

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

Geneva and New York, Monday, 24 November 2008

Peace making is the most ubiquitous theme for discourse at the United Nations. Elusive nature of peace is no more apparent than in the conflict in the Middle East as the agreed goal of Palestine and Israel co-existing securely and peacefully as two States, remains unfulfilled.

The Annapolis conference of 27 November 2007 gave new impetus to direct negotiations towards a two-State solution by the end of 2008. However, as noted by many including our Committee, these goals appear unreachable within the time frames set. We nevertheless derive some optimism from the fact that parties continue to engage in dialogue at different levels and facilitators remain active in supporting and driving such processes. This would naturally help prevent negative developments overshadowing or overtaking the dialogue that is so vital to the goals we all strive for, namely the realisation of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people through the two States solution.

Meanwhile, the Committee remains deeply concerned about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territories. Palestinian economy continues to shrink in the West Bank as a result of the closures, checkpoints, the ongoing construction of the Separation Wall and the increase in the number of settlements and settlers. The effects on the population are worrisome. Not only is the freedom of movement of Palestinians severely curtailed, as it is the enjoyment of their basic economic and social rights, but also the continuing reliance on humanitarian aid and support runs the risk of creating a society afflicted with dependency. Such a society would not be able to sustain and provide for itself in the future.

The deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza, with more than 70 percent of the population living below the poverty line, is deeply distressing, particularly the suffering endured by women and children.

The policy of isolation and sanctioning of Gaza has resulted in an ever worsening humanitarian crisis, not only increasing dependence on humanitarian assistance in the short-term, but also creating an environment of physical destruction and psychological scars that will deprive the enjoyment of human rights by Palestinians for generations to come. The ceasefire that took effect on 19 June 2008 led to some optimism that after a year of heavy restrictions, fuel and other essential goods might enter the Gaza Strip. However, since the ceasefire, there has been no significant improvement in the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. In November though, more than four months into the ceasefire, Israeli

troops entered the Gaza Strip. Rocket attacks have started again, as have Israeli army incursions inside the Strip.

As usual, it is the civilian population paying the higher price. All crossings with the Gaza Strip have been closed; no fuel has been allowed into Gaza for its power station, no food has been allowed in for the United Nations' aid distribution centres on which most Gazans rely. No journalists are being allowed into Gaza. Hospitals and water-sanitation structures are also affected by the lack of electricity and fuel.

The key question remains whether the political process will lead to tangible results for the enjoyment of the human rights of the Palestinian people. The Special Committee would like to recall that the protection of human rights is an essential element for the peace effort to sustain itself and eventually succeed. The respect and protection of the rights of the Palestinian people cannot be put on hold. On this solidarity day the parties concerned and the international community must recommit themselves to pay immediate attention and take immediate measures to address and rectify this situation.

Thank you.
