



**Statement by 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**

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Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of  
the Occupied Territories**

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*Check Against Delivery*

Mr. Chairman,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honour to introduce the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories to the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly.

Once again, the Special Committee was not allowed by Israel to visit the occupied territories and assess, at first hand, the human rights situation in Palestine. This restriction also prevented any exchange of views with relevant Israeli authorities. You would reckon that the situation in Palestine and indeed the world has changed since the inception of the Special Committee's mandate. A new generation of leaders are taking over leadership, and dialogue and cooperation are now preferred over monologue and confrontation. In this context, the Committee is of the view that the Israel, after 37 years of denying access for the Special Committee to the occupied territories, should revisit the reasons behind such a refusal.

The Special Committee was however able to meet witnesses from occupied territories at locations outside occupied territories and collect sufficient material and evidence regarding the human rights situation affecting Palestinians as well as other Arabs in occupied territories.

During its field Mission from 25 June to 9 July 2005, the Special Committee visited Egypt, Jordan and Syria. In Cairo and Amman, the Committee met altogether 38 witnesses from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Owing to the congestion in Rafah on both sides of the border, five witnesses who had confirmed their attendance were not able to testify before the Committee. Three of them were, however, interviewed by telephone. In Syria, the Committee heard testimonies of 8 witnesses with direct and personal knowledge of the human rights situation in the occupied Syrian Golan.

Despite some positive developments in the aftermath of the Sharm El Sheikh Summit of February 2005 and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip in August 2005, testimonies by witnesses manifest a dire human rights situation in occupied territories. Accordingly, the harshness of the military occupation in the occupied territories and the ill-effects of road closures, checkpoints and Jewish settlements isolating or cutting off Palestinian villages, are negatively impacting all human rights of the Palestinians. The confiscation of land, exploitations of water resources, razing of land and crops, uprooting of trees, as well as destruction of infrastructure and demolition of houses have led several Palestinian witnesses to use the words such as “ethnic cleansing” and “rampant expulsions” to describe their situation.

It has become apparent to the Committee that the construction of the separation wall is violating human rights of the Palestinians not only in respect of freedom of movement, but also the rights related to adequate housing, food, family life, education and health. By all accounts, the wall is affecting the national identity of the Palestinians and their legitimate claims to territories, which not long ago, were contiguous lands.

In this context witnesses also explained as to how Palestinians were losing control over key strategic resources such as water and energy even more with the construction of the wall. Since 1967, according to witnesses, Palestinians have been totally denied access to the waters of the Jordan River basin and allowed only to dig a small number of new wells to replace those destroyed during the war. They now suffer anew due to extensive destructions of groundwater wells, and water pipes due to of the construction of the wall. Many rural communities are forced to look for alternate water sources and often suffer from the ill-effects of contaminated waters and inadequate sewage or sanitation systems. Some testified that during winter 2005, severe flood damages have been caused to homes and crops in several villages of the Qalqiliya region due to the wall obstructing water run-off flows.

Before the construction of the wall, 87 per cent of the population in communities around Jerusalem were said to have access to health care facilities. After the completion of the wall, it is expected that only 39 per cent of Palestinians

will have access to such facilities. Reportedly as many as 120'000 children will be deprived of vaccinations. Reports also indicate that health outreach programmes in some areas have been cut off as a result of the wall and mobile clinics prevented from reaching their patients. Pregnant women are increasingly at risk as they cannot easily access primary health care dispensaries and are held back at check points on their way to hospital at time of delivery.

Several witnesses spoke of attacks against children on their way to school, as well as numerous impediments posed by closures, curfews, and long waiting hours at checkpoints or entry points to the wall. They claimed that this trend indicates a growing, deliberate pattern of behaviour by the occupying power aimed at hampering normal schooling, especially higher education. Most students are unable to enrol in or reach universities outside their locality. Teachers in some areas are unable to reach their workplaces regularly. Teachers and students have to cross checkpoints on foot, risking their safety. The quality of education is also suffering as the Palestinian Ministry of Education has been compelled to recruit teachers who live in the neighbourhood rather than those who are the best qualified, but living elsewhere.

As far as the availability of energy is concerned, the combined effects of the wall, military incursions, confiscation of land for distribution to settlers and road closures have prevented Palestinian electricity companies from maintaining regular supply of power. Often, they are not able to attend to the needs of customers located on the other side of the wall. In Jerusalem, many Palestinians are reportedly deprived of electricity because their houses have been allegedly illegally built.

Women and children are paying a heavy toll due to persistent harsh daily conditions affecting the Palestinians as a whole. Rising unemployment and poverty, along with multifaceted restrictions on movement have prevented vulnerable groups of Palestinians from access to health facilities, generated food insecurity and a decline in nutrition levels. Child malnutrition is reportedly becoming a major concern.

The Special Committee heard with utmost concern that up to 8'500 Palestinians are reportedly detained in Israeli jails, including 110-170 women and 300-330 minors. Allegedly, Palestinian prisoners are subjected to degrading and cruel

treatment including torture. The situation of women detainees was described as dire by several witnesses. The condition of minors imprisoned is no less appalling. Minors are reportedly subjected to various threats such as destruction of their homes, life imprisonment, rape and are sometimes confined in isolated cells.

Several hundred detainees are held in administrative detention for periods indefinitely renewable. Lawyers allegedly continue to work under extreme conditions as they are not regularly informed of hearings concerning their clients or of their postponement and prison visits are often hampered by closures or delays at checkpoints.

In Syria, Government officials and the witnesses attested before the Special Committee describing worsening human rights situation in the occupied Syrian Golan. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Syria 21 out of the 44 existing Israeli settlements were to be expanded and 300 Jewish families one being encouraged to settle in the occupied Golan in the wake of 700 families already settled in the area during the previous four years. Israel has also tightened its grip on the water resources of the occupied Syrian Golan, leaving only 20 per cent of the water supply to Syrian citizens. Landmines are still a threat to the population of the occupied Syrian Golan as they are reportedly often laid close to villages and fields. In one instance, heavy rains washed mines down to the centre of a village causing death and permanent disabilities among the population, particularly the children. The burying of Israeli nuclear waste allegedly continues in a tract of land close to the Syrian border in the vicinity of Jabal al-Sheikh summit which threatens catastrophic ecological consequences.

It is demoralising for the Special Committee to observe deterioration of the human rights situation in occupied territories, especially since it was not possible to detect much trust among the witnesses on the prospects for peace despite new positive developments in the region. This lack of trust on actions taken by Israel authorities in all spheres, seem to pervade through the views of all witnesses. In the view of the Special Committee, it is therefore essential that Israel and the Palestinian Authority take all action possible to build trust among and across communities on the basis that the two-States solution of independent States of Israel and Palestine existing side by

side will be a reality soon and as a consequence just aspirations of all communities will be met. Such confidence building measures in our view will no doubt contribute towards improving human rights situation in occupied territories. The Special Committee also wishes to emphasise that all forms of organised violence, intimidations, harassments and terrorism, attributable to all parties in occupied territories, must be halted as an essential condition to improve human rights of people living in all occupied territories.

The recommendations of our report are very similar to those of last year, as no significant progress has been observed in the daily lives of Palestinians and other Arabs of the occupied territories since our last report. Nevertheless, it is time for the General Assembly to think of innovative ways as to how the UN could fulfil its responsibility with respect to all aspects of the human rights of Palestinian people and Arabs in occupied territories. And, in this context, it is essential that the Special Committee is provided with a renewed mandate that is in line with current realities, taking into account the hopes and aspirations of those living in the occupied territories.

Thank you.