



**Message from the Chairman of the Special Committee to
investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of
the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the
Occupied Territories on the occasion of the
International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People**

**Read by H.E. Mr. Mohd Radzi Abdul Rahman.
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Geneva and New York

Tuesday 29 November 2005

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**Mr. Chairman, Mr. Director-General/Secretary-General
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

On this solemn occasion of observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, I am honoured to address this Meeting in my capacity as the Chairperson of the Special Committee established by the General Assembly to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories. We, on this day, once again, individually and collectively express our steadfast solidarity with the people of Palestine.

On this occasion, I wish to inform this Meeting that I have early this month introduced the report of the Special Committee to the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly, reflecting our findings and observations pertaining to the human rights situation in occupied territories.

Despite some positive developments in the aftermath of the Sharm El Sheikh Summit of February 2005 and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip in August 2005, testimonies by witnesses to the Special Committee amply reflect the dire human rights situation in occupied territories. Their accounts demonstrated the harshness of the military occupation and the ill-effects of road closures and numerous checkpoints. Moreover, Jewish settlements isolating or cutting off Palestinian villages are negatively impacting all human rights of the Palestinians. "Ethnic cleansing" and "rampant expulsions" were the words used by several Palestinian witnesses to describe their miserable situation.

Once again, the Special Committee was not allowed by Israel to visit the occupied territories and assess, at first hand, the human rights situation in Palestine. This restriction also prevented any exchange of views with relevant Israeli authorities. But the situation in Palestine and indeed the world has changed since the inception of the Special Committee's mandate 37 years ago. A new generation of leaders is taking over leadership, and dialogue and cooperation are now preferred over monologue and confrontation. In this context, the Special Committee is of the view that Israel, after all these years of denying access for the Committee to the occupied territories, should revisit the reasons behind such a refusal.

During our field mission from 25 June to 9 July 2005, the Special Committee visited Egypt, Jordan and Syria and met altogether 38 witnesses from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In Syria, the Special Committee heard testimonies of 8 witnesses with direct and personal knowledge of the human rights situation in the occupied Syrian Golan.

More than ever, the Special Committee is of the view that the construction of the separation wall is violating every single right of the Palestinians, not only in respect of freedom of movement, but also the rights related to adequate housing, food, social life, education and health. The wall is affecting the very national identity of the Palestinians and their legitimate claims to territories, which not long ago, were contiguous lands. As a result of the wall, Palestinians are losing control over a key strategic resource, water, through extensive destruction of groundwater wells and water pipes. Many rural communities are now forced to look for alternate water sources and often suffer from the ill-effects of contaminated waters and inadequate sewage and sanitation systems. The wall also affects supply of energy. The combined effects of the wall, military incursions, confiscation of land for settlers and road closures have prevented Palestinian electricity companies from maintaining regular supply of power or from attending to the needs of customers located on the other side of the wall. Moreover, many Palestinians in

Jerusalem are deprived of electricity because their houses have been allegedly illegally built.

Women and children are still paying a heavy toll due to persistent harsh daily conditions affecting the Palestinians as a whole. Rising unemployment and poverty, along with multifaceted restrictions on movement including due to the wall, have prevented Palestinians from access to health facilities. Such restrictions have also generated food insecurity and a decline in nutrition levels. After the completion of the wall, it is expected that only 39 per cent of Palestinians will have access to health facilities and as many as 120'000 children will be reportedly deprived of vaccinations. Health outreach programmes have been cut off in some areas as a result of the wall and mobile clinics have been prevented from reaching their patients. Pregnant women are increasingly at risk as they cannot easily access primary health care dispensaries and are held back at check points on their way to hospital at time of delivery.

Several witnesses spoke of attacks against children on their way to schools, as well as numerous impediments posed by closures, curfews, and long waiting hours at checkpoints or entry points to the wall. This trend seems to indicate a growing and deliberate pattern by the occupying power to hamper normal schooling, especially higher education. Most students are unable to enroll or reach universities outside their locality and teachers are at times unable to reach their workplaces regularly. Teachers and students have to cross checkpoints on foot, risking their safety. The quality of education is also suffering as teachers are often recruited from the neighbourhood and are not necessarily the best qualified. In the Special Committee's view, inadequate education will hamper skills development and leadership among Palestinian youth in coming years.

The number of detainees is again on the rise with up to 8'500 Palestinians reportedly detained in Israeli jails, including 110-170 women and 300-330 minors. Several hundred detainees are held in administrative detention for indefinitely renewable periods. Prisoners are allegedly subjected to degrading and cruel

treatment, including torture. The situation of women was dire according to several witnesses and the condition of minors was no less appalling. Minors were subjected to various threats such as destruction of their homes, life imprisonment and were sometimes confined in isolated cells.

In the occupied Syrian Golan, Israel has also tightened its grip on its water resources. Landmines are still a threat to the population of the occupied Syrian Golan as they are reportedly often laid close to villages and fields. The burying of Israeli nuclear waste allegedly continues in a tract of land close to the Syrian border in the vicinity of Jabal al-Sheikh summit. About half of the existing Jewish settlements are to be expanded and citizens of the occupied Syrian Golan continue to be denied of their traditional cultural practices.

The Special Committee observes with dismay the ever deteriorating human rights situation in the occupied territories and the Syrian occupied Golan. It has not been possible to detect much trust among the witnesses on the prospects for peace despite several positive developments in the region and some action taken by Israeli authorities in this regard. The Committee sees it as crucial that Israel take measures to restore trust across communities on the basis that the two-States solution of independent States of Israel and Palestine existing side by side will soon be a tangible reality and, as a consequence, just aspirations of all communities will be met. The Special Committee sincerely hopes that the current developments and changes that are taking place in Israel will offer a window of opportunity to all parties concerned and pave the way for a just and durable peace in the Middle East. The Special Committee in this context calls upon Israel authorities to show restraint and take measures in accordance with the obligations of the Road Map, that will contribute towards improving the human rights situation of the Palestinian people.

Thank You