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STATEMENT BY BUREAU OF COMMITTEE ON EXERCISE OF INALIENABLE RIGHTS
OF PALESTINIAN PEOPLE ON OCCASION OF PALESTINIAN PRISONERS DAY

The Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People issued the following statement today, 16 April:

On the occasion of the Palestinian Prisoners Day, 17 April, the Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People expresses its grave concern about the plight of Palestinian prisoners and detainees in Israeli prisons and detention facilities.

It is estimated that over 750,000 Palestinians have been arrested by Israel since the beginning of the occupation in 1967. At the end of February 2013, there were 4,700 Palestinians in Israeli prisons, 235 of them children and 10 of them women, as well as 169 administrative detainees that are imprisoned without charge or trial.

Of particular concern is the situation of vulnerable people — children, women, the elderly and the infirm — in Israeli prisons. In a recently released report, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) said that each year, approximately 700 Palestinian children aged 12 to 17 were arrested, interrogated and detained by Israeli army, police and security agents. In the past 10 years, an estimated 7,000 children had been detained, interrogated, prosecuted and/or imprisoned by the Israeli military. UNICEF confirmed that the cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment of Palestinian children in the Israeli detention system was widespread, systematic and institutionalized, in violation of article 37 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

There is hardly any Palestinian family that has not been affected by the ongoing campaign of arrests, harassment and intimidation carried out by the Israeli occupying forces. The arbitrary Israeli military law criminalizes legitimate protest against the occupation. Palestinians are tried in military courts, which do not meet the minimum international standards of fairness, independence and impartiality. In contravention to international law, they often are convicted on secret evidence, based on confessions extracted under duress or torture, denied the right to a lawyer, with children tried as adults. Many Palestinians do not even get a trial. They suffer in detention, sometimes for years, not charged with any specific offence. These actions by the occupying Power directly contravene article 71 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The conditions of detention of Palestinians in Israeli prisons continue to be a source of grave concern. Prisoners are thronged together in overcrowded and unsanitary facilities, denied access to health services, abused, beaten and humiliated by the guards, subjected to solitary confinement, with family visits severely restricted, all in contravention of provisions contained in the Fourth Geneva Convention regarding the treatment of protected persons. We are particularly alarmed by continued reports of torture and other forms of ill treatment.

The ongoing critical situation of Palestinian prisoners and detainees has led to raised tensions and is causing further instability in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. The plight of several Palestinian prisoners and detainees who are undertaking long-term hunger strikes to protest abuses

and violations of their fundamental human rights has brought the prisoner issue to the fore. The current crises require the urgent attention and intervention of the international community.

The Bureau of the Committee calls upon Israel, the occupying Power, to implement international humanitarian law and previous agreements with regard to its treatment of Palestinian prisoners and detainees. The deaths of prisoners under questionable circumstances should be promptly investigated by an independent authority. A humane solution must be urgently found for the long-term hunger strikers in accordance with international legal standards and principles. Administrative detainees should be charged and face trial, or promptly released. Israel must respect the right to peaceful protest and act with restraint while protests should be kept completely non-violent.

On its part, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People will continue to keep the situation under review and raise international awareness on the issue of Palestinian prisoners, as it did in 2011 and 2012 with two of its international meetings specifically devoted to this crucial issue, and to call for the release of all Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. The Committee will also continue to appeal to the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to ensure respect by the occupying Power for its provisions on the treatment of civilians under its occupation, including Palestinian prisoners and detainees.

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