



**Amnesty International Statement at the Special Meeting of the Committee on the Exercise  
of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinians People  
New York, 7 June 2007**

On the occasion of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Amnesty International has published a report calling on the Israeli authorities to end the unlawful settlements, blockades and other violations of international law carried out under the occupation. The report details how the occupation has resulted in persistent and widespread human rights abuses and has also failed to bring security to the Israeli and Palestinian civilian populations.

Amnesty International acknowledges Israel's legitimate security concerns and the government's obligation to protect the population within its borders. But that cannot justify blatant violations of international law, including human rights and humanitarian law.

The High Commissioner for Human Rights only two days ago emphasized that human rights, in the long standing search for a solution, 'have far too long taken a back seat'. She stressed, like Amnesty International, that the conflict must be addressed within the framework of international human rights and humanitarian law. We agree that achieving respect for human rights in the OPT can in fact build greater confidence among the parties and facilitate the search for a lasting solution. For forty years, the international community has failed adequately to address the Israeli-Palestinian problem; it cannot, must not, wait another forty years to do so.

In our report published this week, called *Enduring Occupation: Palestinians under siege in the West Bank*, we describe the devastating impact of four decades of Israeli military occupation. The report documents the relentless expansion of unlawful settlements on occupied land that deprives the Palestinian population of crucial resources. It documents a wide range of measures that confine Palestinians to fragmented enclaves and hinder their access to work, health and education facilities.

These measures include a 700km fence/wall, whose construction on Palestinian land the International Court of Justice in July 2004 found to violate international law, requiring full reparation to all Palestinians affected. This has not happened. If the intention was simply to prevent Palestinian suicide bombers from entering Israel, the barrier would be located on the Green Line, the border between Israel and the West Bank. Yet, the reality is that 80% of the wall/fence is being built on Palestinian land, in defiance of the International Court of Justice, cutting off Palestinians from their families and land and, protecting and making the main Israeli settlements in the West Bank territorially contiguous with Israel. There are more than 500 checkpoints and blockades, and a complicated system of permits. Palestinians living in the West Bank are blocked at every turn. This is not simply an inconvenience -- it can and has been a

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matter of life or death. It is unacceptable that women in labour, sick children, or victims of accidents on their way to hospital should be forced to take long detours and face delays which can and has cost them their lives.

Israeli settlements in the OPT are illegal under international law, notably under Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, that states: "The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population in the territory it occupies". Moreover, a specific burden lies on the Security Council, to ensure implementation of resolution 465 of 1980, that called on Israel "to dismantle the existing settlements and to cease on an urgent basis the establishment, construction and planning of settlements in the Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem".

International action is urgently needed to address the widespread human rights abuses being committed under the occupation, and which are fuelling resentment and despair among a predominantly young and increasingly radicalized Palestinian population. Harsh Israeli restrictions have caused the virtual collapse of the Palestinian economy and have resulted in levels of despair, poverty and food insecurity never before seen in the Occupied Palestinian Territories,

This is also evident in the Gaza strip, where in late May some 50 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli airstrikes, including 20 unarmed civilian bystanders, and, on the other side, two Israeli civilians have been killed by indiscriminate rocket attacks in Sderot by Palestinian armed groups, mostly Hamas. These actions violate international law including the right to life and the prohibition of targeting civilians. We have called on both the Israelis and the Palestinians to immediately end these attacks and on the Palestinian Authority to prevent further rocket attacks.

In our report on the West Bank, we are making a range of detailed recommendations to the Israeli government – notably to stop construction and expansion of Israeli settlements and to stop construction of the fence/wall—and to Palestinian armed groups and the Palestinian authority, as well as to the international community.

For the latter, a key recommendation is the urgent deployment, especially in the West Bank, of an effective international human rights monitoring mechanism to monitor compliance by both parties, Israeli and Palestinian, with their obligations under international law. This must be backed up with a commitment to investigate and prosecute, through the exercise of universal jurisdiction, those who commit war crimes or other crimes under international law.

We do not underestimate the difficulties of establishing such an independent monitoring system, whether by the UN or another appropriate body, but it is vital that the international community, including all UN member States and the Security Council, become more engaged in finding a solution, and in holding the parties to their obligations under international law.

We have therefore written to all members of the Security Council this week, urging the Council to use the monthly discussion on the Middle East:

- First, to take concrete steps to implement its own resolutions including resolution 456;
- Second, to ensure that an effective international human rights monitoring mechanism is established and
- Third, to ensure that any peace process includes concrete provisions that address fundamental human rights at the heart of the conflict, including the removal of Israeli settlements from the OPT, the dismantling of the fence/wall inside the west Bank, ending the closures, ending impunity for serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law and, in the longer term, a fair solution to the refugee question.