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**Human Rights Council 25th Session**

**Agenda Item 7**



**Introductory remarks by**

**Ms. Navi Pillay**

**United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**

**Geneva, 24 March 2014**

Mr. President,

Distinguished Members of the Human Rights Council,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to introduce four reports under agenda item 7, concerning the human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories.

In line with Human Rights Council resolutions S-9/1 and S-12/1, I present my sixth periodic report on the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The report, which is based primarily on human rights monitoring carried out by my office in the State of Palestine, highlights issues of concern and sets out recommendations with regard to each of the main duty bearers in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, namely the Government of Israel, the Palestinian Authority and the de facto authorities in Gaza.

By resolution 22/29, the Human Rights Council also requested that I report on the status of implementation of the recommendations contained in the report of the independent international fact-finding mission on the implications of Israeli settlements on the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of the Palestinian people throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. This report, before you today, addresses continued Israeli settlement activity, settler violence and accountability, Palestinian detainees, including children in Israeli custody, as well as the responsibilities of businesses to respect human rights in relation to the settlements. It also includes summaries of submissions received from Member States on steps that their Government had taken, envisaged taking or were otherwise aware of concerning the status of implementation of these recommendations.

There are also two reports by the Secretary-General before you. In accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 22/26 on the Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan, the Secretary-General’s report highlights the impact of the settlement-related activities and planning policies of Israel on Palestinians’ human rights. It describes instances when the Government of Israel has failed to maintain public order, and stresses the almost complete lack of accountability regarding settler violence.

Pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 22/17, the Secretary-General has also submitted a report on human rights in the occupied Syrian Golan. The report contains information provided by the Permanent Missions of the Syrian Arab Republic, of Ireland, of Cuba and of the European Union in response to a note verbale sent by OHCHR, on behalf of the Secretary-General, to all permanent missions in Geneva. The note verbale drew attention to resolution 22/17 and requested information on the implementation of the relevant provisions of the resolution.

Excellencies,

During my mandate as High Commissioner, I have consistently raised concerns regarding the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including during my visit to the region in 2011. I have made constructive and realistic recommendations to all duty-bearers. At this year’s Human Rights Council session, once again I introduce reports which make detailed recommendations that, if implemented, would improve the human rights situation and protect civilians from violence and insecurity. It is my firm belief that in the context of the current political negotiations, addressing key human rights issues would genuinely help to further the peace process and build confidence between the parties.

Allow me to take this opportunity to outline some key concerns and recommendations. In relation to Israeli violations, all the reports before you today highlight the issue of settlements in the context of the Israeli military occupation now in its 47th year. That is because Israeli settlement-related activities and settler violence are at the core of many of the violations of human rights in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Israeli settlements not only have a significant impact on the right to Palestinian self-determination, but settlement related activities and settler violence also violate the entire spectrum of Palestinians’ economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights. Despite repeated calls on Israel to cease settlement activity, ongoing settlement construction and acts of settler violence continue with devastating consequences for Palestinian civilians.

I continue to remain deeply concerned by the situation in Gaza. In recent months, my Office has noted a rise in violence in the Gaza Strip, evidenced by increased rocket and mortar fire directed by Palestinian armed groups at Israel and more Israeli airstrikes on the Gaza Strip. The targeting of civilians and the indiscriminate firing of rockets towards Israel is in violation of international law. The response through air strikes by Israel is excessive and often causes destruction to personal and public property.

At the same time, I am concerned that Israel’s blockade of Gaza, coupled with the recent destruction of most of the tunnel network with Egypt, has led to a significant deterioration of economic and social rights in Gaza. This closure regime is effectively penalizing the civilian population and has far-reaching effects on the enjoyment of their human rights. I reiterate my position that the blockade of Gaza must - and can - be lifted, with due regard to Israeli security concerns.

Another issue that I have consistently raised is that of lack of accountability. There is an urgent need to carry out prompt, thorough, effective, independent and impartial investigations into allegations of unlawful killing or injury and torture and ill-treatment, and to prosecute individuals responsible for violations and provide victims with an effective remedy. This is particularly pertinent given that my Office in the State of Palestine has documented a dramatic increase in fatalities and injuries in incidents of use of force by Israeli security forces in the West Bank in 2013. In this regard, I reiterate my call for implementation of the recommendations regarding accountability for violations of international law made by the Turkel Commission. I urge the Government of Israel to take concrete steps and measures in this regard without delay.

The absence of accountability is also an issue which Palestinian leaders need to address urgently. The lack of effective and transparent investigations, particularly into cases of torture and ill-treatment involving the Palestinian security forces, is of serious concern. Arbitrary detention and ill-treatment, notably of persons suspected of affiliation with the opposing faction, remain an ongoing problem with regard to the Palestinian Authority and the de facto authorities in Gaza.

Excellencies,

I conclude on a positive note, welcoming the good cooperation that my Office enjoys with the Government of the State of Palestine. An example of this cooperation is the collaborative work on the recently endorsed *Guidance Document on Integrating Human Rights into Palestinian National Development Plans*. In January, a significant milestone was reached together with the Palestinian Government when this Guidance Document was formally endorsed. This paves the way for the integration of specific and measurable human rights targets into the current and future Palestinian National Development Plans.

I am also pleased to report that, following suspension of contacts in March 2012 by the Government of Israel with the Human Rights Council and with OHCHR, Israel revised its position on 29 October 2013, when it participated in the second review of Israel under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Subsequently, the Government of Israel has confirmed that it has re-established relations with the Council and with OHCHR. My Office, in the field and at headquarters, remain committed to constructively engage with Israel on human rights issues, including on implementation of the UPR recommendations.

Thank you.