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Permanent sovereignty of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan over their natural resources

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Economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan**

Economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan

Note by the Secretary-General

Summary

In its resolution [2019/29](#), entitled “Economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan”, the Economic and Social Council requested the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its seventy-fourth session, through the Council, a report on the implementation of that resolution. The Assembly, in its resolution [74/243](#) entitled “Permanent sovereignty of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan over their natural resources”, requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its seventy-fifth session on the implementation of that resolution. The present report, which was prepared by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, has been submitted in compliance with the resolutions of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly.

The report covers persistent Israeli practices and policies, particularly those that are in violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law and that affect the social and economic conditions of the people living under its military occupation.

* [A/75/50](#).



I. Introduction

1. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution [2019/29](#), expressed concern about the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan. The General Assembly, in its resolution [74/243](#), demanded that Israel, the occupying Power, cease the exploitation, damage, cause of loss or depletion and endangerment of the natural resources in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan. The present note provides information on relevant developments with regard to the foregoing.

II. Occupied Palestinian Territory

Israeli practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

2. As previously reported, the Israeli zoning and planning policies in Area C, which constitutes 60 per cent of the West Bank, and East Jerusalem, are discriminatory and are considered incompatible with requirements under international law. While allocating land almost exclusively to Israeli settlements or to the military and facilitating the growth of Israeli settlements, these policies make it almost impossible for Palestinians to obtain building permits.¹ The average rate of approval of Palestinian applications for building permits in Area C during the 2010s stood at 3 to 4 per cent.² As a result, many Palestinians are compelled to build without a permit, risking eviction, house demolition and displacement.³

3. The operational environment in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, continues to be characterized by territorial fragmentation and systematic limitation to the future expansion and connectivity of Palestinian communities, particularly in Area C.⁴

4. Israeli policies and practices also entail discrimination in service provision. For example, Palestinians constitute 30 per cent of the population in Jerusalem. They pay 40 per cent of the total value in taxes that the Israeli municipality collects, yet, the municipality only allocates 8 per cent of tax revenues to the services provided to the Palestinians.⁵

5. Palestinians in the occupied territory continue to be subject to a complex combination of Israeli and Palestinian legal systems. In the West Bank, Israeli domestic law is applied extraterritorially to Israeli settlers, while Palestinians are subject to Israeli military law in addition to the Palestinian legal system. As a result, lower human rights standards are applied to Palestinian suspects and defendants compared with Israeli suspects and defendants. The application of two different legal systems in the same territory on the sole basis of nationality or origin is inherently discriminatory and violates the principle of equality before the law, which is central to the right to a fair trial. The application of Israeli domestic law to settlers and of Israeli military law to Palestinians in the West Bank also raises concerns as to the

¹ See [A/HRC/43/67](#), para. 30.

² United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), “West Bank: Area C – key humanitarian concerns”, fact sheet, 21 December 2017.

³ United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) input.

⁴ UN-Habitat input.

⁵ State of Palestine, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, “H.E. Dr. Awad, highlights the forty four annual commemoration of Land Day in statistical figures”, 29 March 2020.

obligation of the occupying Power to respect the laws in force in the territory it occupies, unless it is absolutely prevented from doing so.⁶

6. In September 2019, settlers established a new outpost, Keidar East, east of Jerusalem. In protest, Palestinians set up a tent a dozen metres from the outpost. In a seemingly discriminatory enforcement of Israeli law, Israeli authorities demolished the tent two days later, but did not dismantle the outpost. Even when demolition orders targeting Palestinian and settler populations are comparable in percentages, Palestinians seem to be disproportionately affected given the discrepancy in the amount of land allocated to Palestinian and settlement construction.⁷

Violence and the use of force

7. As the occupying Power, Israel has the obligation to take all the measures in its power to restore and ensure, as far as possible, public order and life in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and to protect the Palestinian population from all acts of violence, in all circumstances (see [A/74/357](#), para. 26).⁸

8. Practices of the military and security forces of Israel continue to raise concerns, especially with respect to the excessive use of force and, in some cases, unwarranted force amounting to arbitrary deprivation of life.⁹

9. Of particular and grave concern is the recurrent use by Israeli security forces of crowd control means against children inside and near schools close to settlements. Documented cases reveal the unwarranted use of force and violations of the right to physical and mental integrity of Palestinian children.¹⁰

10. Between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020, 113 Palestinians, including 21 children (20 boys and 1 girl) and 7 women, were killed, while another 10,764 Palestinians, including 413 women and 4,247 children (4,106 boy and 141 girls) were injured by the Israeli military, by Israeli security forces or by Israeli settlers. During the previous reporting period, 299 people were killed and 32,696 were injured. At least 18 of the fatalities, including 6 children, and 7,605 injuries, including 2,784 children (2,714 boys and 70 girls), occurred during demonstrations, mostly related to the Great March of Return protests in Gaza.¹¹ The high incidence of severe injuries during demonstrations continues to put a strain on an already overburdened health sector.¹²

11. Since the start of the Great March of Return protests in Gaza on 30 March 2018, the World Health Organization (WHO) has recorded 565 incidents involving health-care workers, transportation and facilities in Gaza. Three health-care workers wearing clear markings were killed and 844 were injured. A total of 118 ambulances, 10 other forms of medical transport were damaged, as were 1 hospital and 6 other health-care facilities. A total of 68 incidents involving health-care workers in the West Bank were recorded in 2019, including 33 physical attacks against health-care staff and 9 incidents of obstruction of medical teams. A 17-year-old first responder was shot

⁶ See [A/71/86-E/2016/13](#), para. 7; [A/72/90-E/2017/71](#), para. 4; and [A/73/87-E/2018/69](#), para. 3; see also [A/HRC/43/67](#), para. 29.

⁷ See [A/HRC/43/67](#), paras. 11 and 12.

⁸ See the Regulations annexed to the Hague Convention IV of 1907, arts. 43 and 46; and the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, art. 27.

⁹ See [A/74/468](#), para. 10. See also the Hague Regulations, arts. 43 and 46; Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, art. 27.

¹⁰ See [A/74/357](#), para. 68.

¹¹ OCHA in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, "Data on casualties". Available at www.ochaopt.org/data/casualties (accessed on 31 March 2020).

¹² World Health Organization (WHO) input.

and killed in Dheisheh refugee camp while providing medical assistance during an Israeli army raid.¹³

12. The Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories has expressed serious concern over the prevailing culture of impunity, in particular in cases pertaining to the apparent excessive use of force by Israeli security forces in both the West Bank and Gaza.¹⁴

13. Israel had announced the launching of investigations into the killings of Palestinians, including of two children. However, out of 226 cases, only 55 were examined and 10 criminal investigations were launched by the military, in addition to another 3 launched by the police. Media reports indicate that a number of investigations previously opened have been closed with no indictments. Only one soldier was sentenced to one month in prison, to be served through military-related labour, for unlawfully shooting a 15-year-old teenage protester. Similarly, the Military Advocate General has stated that out of 360 cases of possible violations of international humanitarian law along the Gaza border fence, 189 had been closed as at August 2018 without criminal charges being brought or any further action taken, except in relation to three soldiers who were convicted on theft and looting charges.¹⁵

Settler violence

14. Settler violence adversely affects the rights of Palestinian people, including the rights to security of person, freedom of movement, privacy, family life, an adequate standard of living, work and education.¹⁶ Combined with the failure of the Israeli authorities to protect the Palestinian population and to hold perpetrators of violence accountable, settler violence is an important factor of the coercive environment that may leave some Palestinians no other choice than to leave their places of residence. Involuntary moves of that nature could amount to forcible transfer.¹⁷

15. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) recorded 340 attacks resulting in Palestinian casualties or damage to their property, up 21 per cent compared with 2018 and 116 per cent compared with 2017. Seven Palestinian girls and 54 boys were injured in such attacks between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020.¹⁸

16. While efforts by the authorities to prevent and investigate settler-related violence are being made, further measures need to be taken to prevent or investigate cases of settler violence and prosecute perpetrators. In a report issued in August 2019, the Ministry of Justice of Israel listed 118 investigations into alleged crimes by settlers against Palestinians for the period from January 2017 to June 2019. While 11 indictments were filed, including for cases opened in previous years, and two cases reached trial, none resulted in a conviction.¹⁹

17. It also remains common, as previously documented, for the Israeli security forces not to prevent attacks or to fail to react to attacks occurring in their presence. Moreover, in some cases, Israeli security forces appeared to aid settlers in carrying out attacks and appeared to have used force against the protected population instead of protecting it. Several incidents in the H2 zone of Hebron occurred in the presence

¹³ WHO input.

