



Joint Press Release: Al-Haq, BADIL, FIDH, CIHRS, PCHR

*For Immediate Release:*

Palestinian and International Human Rights Defenders:

***'UN Rights Council Must Act Now to Ensure Follow-up on "Goldstone Report" and End Impunity for War Crimes in Israel and Palestine'***

(27 September, 2010 - Geneva) Today the Committee of independent experts mandated to monitor and assess domestic investigations by Israel and the Palestinian side into war crimes committed during Israel's military offensive (code-named Operation Cast Lead) on the Gaza Strip (12/2008- 01/2009), presented their report to the UN Human Rights Council. In a statement read before the Human Rights Council, Prof. Christian Tomuschat, head of the Expert Committee, stated that investigations by Israel "fundamentally lacked transparency" and "impartiality," and that the Israeli government failed to investigate those who designed, planned, ordered, and oversaw the offensive. The Expert Committee also concluded that the Palestinian side has failed to conduct criminal prosecutions.

In a joint letter signed by NGOs from around the world, civil society organizations called on the Human Rights Council to "*acknowledge and condemn the failure of all responsible parties to comply with their obligation to carry out genuine investigations*" and "*recommended that the UN... refer the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory to the International Criminal Court.*"

Speaking before the Council on behalf of The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), Palestine Centre for Human Rights (PCHR), and Al-Haq, Maysa Zorob said that the findings and recommendations of the Goldstone report, "*represented a pivotal point in the history of Israel and the occupied Palestinian Territory. For the first time, a UN body... laid out specific mechanisms and processes to ensure that justice... could finally be achieved*" for War Crimes committed in Palestine and Israel.

Rania Madi of BADIL, also speaking before the Council, urged the Palestinian delegation to use all available means to ensure that the Security Council refers war crimes committed by Israel to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Raji Sourani, Director of PCHR and Vice-President of FIDH said, "international Law and the recommendations of the Fact Finding Mission are clear: it is now time to turn to the ICC. This is not a political issue, but a legal and a moral obligation. The world cannot continue to turn its back on innocent civilians, and to grant blanket impunity"

According to Jeremie Smith of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), "*The UN Rights Council has an important choice to make: It can either effectively kill the Goldstone process with a weak resolution for the sake of political expediency or breath life into it by concluding that recourse to the International Criminal Court is required and sending their decision to the General Assembly. Unfortunately, those who would like to bury this process may have the upper hand at the moment.*"

*"Justice delayed is justice denied. The Council's credibility is at stake. It must act now to ensure justice for the thousands of victims of war crimes committed during Operation Cast Lead. Failing to do so risks not only the death of the Goldstone process but the death of the Council's credibility for human rights defenders around the world,"* said Maysa Zorob of Al-Haq.

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