Al Mezan Center

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### Press Releases

## 69 Years of the Nakba

# Al Mezan Calls on People Around the World to Stand in Solidarity with the Palestinian People’s Right to Self-Determination

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Monday, 15 May 2017, marks the 69th year since the Nakba, or the Catastrophe – one of the largest ethnic cleansings in modern history and a mass exodus of Palestinian. On 15 May 1948, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forced to leave their homes, their belongings and their land. Today, the fourth generation of Palestinian refugees remain displaced and dispersed both within the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) and neighboring countries, while their right to return and to decide their own destiny is still being denied.

This year’s commemoration of the Nakba comes when the hunger strikes of more than 1,500 Palestinian prisoners is in the 28th day. The strike began in protest against Israel’s practices and policies that enforce cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of prisoners and detainees and violate their basic prisoner and detainee rights. By doing so, the Israeli authorities disregard their obligations under relevant international law, as the Israel Prison Service (IPS) deprives Palestinian prisoners of their right to education, family visits, and subjecting the prisoners to medical and nutritional negligence. Palestinian prisoners are held in inadequate cells that are often too small and too dark. Moreover, the Israeli authorities continue to not only ignore the demands of Palestinian prisoners on strike, but also impose additional punitive procedures such as solitary confinement, denial of daily salt rations, transfer prisoners to other prisons across Israel, which being outside of the oPt is itself in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and deny their right to a lawyer and due process.

69 years of the Nakba will also see the continuation of collective punishment by the Israeli authorities imposed on the population in the Gaza Strip where the siege and closure at their most stringent are now in their 10th consecutive year, after decades of restrictions. The Israeli occupation forces (IOF) continue to perpetrate arbitrary attacks on civilians, destroying vital civilian facilities in their wake, including educational and health facilities, effectively depriving Palestinians of their fundamental human rights. Furthermore, the Israeli authorities intentionally deny patients access to hospitals in East Jerusalem and the broader West Bank, Israel and Jordan. In addition, the IOF actively limits access to the already depleted Palestinian natural resources, by, inter alia, preventing farmers and fishermen from carrying out their daily work. These policies and practices have contributed to very high rates of poverty and unemployment, which further exacerbates the low socioeconomic conditions in Gaza.

In 2016, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics calculated a record-high unemployment rate in the Gaza Strip of 41.7%. According to monthly consumer patterns of 2011, the poverty rate amounts to 38.8%, while the rate of abject poverty rose up to 21.1%. These rates continue to rise daily, and approximately 80% of Gaza’s population still remain food-insecure.

According to the documentation conducted by Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, since the year 2000, the IOF have killed 7,345 people in the Gaza Strip, including 549 women, and 1,708 children. The IOF destroyed and damaged 53,508 houses, 3,906 commercial and industrial facilities and 2,041 public facilities. In the same period, the IOF leveled 52,453 dunams of agricultural lands, while hundreds of dunams of arable land are frequently destroyed through Israel’s chemical spraying of crops in the access restricted areas (ARA) adjacent to the Gaza border with Israel.

In East Jerusalem, the IOF has further intensified their discriminatory actions against Palestinians, including the continued practice of forced evictions and house demolitions, while at the same time encouraging the use of Palestinian-owned land for the building of “public facilities”. These actions have contributed to the displacement of thousands of Palestinians, all while the Jewish-Israeli families are encouraged to reside in Palestinian-owned houses and Jewish-only settlements. Furthermore, Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem face extreme difficulties during protracted and expensive procedures to acquire building permits, all while being required to pay higher taxes that then don’t result in the same level of services that are offered to Jewish Jerusalemites.

The IOF have also escalated their attacks against Palestinian civilians, their properties and against the holy places in East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank. The Palestinian residents in East Jerusalem are faced with restrictions on access to the Old City, which is particularly evident through establishment of additional recurrent “flying” checkpoints, intensified ID checks, arbitrary arrests and torture and/or ill-treatment of Palestinians. The Israeli police and military forces frequently use excessive force and live ammunition against peaceful demonstrations, and often subject demonstrators to arbitrary administrative detention, punitive house demolitions and revocation of residence rights. At the same time, the IOF and Israeli police actively encourage settlers to use firearms against Palestinians, all while enjoying full protection and immunity from prosecution.

In the West Bank, the continued construction of the separation Wall by Israel does not only alter the character of the oPt, but it also undermines any possibility for establishing an independent Palestinian state. The Wall and its progressive construction has already inflicted serious harm on Palestinian property, livelihood and communities. The IOF keeps the majority of Palestinian land in the West Bank under its full control and has already seized 58% of the land. In practice, the route of the Wall which in most places deviates from the Green Line, as well as the system of roads that connect the settlements situated deep inside of the West Bank and are prohibited for Palestinian use have fragmented the West Bank into individual clusters, therewith separating towns and villages from each other and from the adjacent arable land.

Al Mezan strongly condemns Israel’s continued occupation and violations of International Human Rights Law (IHRL) and International Humanitarian Law (IHL) in the oPt. Al Mezan asserts that these, which have persistently been committed by the IOF and Israeli authorities for decades, constitute grave breaches of international law, and that the perpetrators must be held accountable.

Al Mezan therefore calls upon the international community to immediately begin addressing the plight of Palestinian people for self-determination and freedom from alien occupation as a human rights issue, rather than a humanitarian crisis. Human rights are guaranteed under international law and are applicable to all human beings. Israel, as the occupying power, has obligations under IHRL and IHL, which in remaining unfulfilled, require the intervention of the High Contracting Parties. The UN and its member states have the responsibility to end Israeli violations in accordance with international justice principles and related UN resolutions.

Further, Al Mezan calls on people around the world to show solidarity with the Palestinian people and their struggle for freedom and self-determination. Al Mezan calls on citizens of all countries to exert pressure on their governments to take effective measures that will challenge the ongoing Israeli violations and crimes against Palestinians.