¹⁴ See [A/74/356](#), para. 46.

¹⁵ See [A/74/468](#), paras. 12 and 13; Israel Defense Forces, "Operation Protective Edge legal updates", available at www.idf.il; Judah Ari Gross, "In first, soldier convicted over killing of Gaza rioter, gets one-month sentence", *Times of Israel*, 29 October 2019.

¹⁶ See [A/HRC/40/42](#), para. 24.

¹⁷ See [A/74/357](#), para. 38.

¹⁸ OCHA in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, "Data on casualties" (accessed on 31 March 2020).

¹⁹ See [A/HRC/43/67](#), para. 27.

of Israeli security forces, at times with their direct participation, or were followed by measures and operations against Palestinians.²⁰

18. In the weeks following the outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, between 1 March and 13 April, there were 53 settler attacks resulting in injuries or property damage, an 80 per cent increase when compared with January and February 2020.²¹

Detention and ill-treatment

19. By 31 March 2020, 4,488 Palestinian “security detainees” and prisoners were being held in Israeli prisons, including 194 children, 43 women and 7 members of the Palestinian Legislative Council. A total of 424 Palestinians, including 3 women and at least 2 minors, were being held in administrative detention.²²

20. Most Palestinian prisoners continued to be held in Israel, which, in many cases, restricted their right to family visits from the West Bank and Gaza.²³

21. Concerns about possible arbitrary detention by Israeli authorities, including administrative detention without charge, persisted. Administrative detainees are held without trial or charge, often on the basis of secret information that is not shared with the suspects or their lawyers. It is a renewable six-month detention that is usually renewed. It is governed by orders signed by a military authority (i.e., a non-judicial authority).²⁴

22. Also of concern are the continuous reports of ill-treatment and torture of Palestinian detainees, including women and children, older persons, and persons with disabilities, which persist. Women and girls are reportedly subject to sexual harassment, verbal abuse and physical assault. They are incarcerated in prisons with facilities that do not meet gender-specific needs or provide gender-sensitive social services.²⁵

23. In November 2018, the High Court of Justice of Israel issued a ruling upholding the legality of “special interrogation methods” in particular circumstances, potentially setting a precedent for other cases in which the Israeli security agencies can resort to physical and psychological coercion.²⁶

24. Children have reported ill-treatment during arrest, transfer and detention, including breaches of due process, by Israeli military, police and security apparatuses, as well as the Israel Prison Service.²⁷ This reinforces serious concerns about such practices with regard to Palestinian children’s rights, particularly during the phase of arrest, including practices aimed at extracting confessions.²⁸

²⁰ See A/74/357, paras. 50, 54, 55 and 75; see also see B’Tselem – Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, *Playing the Security Card: Israeli Policy in Hebron as a Means to Effect forcible Transfer of Local Palestinians* (Jerusalem, 2019).

²¹ OCHA, “Protection of civilians, Occupied Palestinian Territory”, 17–30 March 2020. Available at www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/protection_of_civilians_17_30_march_2020.pdf.

²² B’Tselem, “Statistics on Palestinians in the custody of the Israeli security forces” (accessed on 11 May 2020); Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, “Statistics” (accessed on 11 May 2020).

²³ See A/74/468, para. 16.

²⁴ See A/74/356, para. 32 and A/74/468, para. 16.

²⁵ E/ESCWA/ECW/2019/TP.2.

²⁶ See A/74/468, para. 16.

²⁷ United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) input.

²⁸ See A/74/468, para. 18.

25. Since 2000, at least 8,000 Palestinian children have reportedly been arrested and prosecuted in the Israeli military justice system.²⁹

26. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has documented a number of arrests of children occurring during the night, in addition to a number of cases in which the parents or guardians were unable to accompany the arrested child following their detention.³⁰

27. Testimonies of 641 Palestinian children detained and prosecuted by the Israeli military between 2015 and 2019 showed that 72 per cent had experienced physical violence; 94 per cent had been hand-tied; 85 per cent had been blindfolded; 54 per cent had been arrested from their homes in the middle of the night; 61 per cent had suffered verbal abuse, humiliation, or intimidation; 97 per cent had been interrogated without the presence of a family member; 22 per cent had been subjected to stress positions; and 56 per cent had signed documents in Hebrew, which most Palestinian children do not understand.³¹

28. Arrest operations, particularly in East Jerusalem, have continued, even after the COVID-19 pandemic had broken out in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Such arrests included volunteer health-care workers distributing communication materials about pandemic-related risks.³²

Population displacement

29. There is continued concern that a combination of Israeli policies and practices in Area C, East Jerusalem and the city of Hebron, including the demolition of homes and schools and the destruction of livelihoods, or threat thereof; the denial of service infrastructure; the restriction of access to farming and grazing land; settler violence and poor law enforcement in response thereto; and the revocation of residency rights have created a coercive environment.³³

30. Involuntary displacement and relocation to alternative residential areas as a result of such policies may amount to forcible transfer if it is carried out without the free and informed consent of the individuals who relocate, in violation of the obligations of Israel under international humanitarian and human rights law. Forcible transfer is a grave breach of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and amounts to a war crime.³⁴

31. The increase in the number of demolitions and settler attacks in 2019 intensified the coercive environment.³⁵ Between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020, demolitions of structures by Israel resulted in the displacement of 849 Palestinians, the majority of whom were women (221) and children (435, including 189 girls), and negatively affected the livelihoods and service provision for thousands of others.³⁶

32. Israel has facilitated the takeover by settlers of properties in the heart of Palestinian neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem and Hebron, which has often resulted

²⁹ See A/73/499, para. 69.

³⁰ United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) input.

³¹ Defense for Children International – Palestine and American Friends Service Committee, “Palestinian children in the Israeli military detention system”, 5 March 2020. Available at <https://nowaytotreatachild.org>.

³² WHO input.

³³ OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020: Occupied Palestinian Territory*, December 2019, available at https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/hno_2020-final.pdf.

³⁴ See A/74/88-E/2019/72 para 32.

³⁵ OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020*.

³⁶ OCHA, “Occupied Palestinian Territory: Data on demolition and displacement in the West Bank”. Available at www.ochaopt.org/data/demolition (accessed on 31 March 2020).

in the eviction of Palestinian families. By the end of 2019, some 877 Palestinians in East Jerusalem were at risk of eviction as settler organizations sought to gain control of their properties.³⁷

33. The publicly stated intention of the Government of Israel to relocate thousands of Palestinians residing in Area C remains a key concern. Some 18 communities in and around East Jerusalem are at particular risk of forced eviction.³⁸

Destruction and confiscation of property and infrastructure

34. In 2019, demolitions and the resulting displacement were at their highest levels since the peak year of 2016 (which, in turn, was the highest year on record since the United Nations had started to systematically collect data).³⁹ April 2019 had the highest number of demolitions in East Jerusalem in a single month since OCHA had begun the systematic recording of such data in 2009.⁴⁰ That month also had the highest single-day total of demolitions in East Jerusalem since 2009, with 31 structures demolished in one day.⁴¹

35. Between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020, Israeli authorities demolished 608 structures owned by Palestinians, including 257 homes.⁴² In three instances, the owners were not allowed an opportunity to evacuate their belongings from their homes before the demolitions were carried out.⁴³

36. Between the declaration of the state of emergency in the Occupied Palestinian Territory owing to COVID-19, on 5 March, and 31 March, Israeli authorities enforced the demolition, self-demolition or seizure of 40 structures, displacing 26 Palestinians and otherwise affecting over 260 others.⁴⁴

37. Between 2006 and 2019, Israel demolished at least 1,537 Palestinian residential units in the West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem), rendering 6,732 people homeless, including at least 3,382 children.⁴⁵ Moreover, since the onset of the occupation, Israel has completely demolished around 50,000 residential units and partially destroyed more than 100,000.⁴⁶

38. For the vast majority of demolitions, Israeli authorities cite a lack of building permits, which are virtually impossible for Palestinians to obtain in Area C and East Jerusalem. As a result, over 12,500 demolition orders against Palestinian properties for lacking such permits have been issued and are pending. At least a third of all Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem lack building permits issued by Israel.⁴⁷

³⁷ See A/HRC/43/67, para. 33.

