*Unofficial Transcript by Human Rights Voices*

November 29, 2016

**Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Special meeting in Observance of the “International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People”**

chairman of the special committee to investigate israeli practices affecting the human rights of the palestinian people and other arabs of the occupied territories (sri lanka): Thank you, Mr. Chairman; Ambassador Djani, Vice Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People; His Excellency Mr. Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine; Excellencies; colleagues on the podium; ladies and gentlemen.

I’m honored to address this special meeting to commemorate the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestine people, and I take this opportunity to thank Mr. Ambassador Fodé Seck, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, for the kind invitation extended to me to address the special meeting in my capacity as Chairperson of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories. The International Day of Solidarity reminds us of the urgent need to find a just and peaceful solution to the question of Palestine and most importantly, to address the plight of the Palestinian people, in particular, its women and children, and to provide for their humanitarian needs.

Mr. Chairperson, earlier this year in Amman, civil society representatives, victims and witnesses of the Israeli practices affecting human rights of the Palestinian people, as well as the Palestinian and United Nations officials briefed the Special Committee on the situation of human rights within the occupied Palestinian territories and the occupied Syrian Golan. These briefings and testimonies once again brought to the attention of the committee the daily violence and humiliations suffered by Palestinian men, women, and children whose every aspect of life continues to be controlled by the unlawful occupation.

Settlement expansion has had a direct impact on the escalation of violence in the occupied territories and has largely contributed to the increase in the number of civilian casualties that include infants. The latest statistics from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs indicate that as of mid-October, 83 Palestinians were killed in the occupied West Bank and 8 Palestinians killed in Gaza by Israel security forces in 2016. During the same period, 2,978 Palestinians were injured in the occupied West Bank and 184 Palestinians injured in Gaza.

Mr. Chairperson, according to information placed before the Special Committee, many of these incidents involved attacks reported to have been perpetrated by young Palestinians or during security raids into the homes of Palestinians suspected of involvement in these attacks. However, a significant number were also reported to have taken place in the context of clashes between Palestinians and the occupying security forces. These numbers speak for themselves and illustrate the scale of the violence confronted on a daily basis by Palestinian men, women, and children.

The Special Committee viewed the video footage of the killing of the Palestinian man, Abed al-Fattah al-Sharif, in Hebron in March, this year. Sadly, this was not one isolated incident, but the most publicized, following the uploading of the video on YouTube. The Palestinian Commission of Detainees and Ex-Detainees has reported at least 17 separate cases of alleged extrajudicial executions, including of children, carried out by the occupying forces since October 2015. The Special Committee appeals to the parties concerned to act proportionally and with restraint in accordance with United Nations basic principles on the use of force and firearms by law enforcement officials.

Mr. Chairperson, we must remain deeply concerned of reports that dozens of families of Palestinians killed have been denied the right to a proper and dignified closure on the basis of what is called security concerns. While many of the bodies have now reportedly been released, conditions have been imposed regarding the release of bodies, such as the prohibition of autopsies and limitations on funeral rights. According to testimonies before the Special Committee, Israeli practices have often included state-sanctioned land seizures, retroactive legalization of outposts, demolition of Palestinian homes and livelihood structures, denial of Palestinian building permits, restriction of movements or access to livelihood, or lack of accountability for settler violence.

Year after year, for the best part of half a century, since the establishment of the Special Committee, the information received by the committee has affirmed the trends and patterns of human rights violations associated with the occupation and its inextricable link to settlement enterprise. Israeli authorities also reportedly demolished or sealed at least 37 homes since October 2015 to punish relatives of Palestinians who attacked Israelis or were suspected of such attacks, leaving dozens of innocent Palestinian families and their children homeless and displaced. These punitive demolitions and other punitive practices constitute a form of collective punishment which is a clear breach of international law and must be brought to an end.

Mr. Chairperson, an emerging issue of particular concern brought to the attention of the Special Committee has been the threats and intimidation against human rights defenders and non-governmental organizations, particularly local Palestinian and Israeli organizations working to promote human rights in the occupied territories. The situation of Palestinian detainees, including women and children, must remain a serious concern for the international community. The latest reported statistics as of August 2016 suggest that there are an estimated 7,000 Palestinian detainees held in Israeli custody, including 340 children under 18 years old, 56 female detainees, and 6 members of the Palestinian Legislative Council.

An estimated 700 Palestinians are reported to be held under administrative detention without charge or trial for an indefinite period of time. These administrative detainees must either be released without delay or promptly charged or prosecuted with all the judicial guarantees required by human rights law and standards.

Mr. Chairperson, the Special Committee's report also covers the situation in Gaza, where Israel's land closure and naval blockade has now entered its 10th year. Two years after the most devastating escalation of hostilities, an estimated 85,000 Palestinians remain displaced. Reports indicate that there has been chronic de-development over the past nine years with per capita incomes up to 30% lower than 2005. According to the report of the Special Committee, unemployment in Gaza stands at 38.4% with youth and women's unemployment at a staggering 60% and 84% respectively. The economic situation has not been helped by Palestine's state of energy dependence and Israel's exploitation of natural resources, including oil and gas, which is also covered in the Special Committee report.

Mr. Chairperson, while we here today pledge our solidarity to the people of Palestine, I wish to acknowledge with deep appreciation the work done by United Nations Relief and Works Agency, UNRWA, and for the tireless efforts taken by the agency to provide care and deliver vital human development services and emergency assistance to some 5.2 million Palestine refugees in all fields of operations in the Gaza Strip, West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon, and the Syrian Arab Republic since 1950. In the face of such misery, UNRWA's support has been invaluable in maintaining schools and education infrastructure in the occupied territories that are of crucial importance in order for Palestinian children and youth not only to turn away from violence, but also to inspire in them hope for the future, even in such dire circumstances.

Mr. Chairperson, as Chair of the Special Committee, I repeat the call for a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine and an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people. Both parties of the conflict must create the necessary environment to facilitate peace. There's an urgent need for mutual confidence-building measures in support of efforts to resume dialogue and substantive negotiations. Israel must protect the Palestinian civilian population in the occupied territories and desist from actions that are contrary to the established rules of international law and practice. We reiterate our support for the implementation of the UN resolution regarding inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to statehood and the attainment of the two-state solution based on the 1967 borders.

Mr. Chairperson, we're encouraged that despite decades of disappointment, the people of Palestine have resolutely sustained their spirit and the strength of purpose to gain their legitimate rights and have prevailed over the considerable challenges facing them. We hope that the Palestinian people will work together to preserve national unity, for it is imperative for the creation of a fully sovereign independent Palestine. Every day, the resilience and endurance of the people of Palestine inspire us. Surely, it must also energize and motivate us to act now. It is not a fight they can fight alone. It is a fight we must fight together as a global community.

I thank you.