ongoing restrictions on freedom of movement and goods, and the resulting increasing levels of unemployment, poverty (81% of the Gaza Strip are below the poverty line), malnutrition, and illness, have created a rapidly deepening humanitarian crisis. Israeli incursions into Palestinian towns, villages, and refugee camps have exacerbated this crisis, severing electricity, water, and communications networks, and leading to food shortages.

Israeli occupying forces have demolished at least 520 houses and destroyed at least 15.5 million square meters of agricultural land and facilities in the Gaza strip during the al-Aqsa Intifada. This ongoing policy of destruction serves as often as either a form of collective punishment, to serve Israel's colonial settler aims in the OPT, or both. House demolitions are usually carried out at night, without warning, or opportunity for appeal. The deliberate extensive destruction of civilian homes and property, carried out wantonly and unlawfully, is a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention and a war crime, as most recently noted by the UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing.

We are particularly concerned at the impact of these policies and all other violations of international human rights and humanitarian law on the health of Palestinians. The deepening humanitarian crisis, closures, house and property destruction, and the continuing military onslaught result in increasing levels of physical and mental illness among Palestinian civilians. Such ongoing suffering destroys any hope, any vision of a safe and secure future among Palestinians, and serves only to facilitate the growth of extremism.

In this context, we call upon this Commission:

- To call for the immediate cessation of all home and property demolitions, and for the immediate lifting of the closure policy
- To allow access to humanitarian aid and services, including ambulances and medical staff
- To call upon states to provide donations to international agencies providing emergency humanitarian aid and services to Palestinian civilians
- To call upon the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to ensure Israel's respect for the Convention in the OPTs
- To provide for international protection for Palestinian civilians