³⁸ Ibid.; see also OCHA, "Occupied Palestinian Territory, Protection of civilians report, 7–20 January 2020", available at <https://www.ochaopt.org/poc/7-20-january-2020>; and Marya Farah, *Occupying Jerusalem's Old City: Israeli Policies of Isolation, Intimidation and Transformation* (Ramallah, Al-Haq, 2019).

³⁹ UNRWA input.

⁴⁰ OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020*.

⁴¹ Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, 26 September 2019.

⁴² OCHA, "Occupied Palestinian Territory: Data on demolition and displacement in the West Bank" (accessed on 31 March 2020).

⁴³ Al-Haq, "Al-Haq field report on human rights violations in October 2019", 16 December 2019.

⁴⁴ OCHA, "Protection of civilians, Occupied Palestinian Territory", 17–30 March 2020.

⁴⁵ B'Tselem, "Statistics on demolition of houses built without permits in the West Bank (not including East Jerusalem)" (accessed on 15 March 2020).

⁴⁶ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "H.E. Dr. Awad, highlights the forty four annual commemoration of Land Day in statistical figures".

⁴⁷ OCHA input.

39. In April 2019, the High Court of Israel upheld military order 1797, which allows the demolition or seizure of unlicensed structures deemed new within 96 hours after the issuance of a removal notice.⁴⁸ Moreover, an amendment to the planning and building law came into effect in October 2019, enabling expedited demolitions in East Jerusalem. These measures raise serious concern about accelerated demolitions on the basis of the discriminatory Israeli zoning and planning regime, and further limit opportunities for legal recourse for Palestinians.⁴⁹

40. Israeli authorities continued punitive demolitions of the family homes of Palestinians suspected of killing Israelis at a measure that may amount to collective punishment.⁵⁰ Between 1 April 2019 and 31 March 2020, Israel carried out eight such demolitions in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and destroyed 15 structures.⁵¹

41. Israeli authorities seized and destroyed 127 structures provided to vulnerable communities in Area C and East Jerusalem as humanitarian assistance, claiming a lack of coordination.⁵² It was reported that Israel has intended to auction goods seized from Palestinian communities, including seven donor-funded humanitarian structures, in particular school structures, tents and metal sheds.⁵³

42. In 2019, UNRWA recorded the issuance of 51 orders to confiscate 17,494 dunums⁵⁴ of land owned by Palestinians in the West Bank.⁵⁵

43. As a result of military operations against Gaza, between 1 April 2019 and 31 December 2019, around 144 shelters were totally demolished and around 1,482 shelters were partially damaged, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Public Works and Housing.⁵⁶

Israeli settlement activity

44. In its resolution [73/255](#), the General Assembly stressed that the wall and the settlements being constructed by Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, were contrary to international law. This has been confirmed in other resolutions, such as Security Council resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#), in which the Council reaffirmed that the establishment by Israel of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, had no legal validity and constituted a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of a lasting and comprehensive peace.

45. The establishment and expansion of Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory amounts to the transfer by Israel of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies, which is prohibited under international humanitarian law.⁵⁷

⁴⁸ See European Union, Office of the European Union Representative (West Bank and Gaza Strip, UNRWA), “Six-month report on demolitions and seizures in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, reporting period: 1 January–30 June 2019”; see also [A/74/468](#), para. 4.

⁴⁹ See [A/HRC/43/67](#), para. 32.

⁵⁰ See [A/74/468](#), para. 22.

⁵¹ OCHA, “Occupied Palestinian Territory: Data on demolition and displacement in the West Bank” (accessed on 31 March 2020).

⁵² OCHA input.

⁵³ See [A/74/356](#), para. 28.

⁵⁴ One dunum equals 1,000 m².

⁵⁵ UNRWA input.

⁵⁶ UNRWA input.

⁵⁷ See [A/74/357](#), para. 74.

46. Settlements obstruct the ability of Palestinians to exercise their rights, and impede development, employment and livelihoods.⁵⁸

47. By the end of 2018, approximately 671,007 Israeli settlers resided in the West Bank (228,614 in East Jerusalem) in 150 settlements (including 13 in East Jerusalem) and 26 inhabited outposts designated as settlement neighbourhoods, in addition to 128 settlement outposts.⁵⁹

48. In 2019, there was a significant increase in the pace of construction and expansion of the Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Israeli settlement expansion more than doubled in Area C of the occupied West Bank during the reporting period. The Israeli authorities advanced plans for 13,700 settlement units, 4,000 of which reached the final stage of approval, and announced tenders for 2,400 units. In the previous reporting period, 5,500 units were advanced and 3,300 tenders were announced. In occupied East Jerusalem settlements, 1,300 units were advanced, compared with 2,100 in the previous reporting period. Tenders for 2,100 housing units were announced, including 1,077 units in the Giv'at Homa settlement located between the Palestinian neighbourhood of Bayt Safafa in East Jerusalem and Bethlehem, impeding the former's connection with a future Palestinian State. Moreover, the announcement made by Israel on 25 February that it would advance two plans (3,500 units) in the E1 area, if implemented, would expand the settlement of Ma'ale Adummim towards Jerusalem, severing the connection between the northern and southern West Bank, and severely undermining the possibility of a viable and contiguous Palestinian State. Overall, about 30 per cent of the units advanced, approved or tendered are to be built in outlying locations, deep inside the occupied West Bank.⁶⁰

49. Eleven new outposts were established, while at least another 35 were in the process of being legalized.⁶¹ The establishment of outposts appears to be part of an official policy whereby the Israeli authorities encourage the takeover of land by settlers through agricultural projects.⁶²

Movement and access restrictions

50. As freedom of movement is a prerequisite to the exercise of other human rights, such as the rights to family, health and education, the closures and related practices imposed by the Israeli authorities, in particular the restrictions on movement, have had a devastating impact on the lives of Palestinians, in particular on families,^{63,64} and have a compounded effect on women and girls.⁶⁵

51. The restrictions have fragmented the Palestinian landscape, including the separation of Gaza from the West Bank. They have created isolated communities, undermined social cohesion, ruptured a common identity and reduced economic activity within and among the fractured Palestinian population.⁶⁶ About a third of Gaza residents have relatives in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. As family visits are not one of the criteria for travel, many families remain separated for years.

⁵⁸ International Labour Organization (ILO) input; see also [A/74/357](#).

⁵⁹ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "H.E. Dr. Awad, highlights the forty four annual commemoration of Land Day in statistical figures".

⁶⁰ See [A/75/84-E/2020/61](#).

⁶¹ Peace Now, "Population". Available at <https://peacenow.org.il/en/settlements-watch/settlements-data/population> (accessed on 31 March 2020).

⁶² See [A/HRC/43/67](#), para. 10.

⁶³ See [A/74/468](#), para. 26.

⁶⁴ See [A/74/88-E/2019/72](#), para. 50.

⁶⁵ UN-Women input.

⁶⁶ UNICEF input.

