**Palestine |Unarmed protesters massacred in Occupied Palestine as Security Council inaction shields Israel from accountability**

Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies

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So far 18 Palestinians have been reported killed and 1,416 injured by Israel’s use of excessive lethal force to suppress a peaceful demonstration i the Gaza Strip on March 30th. The Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS) expresses its deep concern over the UN Security Council’s failure to respond to this latest grave violation of humanitarian law by Israeli occupying forces. This represents only the latest of many Security Council failures to protect the lives and fundamental human rights of Palestinian civilians living under a brutal and prolonged military occupation by holding Israel accountable for the grave violations it routinely inflicts upon them.

Thousands of Palestinians marched peacefully towards the closure’s fence in the Gaza Strip on March 30, which marks the occasion of Land Day. The protesters demanded their right to return to the homes they had been expelled from beginning in1948; a right enshrined by UN General Assembly Resolution 194 of December 1948.They also demanded the end of the eleven-year long blockade of the Gaza Strip, which is causing a dire humanitarian crisis for its two million residents. Instead of addressing the peaceful protesters’ legitimate demands, the Israeli occupying forces unleashed disproportionate lethal force against them; executing unarmed civilians protesting Israel’s 70-year denial of their right to return through expulsion and dispossession.

Several human rights groups and UN officials, including the UN Secretary General (UNSG), called for an investigation into the premeditated use of lethal force by Israeli soldiers against peaceful protesters. Despite these calls, during an emergency meeting on April 1, the Security Council failed to vote on a statement expressing concern over the excessive use of violence and calling for impartial investigations. The statement was blocked by the United States and Great Britain. Israeli officials have explicitly refused to conduct or cooperate with any probes, stating that the soldiers who murdered unarmed Palestinian civilians deserve medals instead of being held accountable.

Over the years, Israel has largely profited from international mechanisms’ failure to end impunity for grave international human rights and humanitarian law violations. A report by the Office of High Commissioner in 2017 concluded that impunity is the international community’s major concern in regards to Israel. The report documented that 27% of all human rights recommendations to Israel are related to a lack of adequate mechanisms to bring perpetrators of international crimes to justice. In 2016, the UNSG considered that “the lack of any significant movement towards a political resolution and ongoing violations of international human rights and humanitarian law are exacerbated by the lack of accountability for previous violations. That feeds the cycle of violence and compromises chances for sustainable peace and security. Tackling impunity must be the highest priority.”

The UN Security Council must put an end to its practice of shielding rogue states from being held accountable for unapologetic criminal behavior. Permitting the law of the most powerful to prevail clearly contradicts the UN Charter and the principles underlying the international order that are intended to ensure peace and security. CIHRS fears that the lack of an appropriate response from UN member States to the Council’s failure will only exacerbate the conflict in the Middle East. States and non-state armed groups and actors will be emboldened to take the law into their own hands through the use of force.

CIHRS calls on member States to immediately respond to the Security Council’s failure by creating the necessary mechanisms to ensure deterrence and justice for the victims. CIHRS calls on:

* The UN General Assembly to immediately convene the 10th Special Emergency Session concerning “Illegal Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory,” which was established on the basis of the Uniting for Peace resolution 377A to decide on effective measures to protect Palestinians under occupation from the disproportionate use of force.
* The Human Rights Council to immediately call for an emergency session in order to establish a permanent investigative mechanism on grave violations of human rights and humanitarian law in the OPT.