**Palestine | The massacre must stop: Israel slaughters civilians calling for basic rights on the 70th anniversary of Al Nakba**

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Over 60 Palestinians have been killed, and more than 2000 civilians were wounded by the Israeli occupation forces during marches in the Occupied Palestinian Territory between yesterday and today, May 15th. CIHRS condemns, in the strongest terms, the unrestrained brutality of the Israeli occupation forces in suppressing the peaceful Palestinian marches, most particularly those taking place on the eastern borders of the Gaza Strip. The marches called for right to return for Palestinian refugees, who have endured seven decades of expulsion and dispossession since the Al Nakba, or Palestinian catastrophe, the annual commemoration of which was being observed by the marchers today. The marchers were also demonstrating against the American administration’s unlawful move of the US embassy in illegally annexed East Jerusalem, which took place yesterday May 14th.

Hundreds of thousands of Gazan residents peacefully marched to the borders. The largest majority of Gaza Strip residents (almost 70%) are refugees; who, since March 30th, have been organizing weekly marches demanding their right to return to their land, and to protest the atrocious living conditions caused by over a decade of the full closure of the Gaza Strip. The response to these marches was the intentional use of live ammunition, with the aim to kill. Israeli forces also deployed explosive ammunition, indiscriminately mauling civilians and inflicting severe, long-term harm and handicaps, including amputations. In total, 101 Palestinians were killed in these demonstrations over the past two and a half months.

The willful killing of unarmed protestors is constitutive of a war crime according to international criminal law, and a grave breach of the basic principles of international humanitarian law. In their policing activities, Israeli forces are prohibited from using lethal force unless there is an imminent threat to the lives of the security forces.

Such criminal conduct against unarmed civilians would not have been possible if regional powers, in particular member states of the Arab League such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt, had used their influence to prevent or even mitigate the unprecedented crackdown on Palestinian civilians and their inalienable rights. Leaders from both countries have repeatedly undermined the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people in public statements over the past few months. This shows that beyond the rhetoric, these state governments have given the green light for the abandonment of the Palestinian cause; now lifting the traditional support for Palestinians and leaving them to their own fate.

The massacre also coincides with the inauguration of the US embassy in a settler neighborhood of the occupied and illegally annexed East Jerusalem. The move of the embassy to this particular location expresses stronger, than any words could, the American government’s full complicity in the ongoing denial of the Palestinian people’s rights, and its complete political backing of the settler colonial occupation regime imposed on Palestinians for the last half a century.

This is yet another of many traumatic days in the lives of the Palestinian people, who continue to suffer from the effects of Al-Nakba, 70 years later. In 1948, almost a million Palestinians were forcibly transferred from their lands and homes and hundreds of city and towns were destroyed by Jewish militias and armed groups which later formed the Israeli army. Today, eleven million refugees are kept in a constant state of flux defined by the denial of their fundamental rights. The Palestinian people as a whole continue to be prevented from exercising their right to self-determination in their homeland. The Nakba has never ended for Palestinians; to this day, they continue to suffer from the same policies of forcible displacement, expulsion, and property dispossession. This has particularly escalated since 1967, when the remaining part of mandate Palestine was placed under a settler colonial military occupation. Israeli occupation forces are relentlessly working to transfer new settler populations onto Palestinian land, and encircling Palestinians within segregated enclaves.

CIHRS reiterates that the Palestine problem is first and foremost an international problem. The UN and individual member states have an unequivocal responsibility to bring this tragedy to end by assuming their obligations and implementing the recurrent resolutions that affirm Palestinian rights, and drawing the parameters of a just solution to the conflict. CIHRS calls on the competent UN bodies and agencies to immediately create adequate mechanisms to protect Palestinian civilians under occupation, and ensure accountability for crimes by investigating the events and identifying the perpetrators.

CIHRS further calls on the Office of the Prosecutor at the International Criminal Court to conclude its preliminary examination and begin reviewing cases of alleged international crimes committed in occupied Palestine. CIHRS also appeals to all State members of the international community, individually and collectively, to uphold their responsibility towards the Palestinian people by forcing Israeli compliance to international law and enabling the Palestinian people to fully exercise their right to self-determination. This includes the review of trade, diplomatic and other dealings with Israel, the occupying power.