Gaza closure

52. Imposed since June 2007, following the takeover by Hamas, the closures in Gaza, which affect the movement of goods and people, continue to undermine the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of Palestinians in Gaza and continue to affect all areas of Palestinian life. The blockade may amount to collective punishment, which is prohibited under international law. The closure⁶⁷ remains a major impediment to combating the COVID-19 epidemic.

53. Israel intermittently changes the measures comprising the closure, citing, as it has on several occasions, violence and rocket fire towards civilian populations launched from Gaza as a reason for these steps. In view of their punitive aspect with regard to persons who have not committed the violence referred to, in particular the severe human rights impact on the entire population of Gaza, those measures may amount to collective punishment.⁶⁸

54. Only certain categories of people, mainly patients, merchants and staff of international organizations, are eligible to apply for exit permits through Israel. In February, an additional 2,000 permits for traders were approved, many of whom were reported to be labourers employed in Israel.⁶⁹ The rate of approval of permit applications lodged by patients in Gaza in 2019 reached 65 per cent, with 9 per cent being denied and 26 per cent delayed with their application unanswered by the time of the medical appointment for which the permit had been requested. WHO has found that patients whose applications were initially delayed or denied between 2015 and 2017 were 1.45 times less likely to survive than those initially approved permits to exit.⁷⁰

55. Only 38 per cent of the permit applications lodged by parents to accompany their children travelling from Gaza to receive medical treatment were approved. Children are thus forced to travel with a more distant relative or an appointed guardian. The approval rate for permits for those injured during demonstrations is, on average, significantly lower than the overall approval rate for patient applications to exit Gaza, at only 18 per cent in May 2019.⁷¹

56. The Rafah pedestrian crossing with Egypt has been regularly open since May 2018.

57. In 2019, approximately 103,161 truckloads of goods (excluding fuel) entered Gaza through Israel, a decline from 2018 (106,171 truckloads). The entry of a wide range of goods defined by Israel as dual-use items, i.e., items that could be used for either civilian or military purposes (including basic construction materials, equipment and electronics), has remained either prohibited or subject to a complex approval procedure.⁷²

58. Restrictions on exports from Gaza remain in place, albeit with some easing. During 2019, a total of 3,146 truckloads were permitted to exit Gaza through Kerem Shalom, the largest such figure in a decade. Nevertheless, that volume is only one quarter of that recorded in the first half of 2007, before the imposition of the closure.⁷³

⁶⁷ See [A/74/356](#), para. 38, and [A/74/88-E/2019/72](#).

⁶⁸ See [A/74/468](#), para. 22.

⁶⁹ OCHA input.

⁷⁰ WHO input.

⁷¹ WHO input.

⁷² OCHA input.

⁷³ OCHA, "Gaza blockade: Restrictions eased but most people still 'locked in'", 12 February 2020; OCHA input.

59. In addition to the access restrictions, Israeli security forces enforce buffer zones by land and sea as access-restricted areas. Israeli authorities have declared that up to 100 metres from the perimeter fence is a “no-go” area for individuals and up to 200 metres there is no access for heavy machinery, although humanitarian partners in the field have reported that, in practice, up to 300 metres from the perimeter fence is considered by most farmers as a no-go area and up to 1,000 metres a high-risk area. At sea, the restricted area is generally 6 nautical miles, although that distance varies and is at times increased to 12 to 15 nautical miles, less than a third of the 20 nautical miles agreed under the Oslo Accords. Israel enforces the restrictions through regular military incursions, the levelling of land and causing of damage to property, shootings along the fence and at sea, and arrests and detentions.⁷⁴

60. Restrictions imposed by Israel have had an impact on humanitarian personnel in Gaza. Until October 2019, most national staff working for the United Nations and international non-governmental organizations were not permitted to exit Gaza for the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Following intensive advocacy by the United Nations, international non-governmental organizations and Member States, the Israeli authorities eased that restriction in October 2019, giving approximately 50 per cent of affected staff to access permits again. However, more than 160 staff members of the United Nations and international non-governmental organizations are still not permitted to travel to the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.⁷⁵

Movement restrictions in the West Bank

61. The movement of Palestinians within the West Bank, including to and from East Jerusalem, is subject to physical and administrative obstacles impeding economic and social activity, and access to services. The movement of Palestinians is restricted through a complex system of checkpoints, permits, military roadblocks, settlements and the West Bank barrier.⁷⁶

62. Over 700 physical obstacles, including checkpoints and iron gates at the entrances to the cities and villages, have fragmented the West Bank into more than 100 cantons and hinder interaction between Palestinian communities. In addition, Israel has allocated more than 40 km of roads for the exclusive use of Israeli citizens, imposing partial restrictions on Palestinian use of another 20 km of roads within the West Bank.⁷⁷

63. The municipal boundaries of settlements enclose more than 10 per cent of the West Bank,⁷⁸ while another 18 per cent has been designated for military purposes by Israel. All those areas are off limits to Palestinians.⁷⁹ Once completed, the barrier being constructed in the West Bank by Israel will isolate around 9.4 per cent of the West Bank, further obstructing the movement of 11,000 Palestinians living in the area between the wall and the Green Line already isolated in the seam zone since November 2017.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020*; OCHA, “Occupied Palestinian Territory, Protection of civilians report”, 16 March–8 April 2019, available at www.ochaopt.org/content/protection-civilians-report-26-march-8-april-2019.

⁷⁵ Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, “Report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee”, 26 September 2019; OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020*, p. 14.

⁷⁶ See A/74/468, para. 26.

⁷⁷ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, “H.E. Dr. Awad, highlights the forty four annual commemoration of Land Day in statistical figures”.

⁷⁸ OCHA input.

⁷⁹ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, “H.E. Dr. Awad, highlights the forty four annual commemoration of Land Day in statistical figures”.

⁸⁰ See A/74/88-E/2019/72, para. 66–67.

64. Palestinian farming access remains severely restrictive around and within settlements, and in the seam zone, where prior coordination or special permits are required.⁸¹

65. In the H2 zone in Hebron, as of February 2020, there were 120 physical obstacles and 21 permanently staffed checkpoints in an area of approximately 4 km². Approximately 6,200 Palestinians cannot reach their home by vehicle and 5,600 must cross one of the checkpoints on foot to reach their homes.⁸²

66. The World Food programme, UNRWA and WHO report facing Israeli restrictions that hinder the movements of their staff, as well as access to vulnerable communities and the delivery of services to them, including education, health and relief services.⁸³

Exploitation, endangerment and depletion of Palestinian natural resources

67. Area C continues to be almost entirely off limits for the Government of Palestine, as well as for producers and investors, even though it contains the most valuable natural resources.⁸⁴ Palestinian institutions must seek permission from Israeli authorities before constructing new infrastructure in Area C. Closures, particularly in Gaza, limit Palestinian access to materials and technologies.⁸⁵

68. Approximately 3.7 million Palestinians are negatively affected by a lack of access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene services. Almost the whole population in Gaza is exposed to public health risks associated with poor water quality, poor wastewater collection and treatment, a lack of storm water infrastructure and lack of proper hygiene practices.⁸⁶

69. There is continuity in the landscape of humanitarian needs, due to the continuing Israeli control and exploitation of Palestinian natural freshwater resources, as well as severe restrictions on access to water for Palestinians. Around 300,000 Palestinians in Area C are directly affected by Israeli restrictions and practices, including demolition of water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure, such as water and sanitation networks.⁸⁷

70. Palestinians suffer from inadequate access to water from the mountain aquifers, even though 85 per cent of those lie within the Occupied Palestinian Territory.⁸⁸ While all Israeli settlements in the West Bank are linked to the water system of Israel and receive high-quality water for all purposes, at least 180 Palestinian communities in the area have no connection to a water network and rely on low-quality, high-cost alternatives.⁸⁹ Similarly, only 44 per cent of residents in Palestinian communities in East Jerusalem are connected legally and properly to the water grid.⁹⁰

71. One alternative is purchasing water from the Israeli water company Mekorot. In 2018, a total of 83 million m³ was purchased, which represented 22 per cent of the

⁸¹ ILO input.

