**NGO Action News**

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**CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE**

**2 March 2018**

* On 22 February, Amnesty International published its 2017/18 report on the State of Palestine. The report documents human rights violations including restrictions on the freedoms of movement, expression and assembly, as well as torture and ill-treatment by Palestinian authorities and Hamas “de facto administration” in Gaza and West Bank.

Middle East

* On 1st March, One State Foundation issued a press release on a new Palestinian-Israeli initiative to “grow debate and support for a one state solution.” The One State Foundation acknowledges the one state reality that has been in place for over 50 years and aims to have “this reality” transformed to one in which all people living under the control of the same state have the same civil, political and socio-economic rights and opportunities regardless of their ethnicity or religion.
* On 28 February, Al Haq issued a statement signed by several other civil society organizations, which calls for the establishment of a fact-finding committee on the question of Palestinian judiciary system. This followed remarks by Judge Abdallah Ghazlan, the oldest presiding judge in the Palestinian High Court, in which he criticized the lack of autonomy in the judicial process and procedural flaws in case adjudication.
* On 28 February, Badil released a joint statement on the threat posed by the Israeli occupation to the Christian holy sites in Jerusalem and the “deliberate violation of [their] status quo”. The statement criticizes Israel’s recent policies and measures to ensure the “Judaization” of Jerusalem, including the revocation and denial of Palestinians residency status, access to civil registration, house demolitions and discriminatory planning and zoning.
* On 28 February, Education Above All (EAA) Foundation, UNDP and UNICEF opened the first ever “Child Friendly School” in Gaza, built out of the ruins of a school destroyed in the 2014 war. Serving 800 students, this school has been re-built with multipurpose buildings and flexible learning spaces.
* On 26February, Kerem Navot NGO released a new report on settlers’ cemeteries in the West Bank. The study documents the presence of some 600 graves in or near ten West Bank settlements that were built on privately owned Palestinian land; or on lands expropriated for security reasons.
* On 23February, Medical Aid for Palestine reported the conclusion of a surgical training programme for medical residents from Gaza. The training aims at improving local surgeon residents’ techniques and material. MAP also reported on the difficulty found to train the residents outside Gaza and to bring surgical material into the city.

North America

* On 20 March, the Harvard University Graduate School of Design is hosting Suad Amiry, architect and founder of RIWAQ – a center for the preservation of architectural heritage on the West Bank –, for a talk on “Reclaiming Space: Riwaq’s 50 Village Project in Rural Palestine”.
* On 10 March, The Boston Coalition for Palestinian Rights is organizing a talk with Ilan Pappe, professor and activist, who taught at the University of Haifa for two decades and is now a professor and director of the European Centre for Palestine Studies at the University of Essex, UK. Pappe will present his new book “Zionism and the Creation of the Biggest Prison on Earth”.
* On 4 and 8 March, the Boston Palestine Film Festival is screening the Palestinian movie “Wajib” by Annemarie Jacir at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The movie was nominated for best foreign language film to the Oscars.
* On 2 March, Washington Report on Middle East Affairs and the Institute for Research: Middle Eastern Policy (IRmep) held a conference on “Israel Lobby and American Policy in 2018” in Washington, D.C. The conference brought scholars, journalists, former government officials and activists to discuss the impact of Israeli lobby on U.S. foreign policy and in Israel.
* On 27 February, Churches for Middle East Peace issued a press release on “The Future of the Christian Church in the Holy Land in Peril” in solidarity with the Christian community in Jerusalem. The statement is based on the Jerusalem municipality’s recent decision to collect taxes on church properties that are not used as places of worship. The decision was deemed “contrary to the historic position of Churches within the Holy City of Jerusalem and their relationship with civil authorities.”

United Nations

* On 27 February, The European Union (EU) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) held a Strategic Dialogue on the way forward for their partnership. The discussion took place in light of the current financial crisis facing UNRWA and the need to broaden its donor base and continue reforming the Agency. In their press release, the EU and UNRWA stated that they remain committed to protecting the rights of Palestine refugees and continue the delivery of essential services to more than 5 million Palestine refugees in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.