



PALESTINIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Raji Sourani
Director
Palestinian Centre for Human Rights
Gaza
Occupied Palestinian Territories

Mary Robinson
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
Geneva
Switzerland

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Dear Mrs. Robinson,

In light of the all-out, unprecedented Israeli offensive throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), I am writing to ask that you call for immediate states steps to provide Palestinian civilians with international protection in accordance with the Fourth Geneva Convention and that you urgently consider a visit to the region to underscore this need.

Israeli forces have invaded Ramallah, Beit Jala, Bethlehem, Qalqilya, Tulkarem, Salfit, and Jenin, and have launched an assault on Palestinian President Yasser Arafat. Dozens of Palestinian civilians have been killed, thousands have been detained in arbitrary mass arrests, and hundreds of thousands remain trapped in their homes with limited access to food, water, and electricity. Israeli forces are regularly firing upon or otherwise obstructing the work of emergency medical personnel. And most disturbingly, the Israeli government is seeking to prevent journalists, human rights defenders, and diplomats from gathering and relaying information about the situation, either through unlawful orders or, in some cases, physical attack.

PCHR welcomes your statement of 2 April to the Commission on Human Rights, in which you repeated your call for an international human rights monitoring presence and urged the Commission to undertake a mission to the region. Given the massive and dramatic deterioration in the human rights and humanitarian situation taking place at this moment, however, further information-gathering activities are insufficient to meaningfully stop, deter, or reduce human rights violations. Journalists, human rights organisations, and various UN entities have thoroughly documented and analysed these violations, and they have only escalated. Now is the time not only for observation, but international protection as well.

The international community's failure to ensure Israel's respect for international humanitarian law, as obligated by Article 1 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, has left Palestinians in the OPT in a state of profound human insecurity, a situation which has been greatly exacerbated in recent days.



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International protection is particularly crucial in this case, as Palestinian civilians living in the OPT are a people living under a system of occupation and apartheid without the protection of a state.

General Assembly Resolution 48/141, which establishes the office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, states that it is the responsibility of the High Commissioner “to promote and protect the effective enjoyment by all of all civil, cultural, economic, political, and social rights.” In light of the gravity of the current situation, we urge you to exert all possible efforts within your mandate to secure protection for Palestinian civilians, including a visit to the region.

Your visit could contribute to preventing further killings of civilians by drawing attention to the deplorable human rights situation in the OPT and underscoring the unacceptability of attempts to impose an information “black-out” concerning the activities of Israeli occupying forces in the OPT. Your presence would help break the conspiracy of silence that allows Israel to perpetrate war crimes and other violations of international humanitarian law with impunity. Furthermore, by standing with victims of human rights violations and calling for immediate international action under Article 1 of the Fourth Geneva Convention to protect Palestinian civilians, you would lend the authority and moral weight of your office to help avert a disaster whose consequences we can only begin to imagine. I look forward to a timely response in this hour of urgent need.

Yours sincerely,

Raji Sourani
Director,
Palestinian Centre for Human Rights

Cc:
Hassan Othman
Chief Technical Adviser
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
Gaza
Occupied Palestinian Territories