⁸² OCHA, "Occupied Palestinian Territory: Dignity denied: Life in the settlement area of Hebron City", 20 February 2020; [A/HRC/43/67](#), para. 50.

⁸³ World Food Programme (WFP), UNRWA and WHO input.

⁸⁴ See [TD/B/65\(2\)/3](#), para. 25.

⁸⁵ United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) input.

⁸⁶ UNICEF input.

⁸⁷ OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020*, p. 43; UNICEF input.

⁸⁸ WFP input.

⁸⁹ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) input.

⁹⁰ Association for Civil Rights in Israel, "East Jerusalem: facts and figures 2019 – May 2019". Available at https://fef8066e-8343-457a-8902-ae89f366476d.filesusr.com/ugd/01368b_20dc66c3a088465286ce4c6d5a87c56c.pdf.

total amount of water available for Palestinian consumption.⁹¹ The cost of water is also a concern for the approximately 130,000 Palestinians living in Areas A, B and C, with a price of up to 60 new Israeli shekels per m³ for unsafe tankered water.⁹²

72. The average Palestinian in the West Bank consumes only 87 litres of water per day, which is less than the minimum 100 litres per person per day recommended by WHO. Around 95,000 people in Area C receive less than 50 litres per person per day, while over 83,000 people consume bad-quality drinking water, as they are mainly dependent on tankered water from unsecured sources, harvested rainwater or good-quality water stored in contaminated storage facilities, or they may follow unsafe hygiene practices at the household level, given the lack of sanitation and/or handwashing facilities.⁹³

73. The coastal aquifer in Gaza has become contaminated by saline intrusion, agricultural pesticides and sewage. This contamination presents particular risks to children and pregnant women.⁹⁴

74. As 96 per cent of water resources are unfit for use by Gaza's 2 million inhabitants, only 1 per cent of households have access to an improved drinking water source.⁹⁵

75. The greater provision of electricity improved the operation of water facilities. Yet, the average volume of piped water supplied during the first half of 2019 was 77.5 litres per person per day, compared with the recommendations of WHO and the UNICEF Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for All (WASH) initiative.⁹⁶ Furthermore, piped water is unfit for human consumption and has an average loss of 36 per cent due to network leaks.⁹⁷

76. Sanitation remains a primary concern in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Only 73 per cent of households in Gaza and only 32 per cent of households in the West Bank have access to a sewerage network and a large fraction of sewage is disposed of with only partial treatment or no treatment at all.⁹⁸

77. Sewage pollution and water shortage are causing a serious emergency in Gaza and pose a threat to 2 million people, their health and the environment.⁹⁹ The improved power supply in Gaza has enhanced the operation of the five wastewater treatment plants. This has, in turn, reduced the pollution levels in the approximately 179 million litres of wastewater discharged into the Mediterranean every day during the first six months of 2019 by 23 and 32.5 per cent compared with 2018 and 2017, respectively. The reduction has enabled the rehabilitation of some additional beaches

⁹¹ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, the Palestinian Water Authority and the Palestinian Meteorological Department issue a press release on the occasion of World Water Day and World Meteorological Day, March 22th–23th, 2020". Available in Arabic at http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/Press_Ar_19-3-2020-water.pdf and, in a slightly abridged form, in English at <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/post.aspx?lang=en&ItemID=3690#>.

⁹² OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020*, p. 43.

⁹³ UNICEF input; OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020*, p.24.

⁹⁴ UNEP input.

⁹⁵ World Bank, "Assistance strategy FY 18-21 for the West Bank and Gaza", report No. 115201-GZ, 6 November 2017.

⁹⁶ UN-Water Decade Programme on Advocacy and Communication, "The human right to water and sanitation", media brief, n.d.

⁹⁷ UNICEF input; OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020*.

⁹⁸ World Bank, "Assistance strategy FY 18-21 for the West Bank and Gaza".

⁹⁹ World Bank, "Wastewater management project mitigates health and environmental threats in the West Bank and Gaza", 9 October 2019.

for swimming and a reduction of the health risks associated with untreated or partially treated wastewater effluent entering the Mediterranean.¹⁰⁰

78. In the West Bank, untreated waste continues to issue from both Palestinian towns and Israeli settlements. It pollutes agricultural land and infiltrates the groundwater of the mountain aquifer, affecting its quality.¹⁰¹

79. The total area of land classified as being of high or medium agricultural value in the West Bank is 2,072,000 dunums, which constitutes about 37 per cent of the West Bank. Palestinians can only use less than half of that area, mainly owing to land confiscation and the restriction of Palestinian farmers' access to water and land.¹⁰² Palestinian farmers, for example can cultivate only 4 per cent of the land in the Jordan Valley.¹⁰³ Furthermore, they have to buy either water from Israel or desalinated water from private suppliers at a high cost, thereby reducing their competitiveness in the market.¹⁰⁴

80. The agricultural potential of Gaza has been undermined by the closure, as some 35 per cent of farmland falls within restricted areas enforced by Israel. Furthermore, Israel has damaged Palestinian farmland in Gaza by aerially spraying the land with herbicides.¹⁰⁵

81. The strict limitations on fishable waters, which have been reduced at certain times to as little as 3 nautical miles, have severely hampered the livelihoods of Gaza's fishermen. Although the maritime restrictions have recently been relaxed to 12 nautical miles, they remain subject to frequent changes, which causes uncertainty.¹⁰⁶

82. The exploiting of mineral resources in the Occupied Palestinian Territory remains limited. Israeli firms do not face the limitations placed on their Palestinian counterparts.¹⁰⁷

Social and economic conditions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

83. The COVID-19 crisis emerged at a time when the social and economic conditions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory were precarious, particularly in Gaza. The United Nations country team had previously projected that by 2020, Gaza would become an unlivable place.¹⁰⁸ In addition to the health implications of the pandemic, the negative shock to the Israeli and Palestinian economies will have profound socioeconomic implications. Coupled with the effects of the protracted occupation and the matrix of Israeli policies and practices, the social outlook in the Occupied Palestinian Territory seems bleak.

84. The physical fragmentation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, caused by a system of complex restrictions on movement and access imposed by the Israeli military, has resulted in the emergence of different economies in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. This is exacerbated by intra-Palestinian divisions.

¹⁰⁰ UNCTAD input; *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020*, p. 42; Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, "Report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee", 26 September 2019.

¹⁰¹ UNEP input.

¹⁰² Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "H.E. Ms. Awad highlights the 43rd annual commemoration of Land Day in statistical figures", 28 March 2019.

¹⁰³ ILO input.

¹⁰⁴ WFP input.

¹⁰⁵ See [A/HRC/40/73](#) para. 12.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, para 11.

¹⁰⁷ See [A/74/88-E/2019/72](#), paras. 85 and 86.

¹⁰⁸ United Nations country team in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, "Gaza ten years later", July 2017.

85. The severe financial crisis facing the Palestinian Government has exacerbated the humanitarian situation. The Government's ability to continue to provide basic services remains at risk and serious concerns endure over upholding governance functions.¹⁰⁹

86. Before the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis, half the Palestinian population (2.4 million) were in need of humanitarian assistance and protection, including some 1.1 million children and 600,000 women. Funding continues its downward trend, adding constraints for humanitarian agencies.¹¹⁰

87. Economic and political uncertainty increase domestic strain and the risk of social unrest. Youth are the most detrimentally affected and experience very high unemployment rates. They may undergo a psychological impact that later contributes to heightened levels of violence.¹¹¹ The COVID-19 pandemic is expected to exacerbate these conditions.

Economic conditions

88. The long-term economic repercussions of practices, policies and measures applied by Israel have entailed low investments in the Palestinian economy, which has led to a process of de-industrialization, the erosion of the Palestinian productive sectors and to de-development, specifically in Gaza.¹¹² This has entrenched the dependency of the Palestinian economy on Israel and on foreign aid.

