

**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 presenting its thirty-ninth
annual report**

New York

12 November 2007

Chairperson, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honour to address you as Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories and to present to you the Special Committee's thirty-ninth report. The occupied territories covered by the Special Committee's mandate are the occupied Palestinian territories, namely, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, as well as the occupied Syrian Golan. The occupation of these territories has now continued for four decades.

For thirty-nine years now, Israel has denied the Special Committee access to the occupied territories covered by its mandate. In keeping with past practice, the Special Committee undertook to acquaint itself with the situation of human rights in the occupied territories it is mandated to consider by making use of a wide variety of sources which included written materials as well as contacts with Governments in the region, United Nations actors, civil society, non-governmental organizations, academics and private individuals. In order to gain the best possible insight into the situation of human rights in the occupied territories, the Committee travelled to Egypt, Jordan and Syria from 21 July to 4 August 2007 where it met with numerous interlocutors including 37 witnesses with first-hand information about the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories and the occupied Syrian Golan. We are very grateful to the Governments of Egypt, Jordan and Syria for facilitating the work of the Special Committee to carry out its mandate in a sufficiently effective manner.

The Special Committee's report covers, among other things, the crucial issues of self-determination; the right to life, the right to freedom of movement, the separation wall; settlements and settler violence; the rights to health and education; the right to liberty and security of person and the situation of human rights in the occupied Syrian Golan.

After forty years of occupation, the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination appears more elusive than ever as a result of the violations by Israel, the occupying Power, of a whole range of human rights and international humanitarian law, in the occupied territories. The situation of human rights in the occupied Syrian Golan has also not improved either. Particularly striking at this time when preparations are being made for a

political dialogue at the end of this month, is the glaring discrepancy between rhetoric and the deteriorating human rights situation on the ground.

The occupied Palestinian territories, a single territorial unit envisaged under the Oslo Accords, are now more divided than ever before, owing to the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip through the closure of all crossing points since June 2007 and Israel's continued control over its territorial waters and airspace aggravating the occupation. During the current reporting period, in addition to being cut off from the rest of the world, Gaza has been subjected to economic sanctions by Israel and by some in the international community and is surviving on emergency humanitarian assistance. On 7th November, the Commissioner-General of UNRWA stated that 80 per cent of the population in Gaza was now living on World Food Programme or UNRWA rations. There has been a 71 per cent decrease in goods entering the Gaza Strip, including food, drugs and other medicines and there are zero stocks in 91 different drugs.

The situation in Gaza deteriorated further when it was declared "hostile territory" or "enemy entity" by the Israeli Cabinet on 19th September. Since then a number of Israeli banks have stopped dealing with banks in Gaza which makes the sending of remittances from abroad more and more difficult and is starting to cause cash shortages. At the end of October, in violation of international law, the Government of Israel started reducing fuel and electricity supplies to the Gaza Strip which is likely to endanger, among other things, the functioning of hospitals and sewage and water services. This hits the civilian population hardest. This is in contravention of Israel's obligations as the occupying Power under international humanitarian law and amounts to collective punishment of almost 1.5 million inhabitants.

During the current reporting period, the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian crisis in Gaza has been compounded by regular military incursions by land forces which have resulted in deaths, injuries and the destruction of property, including by repeated shelling and air strikes. Targeted assassinations of militants in which innocent civilians are often hurt or killed have continued unabated. On 20th October, the Israeli army killed two fishermen. Seriously ill Palestinian patients from Gaza have increasingly been denied access to hospitals in Israel and their number has fallen from an average of 40 in July to less than five a day in September. Currently some 350 patients from Gaza in need of treatment are unable to travel due to Israeli restrictions. In October, a 21-year-old cancer patient from Gaza died after his entry into Israel was delayed for 10 days. On 29 October the Supreme Court of Israel ordered the Israeli Government to justify its stranglehold on the Gaza Strip.

The situation of human rights in the West Bank has also continued to deteriorate during the period under review. The inhabitants of the West Bank are subjected to severe restrictions of their right to freedom of movement which are implemented through more than five hundred checkpoints, roadblocks and other types of physical obstacles as well as a strict system of permits. The freedom of movement and other human rights have been

affected in a particularly negative manner by the construction of the separation wall, 80 per cent of which is being built in occupied territory. The separation wall is taking in the best Palestinian agricultural land and other resources. With recent extensions in the south, the separation wall will now encompass some 13 per cent of the West Bank. The 2004 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the legal consequences of the building of the separation wall in occupied Palestinian territory has gone unheeded to date.

There are 149 settlements in the West Bank inhabited by some 480,000 settlers. On 7 November the Israeli NGO "Peace Now" published a report on settlement construction indicating that during the Committee's current reporting period settlement activity has accelerated. Israeli human rights organizations have reported a sharp increase in violent attacks against Palestinians by settlers and Israeli Security Forces since March 2007. This involves physical attacks against persons, destruction of property and agricultural land, including olive trees and preventing Palestinians from harvesting their crops. In addition to the confiscation of Palestinian-owned land for settlements, land in the West Bank is also taken by the elaborate network of bypass roads. On 24th September the Israeli army announced new land confiscation for a road east of Jerusalem which would further cut the city off from the rest of the West Bank. The West Bank is increasingly being fragmented into ever smaller parts which affects the viability of a Palestinian state.

The cities and towns of the West Bank are subjected to regular and repeated military incursions in which large numbers of troops and vehicles are deployed. The constant arrest and search operations have increased during the period under review. Targeted assassinations continue. There are now some 11,000 Palestinian prisoners detained in Israel of whom almost 400 are children. In October a Palestinian prisoner was killed during a riot in an Israeli prison.

The situation of human rights in the occupied Syrian Golan has not improved in the course of the period under review. According to reports received by the Special Committee, the number of Israeli settlers in the Syrian Golan has increased and settlements have expanded and arbitrary practices affect people, land and livestock. Syrian citizens of the Golan are reportedly denied access to water resources and have been exposed to the danger of landmines. Syrian workers in the occupied Golan face problems of unemployment and job insecurity and many are under employed. There are currently some 15 citizens from the occupied Syrian Golan in Israeli prisons. The Committee was also informed that there is a chronic shortage of health centres and clinics in the five occupied Arab villages in the Golan.

The international community, acting through the United Nations, needs to take determined and urgent measures to remedy the current situation of human rights in the occupied Arab territories. A peaceful, just and lasting solution would lead to the end of the occupation and the enjoyment of human rights by all the inhabitants of the occupied Arab territories. An end of the

occupation would also enable the Palestinian people to exercise their right to self-determination in a viable Palestinian state.

Thank you for your attention.