89. In 2019, the Palestinian economy continued to encounter numerous challenges that restrained its ability to improve the sluggish performance of 2018. Estimates in constant prices showed an increase of 2.6 per cent in gross domestic product (GDP) during the fourth quarter of 2019 compared with the third quarter of 2019. This increase was driven mainly by the release by Israel of Palestinian clearance revenues in August 2019, otherwise the economy would have fallen into recession.¹¹³

90. However, at constant 2015 prices, real GDP contracted by 1.8 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2019 compared with the fourth quarter of 2018, and by 0.6 per cent in the third quarter of 2019 compared with the third quarter of 2018. Decreases were noted in household consumption, government spending and fixed investment. On the other hand, exports grew by 0.9 per cent in the fourth quarter, while imports decreased by 8 per cent.¹¹⁴

91. The decline in GDP per capita further highlights the precarious situation of the Palestinian economy, whose growth in 2019 was insufficient to keep pace with the population growth rate of 2.5 per cent.¹¹⁵ As a result, GDP per capita saw a 5.5 per cent decrease, from \$898.6 in constant prices in the fourth quarter of 2018 to \$848.8 in the fourth quarter of 2019.¹¹⁶

92. In March 2019, the Palestinian Government started to implement emergency financial measures to address the loss of nearly two thirds of its revenue resulting from the standoff with Israel over the unilateral deductions by Israel from Palestinian

¹⁰⁹ UNICEF, "State of Palestine, humanitarian situation report", July–September 2019.

¹¹⁰ OCHA input.

¹¹¹ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) input.

¹¹² *The Economic Costs of the Israeli Occupation for the Palestinian People: The Unrealized Oil and Natural Gas Potential* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.19.II.D.10).

¹¹³ Portland Trust. "Palestinian economic bulletin", No. 160, January 2020.

¹¹⁴ Data from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.

¹¹⁵ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "Indicators: Household budget". Available at www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/881/default.aspx.

¹¹⁶ Data from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.

clearance revenues. The release by Israel of some clearance revenues enabled the Palestinian Government to cope with the financial strain for a few additional months.¹¹⁷

93. The lack of economic prospects, particularly in Gaza, strains people's livelihoods and limits their access to decent work. This is reflected in the anaemic labour market, whose labour force participation declined by the fourth quarter of 2019, with a mere 44.4 per cent of working-age Palestinians participating in the labour market.¹¹⁸

94. The unemployment rate in the Occupied Palestinian Territory stood at 24 per cent¹¹⁹ among labour force participants of 15 years and older in the fourth quarter of 2019. Total labour underutilization stood at 33 per cent. Unemployment in Gaza remained alarmingly high, at 45 per cent. Notable discrepancies remained in unemployment figures between males (21 per cent) and females (41 per cent), and in labour force participation for males (7 out of 10) and females (2 out of 10). Also alarming was the unemployment rate of 52 per cent among youth graduates (19–29 years of age) who held an associate diploma and above (68 per cent for females; 35 per cent for males).¹²⁰

95. According to the World Bank, the latest available poverty data are for 2016/17. Therefore, they do not reflect the current conditions or the impact of the ongoing fiscal crisis.¹²¹ The 2017 data revealed that 53 per cent of Gazans were living below the national poverty line¹²² (the poverty line translates to an expenditure of \$692 per month for a family of two adults and three children), while the incidence of deep poverty stood at 33.8 per cent (deep poverty is defined as being unable to meet the minimum required for food, clothing and housing).

96. Following the fiscal crisis of 2019, the Palestinian economy was projected to slowly recover in 2020. However, the COVID-19 outbreak seems to be largely weighing on economic activity. Living conditions are difficult, with a quarter of the labour force unemployed and 24 per cent of Palestinians living with less than \$5.5 a day (2011 purchasing power parity), even prior to the outbreak. A larger than expected decline in aid and a further spread of the virus causing COVID-19 pose significant downside risks.

97. Measures put in place by the Government since early March 2020 to halt the spread of COVID-19, while effective in limiting the spread of the virus, seem to have resulted in disruptions in economic activity, especially in the West Bank. As a result, the economy is expected to contract by 2.5 per cent in 2020.¹²³ Private sector representatives have also announced plans to cut pay by 50 per cent.

98. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures to combat it, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics projects that a shutdown would lead to a contraction in GDP of 5.1 per cent if it lasts three months and 7.1 per cent if it lasts six months, with a significant attendant rise in poverty. The capacity of the Palestinian Government to address this crisis remains constrained, as Israel controls the conventional fiscal and monetary tools needed.¹²⁴

¹¹⁷ World Bank, "Economic monitoring report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee", 26 September 2019.

¹¹⁸ ILO input.

¹¹⁹ Based on the latest revised ILO standards adopted at the nineteenth International Conference of Labour Statisticians.

¹²⁰ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "The labour force survey results 2019", n.d.

¹²¹ World Bank, "Economic monitoring report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee", 26 September 2019.

¹²² World Bank, "Economic monitoring report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee", 27 September 2018.

¹²³ World Bank, "Palestinian Territories", economic update, April 2020. Available at <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/394981554825501362/mpo-pse.pdf>.

¹²⁴ Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, "Statement by United Nations Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov on the socioeconomic impact of the COVID-19 impact in the Occupied Palestinian Territory", 12 April 2020.

99. The negative outlook was present before the COVID-19 pandemic came to pose dire challenges to the whole world. Its economic fallout remains uncertain, yet it can be expected that the direct economic, social and humanitarian impact in the Occupied Palestinian Territory will only be multiplied because of an anticipated further decrease in foreign aid. This would entail further deterioration in the social, economic and living conditions of Palestinians who are already suffering from hyperunemployment and poverty, with a disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups, including women and children.

Food security

100. Poverty resulting from the high levels of unemployment is the root cause behind food insecurity. A total of 1.7 million Palestinians, including approximately 900,000 refugees, equivalent to 33 per cent of the population, are considered food-insecure. During 2019, a total of 76 per cent of the beneficiaries receiving World Food Programme food assistance supplemented their food purchases by taking on debt.¹²⁵

101. Food insecurity is higher in households headed by females than in those headed by males. The prevalence of food-insecure households in Area C is three times higher than in the West Bank overall, despite the food assistance and other forms of social transfers from Palestinian governmental bodies or international organizations. In Gaza, food insecurity remains alarmingly high and is increasing, with an estimated 62 per cent of households being severely or moderately food-insecure.¹²⁶

102. During the first half of 2019, 18 per cent of pregnant women and 14 per cent of lactating mothers were malnourished, and only 14 per cent of children under five years of age had a minimum acceptable diet. Among 3,000 children under five, 82 had to be treated for severe acute malnutrition and 237 for moderate acute malnutrition.¹²⁷

Health

103. The most vulnerable populations in the face of the COVID-19 crisis are those that have been suffering the consequences of violence and conflict.¹²⁸ The protracted occupation and the policies and measures associated with it have significantly impaired Palestinian institutions, particularly in Gaza.¹²⁹

104. As at 5 May 2020, there were 532 confirmed cases of COVID-19 among Palestinians (345 in the West Bank, 170 in East Jerusalem and 17 in Gaza), and 4 associated deaths.¹³⁰ Palestinians in refugee camps and other poor, densely populated areas across the Occupied Palestinian Territory face a higher risk of contagion due to overcrowding and inadequate sanitation. The capacity of the Palestinian health-care system to cope with the expected increase in COVID-19 patients remains severely impaired by long-standing challenges and critical shortages, particularly in the Gaza Strip.¹³¹

105. Since the onset of the outbreak, the Palestinian Authority and Israel have coordinated efforts and taken far-reaching measures to try and contain the pandemic. Technical cooperation between the parties has been effective. However, areas of

¹²⁵ WFP input.

¹²⁶ OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020*.

¹²⁷ UNICEF, "State of Palestine, humanitarian situation report", January–June 2019.

¹²⁸ See United Nations, "Shared responsibility, global solidarity: Responding to the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19", March 2020, p. 5.

¹²⁹ WHO input.

¹³⁰ OCHA in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, "COVID-19 emergency situation report", No. 7, 28 April–4 May 2020.

¹³¹ OCHA in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, "COVID-19 emergency situation report", No. 2, 24–31 March 2020.

tension remain, including in East Jerusalem and Hebron, that could undermine efforts to combat the spread of the virus. The number of Palestinian patients with COVID-19 in East Jerusalem remains unconfirmed. Israeli authorities did not open testing stations in the city until the end of March 2020.¹³²

106. In addition, factors restricting hygiene measures, including inadequate water and sanitation, overcrowding, and limitations on accessing health information, contribute to increased susceptibility of the Occupied Palestinian Territory and hamper effective emergency preparedness and response.¹³³

107. Gaza's health infrastructure has been eroded. It is overstretched and on the verge of collapse owing to the Israeli closure and the damage sustained during recurrent military operations.¹³⁴ There were only 2,500 available beds,¹³⁵ and in February 2020, less than a month's supply ("zero stock") remained for 39 per cent of essential medicines in Gaza. Health officials repeatedly announced shortages and the depletion of COVID-19 testing kits, as well as shortages of other medical supplies.¹³⁶

108. Throughout the reporting period, the movement of essential medical equipment and supplies to Gaza remained restricted. Owing to the lack of specialized medical care and chronic shortages of medicines, doctors have often referred patients to hospitals located primarily in the West Bank, Israel and, to a lesser extent, Egypt.¹³⁷ Israeli authorities have delayed or refused applications for exit permits to Palestinian patients with referrals for treatment abroad, which has resulted in premature deaths on several occasions.¹³⁸

109. In 2019, a total of 124 laboratory-confirmed cases of measles, including two deaths, were reported in Gaza. Of those, 46 per cent had not been vaccinated. Previously, between 2009 and 2018, Gaza had recorded a vaccination coverage of 97 per cent for measles, but the socioeconomic decline, the closure, the conflict and other constraints have disrupted that coverage.¹³⁹

110. Access reproductive services is a special constraint facing Palestinian women and girls. It is estimated that in Gaza, 150,000 women, out of a total of 500,000, are "acutely vulnerable owing to critical challenges in delivering health care".¹⁴⁰ The maternal mortality ratio has more than doubled in Gaza, from 8.6 per 100,000 in 2017 to 19.1 per 100,000 live births in 2019.¹⁴¹

111. In the West Bank, health-care services continue to face major challenges, especially as access to some of the most vulnerable communities is hampered by discriminatory zoning and increased protection concerns. Some 165 communities, with a total population of 162,663, have limited or no access to basic primary health-care services, while 33,000 people are in critical need of emergency care.¹⁴²

112. In areas such as the H2 zone of Hebron, the seam zone and Area C, health services, if available, are of poor quality and often limited to basic care. For all facilities in the West Bank outside East Jerusalem, there is a critical shortage of certain treatment and diagnostic options, and patients in need of advanced care are

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ WHO input.

¹³⁴ WHO input.

¹³⁵ International Crisis Group, "The Gaza Strip and COVID-19: Preparing for the worst", Crisis Group Middle East briefing No. 75, 1 April 2020.

¹³⁶ WHO input.

¹³⁷ See [A/74/468](#), para. 28.

¹³⁸ See [E/ESCWA/ECW/2019/TP.2](#).

¹³⁹ WHO, "Measles – Gaza Strip", disease outbreak news, 9 January 2020.

¹⁴⁰ UN-Women, September 2019.

¹⁴¹ UNFPA input.

¹⁴² OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020*.

thus dependent on referrals to East Jerusalem or Israel, and therefore require security permits from the Israeli authorities.¹⁴³

113. Approximately 50,000 Palestinian workers returning to the West Bank from Israel, where the prevalence of COVID-19 has been higher, present a major risk of increasing the transfer of COVID-19 and of overwhelming the testing and quarantine capacities of the Palestinian Government. Incidents of symptomatic workers being left at checkpoints after being returned by Israel to Palestinian-controlled areas, without coordination with Palestinian authorities, are of concern.¹⁴⁴

Education

114. Israeli policies and practices continue to render access to education in a safe learning environment a critical and long-standing challenge. In Area C, over one third of residential communities lack primary schools. Children are forced to travel long distances, sometimes on foot, to reach the nearest school, for which they often have to cross one or two checkpoints. Most children (88 per cent) living in the H2 zone of Hebron must cross a military checkpoint and/or are exposed to harassment by Israeli settlers on their way to school.¹⁴⁵

115. In 2019, a total of 328 education-related incidents affecting approximately 20,000 students were documented. While the shortage of classrooms in the West Bank persist, 51 schools in Area C and East Jerusalem face demolition orders, and others are subjected to stop-work orders. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, access to education is heavily compromised by education-related violations facing students and teachers. Children are exposed to conflict-related violence and movement restrictions, which can lead to increased school dropout rates. Access to safe education is compromised by violence and armed search operations in schools; harassment, intimidation and violence towards students and teachers on the way to and from school; a severe shortage of classrooms; and demolition or stop-work orders on school buildings. In East Jerusalem, the increase in security operations in the city and, particularly, the almost daily clashes in Isawiyah have led to several arrests, including of children.¹⁴⁶

116. In Gaza, the closure and the multiple military escalations have resulted in repeated damage and destruction to an already fragile education infrastructure. Severe electricity shortages, increased poverty, and protection concerns only exacerbate the situation.¹⁴⁷

117. Other factors are compounding the situation, forcing around 70 per cent of UNRWA schools and 63 per cent of those run by the Palestinian Ministry of Education to operate on a double- or triple-shift system, which results in crowded classrooms.¹⁴⁸

118. An estimated 4.9 per cent of 10- to 15-year-olds and 25 per cent of 16- to 17-year-olds in the Occupied Palestinian Territory are out of school. Girls who drop out are at high risk of early marriage, while boys are at high risk of child labour or life-threatening activities.¹⁴⁹

The gendered impact of the occupation on women and girls

119. Laws, policies and practices imposed by the Israeli authorities affect Palestinian women and girls in specific ways. Women are often the first to be affected by curbs

¹⁴³ UN-Women, September 2019.

¹⁴⁴ WHO input.

¹⁴⁵ UNICEF input.

¹⁴⁶ UNICEF, "State of Palestine, humanitarian situation report", July–September 2019.

¹⁴⁷ UNICEF input.

¹⁴⁸ UNRWA input; OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020*.

¹⁴⁹ OCHA, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020*.

on residency and family unification because they traditionally move away from their own families and communities, upon marriage, and, at times, find themselves stranded and without resources.¹⁵⁰

120. Palestinian women and girls continue to be exposed to violence by Israeli settlers and Israeli security forces.¹⁵¹ Women's organizations have found that the fear of not knowing when the Israeli occupying forces will raid houses makes them wear the hijab at all times, even when sleeping.¹⁵² Some women report that the frequent or permanent presence of settlers, soldiers or male residents around the house affected their privacy and freedom of movement.¹⁵³

121. House demolitions and forced evictions adversely affect women's right to adequate housing and the quality of their family life, and have a serious impact on Palestinian women and girls' emotional welfare. Women, particularly mothers, must deal with the burden of ensuring the well-being of the family, including by securing a new place to live and providing physical and emotional support to loved ones.¹⁵⁴ Living with extended family may result in tensions within families and increases vulnerability to domestic violence or child abuse.¹⁵⁵ That situation has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken to contain it.

122. Service providers report an increasing demand for psychosocial assistance due to domestic violence against women and children amid a chronic lack of safe places and recreational areas. The rise in domestic violence is attributed to fear and anxiety stemming from the situation, which includes economic stress and overcrowded households.¹⁵⁶

123. Some reports of violence and sexual harassment at checkpoints mean that parents are hesitant to allow their daughters to cross the checkpoints to attend school, thus impeding their access to education.¹⁵⁷

124. Of the women who were injured during the Great March of Return protests, 12.5 per cent were unable to return to their work. They also suffered from increased exposure to physical and sexual abuse. Women and girls were also subjected to forced or early marriage to men who were injured or maimed.¹⁵⁸

125. Women employed in Area C are often unremunerated or receive low wages. They work mainly in agriculture (primarily performing unpaid family labour) or in Israeli settlements. This further increases the poverty for households headed by women in Area C.¹⁵⁹

126. Multiple factors, including the occupation, Israeli practices and the COVID-19 pandemic, disproportionately affect Palestinian women and girls in several areas.

¹⁵⁰ UN-Women input.

¹⁵¹ See [A/74/357](#), para. 42.

¹⁵² Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC), "WCLAC's shadow report for the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 66th session – Israel review", 2019.

¹⁵³ See [A/74/357](#), para. 53.

¹⁵⁴ WCLAC, "Punitive Measures: the gendered impact on Palestinian women", submission to the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, December 2019.

¹⁵⁵ [E/ESCWA/ECW/2019/TP.2](#).

¹⁵⁶ OCHA in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, "COVID-19 emergency situation report", No. 4, 7–13 April 2020.

¹⁵⁷ WCLAC, "WCLAC's shadow report".

¹⁵⁸ UN-Women input.

¹⁵⁹ Rema Hammami and others, "Addressing the needs of Palestinian households in Area C of the West Bank: A summary of the findings of the first comprehensive household survey" (Oxfam, Birzeit University, Nairobi/Bi'r Zayt, State of Palestine, January 2019).

Those impacts risk reversing the women's rights gains made in past decades and can exacerbate pre-existing inequalities.¹⁶⁰

III. Occupied Syrian Golan

127. The Secretary-General continues to reaffirm the validity of Security Council resolution 497 (1981), in which the Council decided that the Israeli decision to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration in the occupied Syrian Golan Heights was null and void and without international legal effect.

128. Approximately 50,000 people live in the occupied Syrian Golan, about half of whom are Israeli settlers living in 34 illegal settlements. The Syrian population of nearly 27,000 lives in five villages that form approximately 5 per cent of the territory of the occupied Syrian Golan.¹⁶¹

129. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2018/20, reaffirmed that the construction and expansion of Israeli settlements and related infrastructure in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan, were illegal and constituted a major obstacle to economic and social development. The continued establishment and expansion of Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the occupied Syrian Golan amount to the transfer by Israel of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies, which is prohibited under international humanitarian law.¹⁶²

130. An Israeli media outlet reported on a government plan to expand settlements in the occupied Syrian Golan and to increase the settler population in the area to 250,000 by 2048. The plan reportedly envisions the construction of 30,000 new housing units and two new settlements.

131. The Syrian population of the occupied Syrian Golan faces significant discriminatory building restrictions imposed by Israel, which leads to strained infrastructure and overcrowded conditions.

132. Israel continues to maintain extremely restrictive zoning and building policies, which has an impact on the Syrian population. Those include the issuance of demolition orders and a recent process aimed at zoning some of the rare land usable for the expansion of Syrian villages as a national park.¹⁶³

133. Israel is changing its land registration system. The change carries the risk of disadvantaging Syrian citizens who have insufficient proof of ownership, and could provide a basis for Israeli appropriation.¹⁶⁴

134. The Syrian Arab Republic has stressed that Israel has been consolidating its control over land and natural resources, including water. Israel has done so through, among other things, the recent confiscation of land in the Syrian village of Jubbata al-Khashab, which lies within the demilitarized zone established by the United Nations in 1974, with the aim of building trenches close to Syrian territory, a step that had led to the isolation of tens of dunums of land belonging to the village.¹⁶⁵

135. The Israeli company Energix Renewable Energies Ltd. has a project through which it seeks to build 31 wind turbines in close proximity to Syrian population centres. It is estimated that the project as a whole will occupy about 4,300 dunums of land, almost a

¹⁶⁰ UN-Women input.

¹⁶¹ See A/74/357, para. 71.

¹⁶² Ibid., para. 74.

¹⁶³ See A/HRC/43/67, para. 61.

¹⁶⁴ ILO input.

¹⁶⁵ See A/HRC/43/69, para. 20.

quarter of the limited agricultural land remaining in the possession of Syrians. In addition to the environmental aspects and the impact on their health, Syrians are also concerned about the risk the project poses to their cultural life in the Golan.¹⁶⁶

136. At the same time, Syrians in the Golan are unable to develop their own gas and oil industries.¹⁶⁷

137. Information has been received on continued discriminatory policies, particularly with regard to access to land and water, to the benefit of settlers who already enjoy tax incentives and subsidies granted by the Israeli Government.¹⁶⁸

138. Discriminatory pricing and distribution of utilities in the occupied Golan has subsidized illegal Israeli settlement businesses while suffocating Syrian industries, particularly in the agricultural sector.¹⁶⁹ While the majority of Syrian households in the Golan have agricultural roots, only a small number of workers are primarily employed in farming. It has been difficult for small-scale Syrian farmers to compete with the often more industrial agriculture of the settlements, forcing many farmers to turn to other occupations.¹⁷⁰

139. The Syrian Arab Republic has reported that Israel continues its attempts to impose Israeli citizenship on the Syrian residents of the occupied Syrian Golan.

IV. Conclusion

140. The protracted Israeli occupation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the occupied Syrian Golan continues to have a detrimental effect on the living conditions of the Palestinian and Syrian populations, as well as on social and economic development in the occupied territories. The negative impact of the occupation and the Israeli policies and practices is multilayered and the cumulative repercussions affect the future of the populations living under occupation.

141. The unprecedented challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis heightens the vulnerability of Palestinians, in particular the population of Gaza, and exposes them to more risk. Palestine refugees and youth, whose social and economic conditions were already precarious, stand to suffer disproportionately both from the pandemic and its aftermath. Measures that limit testing and treatment in the context of the pandemic should be halted immediately and more resources should be provided to aid the Palestinians in facing the COVID-19 crisis.

142. Current social and economic trends in the Occupied Palestinian Territory indicate that the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals will be out of reach if there are no drastic positive changes to the existing conditions. Israeli-imposed restrictions, the expansion of the illegal settlements and other practices not only prevent development in the occupied territories, but also cause humanitarian crises that necessitate the diversion of national and international efforts from development to immediate relief.

143. The funding crisis facing UNRWA and the decline in donor aid are other factors that only exacerbate the already precarious conditions of hundreds of thousands of

¹⁶⁶ Al-Haq, "Joint parallel report on Israel's violations of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on the occasion of the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights' review of the fourth periodic report of Israel", 6 September 2019.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ ILO, "The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories" (document No. ILC.108/DG/APP, 2019), para. 147.

¹⁶⁹ Al-Haq, "Joint parallel report", para 9.

¹⁷⁰ ILO, "The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories", para 146.

Palestinians. The Secretary-General reiterates his appeal to the international community to guarantee that the vital support for the rights of the Palestine refugees is upheld and to ensure adequate financing for UNRWA. The unfolding COVID-19 pandemic and its economic fallout is likely to further compound the economic difficulties and could result in more adverse living conditions for Palestinians.

144. The closure imposed on Gaza, other restrictive Israeli measures, recurrent escalations and declining donor funding have created a severe situation in Gaza that requires immediate action by the international community. This is particularly alarming in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, with the health-care system in Gaza on the verge of collapse as that crisis unfolds.

145. Israel continues to employ policies and practices that are contrary to relevant Security Council resolutions, international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Some of these practices may be considered discriminatory and others may amount to the forcible transfer or collective punishment of protected persons, which would be a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention and is prohibited under international law.

146. Adherence to international law is imperative, ensuring that no party enjoys impunity and securing justice and peace for all those living in the region, including Palestinians and Syrians living under occupation. The United Nations maintains its long-standing position that lasting and comprehensive peace can be achieved only through a negotiated two-State solution. The Secretary-General will continue to ensure that the United Nations works towards the establishment of an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State, living side by side in peace with a secure Israel, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States, consistent with relevant Security Council resolutions and international law.
