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Fourth Committee  
Special Political and  
Decolonization Committee

Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices  
Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People  
and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories

STATEMENT

By

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Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and  
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*Check against delivery*

Mr. Chairman,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

For the second year, I have the honour to introduce the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories to the Fourth Committee of the General Assembly.

2006 will definitely remain as a peculiar year in the records of the Special Committee's work over the years. Owing to spending limitations affecting the resources allocated from the regular budget of the United Nations to the Special Committee, its yearly field visit was re-scheduled from June to August 2006. However, the seriously deteriorating security situation in the Middle East region at that time, which entailed restrictions of movement and travel both for the Committee and Palestinian witnesses, compelled the Special Committee to reluctantly postpone its field visit. Following consultations held in Geneva from 31 July to 2 August 2006, the Special Committee decided to re-schedule its field visit from 11 – 22 November 2006. The Committee is now in a position to travel to Egypt, Jordan and Syria at the end of the current week and will meet some 30 Palestinian witnesses from the occupied territories in Cairo and in Amman, as well as concerned senior officials from Egypt and Jordan. In Syria, we will meet Syrian authorities, visit Qunaitra and meet the Governor of the area as well as a number of witnesses with direct and recent knowledge of the human rights situation in the occupied Syrian Golan.

Notwithstanding this unusual situation, the Special Committee has submitted its report to the General Assembly according to resolution 60/104. This report is based essentially on documents, surveys and case studies made available by Palestinian and Israeli NGOs through a variety of means, as well as on articles, studies and other material from United Nations agencies active in OPT and from international NGOs. The present report which I am introducing today will be followed by an updated report to be

submitted to the General Assembly in the early months of 2007, in accordance with the provisions of resolution 60/104, upon completion of the re-scheduled field visit of the Special Committee.

The current context under which the Special Committee is conducting its work should by no means hide the fact that once again, it has been denied access to OPT by the Government of Israel and thereby precluding the opportunity to engage in a much needed dialogue with Israeli authorities on the human rights situation in the OPT. The Special Committee even if it did not visit the region during the summer, received ample evidence from a wide range of sources attesting to the seriously deteriorating situation in the OPT. The Special Committee is of the view that the culture of impunity characterizing the actions by the State of Israel in the OPT must be brought to an end by all available means.

Despite changes in leadership by democratic means in the occupied territories and in Israel during the early months of 2006, hopes engendered by these positive developments as well as from the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip and the evacuation of a number of Jewish settlements have been shattered. On the contrary, the persistence of effective Israeli control of the airspace and the maritime and land borders of the Gaza Strip impeded its chances of economic recovery. In addition, the absence of a clear commitment by Hamas to uphold the Quartet conditions including adherence to the principle of non-violence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, led to a situation whereby the new Hamas-led Palestinian Government was gradually boycotted by the Government of Israel and ignored by the international community, leading to a paralysis in its governance. The suspension by major donors including the European Union, the United States of America, Canada and Japan of their financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority, combined with the stopping by Israel of the transfer to the Palestinian Authority of customs taxes and revenues collected on its behalf, triggered off a major crisis in OPT with no apparent solution in view.

Due to the fact that salaries have not been paid to some Palestinian civil servants for the last 7 months, some 900'000 Palestinians throughout OPT are without minimum resources to live, go to their place of work, attend schools or have access to health care, clinics and hospitals. Women, children, the handicapped and the elderly are among the first vulnerable groups to be affected by this drastic shrinking of resources. As reflected in the Special Committee's report, violence renewed since March 2006. Launching of Qassam rockets towards Israel by Palestinian militants in the Gaza Strip resumed. There was a suicide attack in a Tel Aviv café in April and a paramilitary operation conducted on 25 June by three Palestinian militant groups which culminated with the capture of an Israeli soldier, whose whereabouts are still unknown today. The major military operations *Summer Rain* launched by Israeli forces led to the complete naval, air and land blockade of the Gaza Strip, isolating it totally from the outside world and preventing the supplies to the population of much-needed international humanitarian assistance. The use of missile and artillery fire, targeting more often civilians, including many women and children, allegedly took the lives of at least 156 Palestinians, including 81 civilians, 33 children and 9 women for the sole period of 25 June – 31 July 2006. Some press reports put this figure as high as 300 casualties, while indicating that 2'300 persons had been killed over the past six years. About 720 Palestinians were said to have been injured, including 168 children.

In the West Bank, the expansion of the wall goes unabated, cutting off many Palestinian communities from access to their fields and business, schools, universities, as well as to Jerusalem and other cities in the northern West Bank. At present, 99 Israeli settlements and 55 Palestinian localities are reportedly affected by the construction of the wall. At the end of 2005, 243 km of the 702 km contemplated wall in the West Bank had been completed, whereas a new segment of the wall, 122 km long, is due to be completed by the end of 2006. Another portion of 337 km is supposed to begin towards the end of the year. In fact, only 118 km of the so far built wall are following the Green Line. Information received by the Special Committee highlight the detrimental effects of the wall surrounding Jerusalem. Once completed, this portion of the wall would cut off 220'000 Palestinians in East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank. Another 100'000

Palestinians living in the suburbs around Jerusalem would also be separated from the city. Many of them were legal residents who left the city following Israeli restrictions imposed on the development of Palestinian neighbourhoods. Palestinians with Jerusalem identity cards are now forced to travel lengthy routes and suffer extensive delays at checkpoints to enter the city. Throughout 2006, 8 out of the 12 roads allowing access to Jerusalem from the West Bank were said to have been closed to Palestinians.

The effects of the wall are worsened by the closure system aggravating the humanitarian crisis and poverty in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and severely hampering access b Palestinians to health and education services, employment, markets and social or religious networks. Since January 2006, about 470 physical obstacles have been placed by Israeli forces on roads to control and restrict Palestinian vehicular traffic. In July, their number had increased to 550. The increase of physical obstacles has been more noticeable in Hebron governorate, northern West Bank and around the governorates of Nablus, Salfit and Tulkarem. Large segments of the Palestinian population perceive these checkpoints as persistent forms of collective punishment. Many students, teachers, medical patients and staff as well as ordinary working people were subjected to many forms of ill-treatment by Israeli soldiers, including beatings, stripping, and being made to sit in the mud or to stand for hours in the sun or the cold before being allowed to cross checkpoints. Many cases of medical staff or patients not being allowed to cross checkpoints to reach medical facilities are also reported.

The Special Committee received from several sources of information detailed reports about the extensive level of destruction of properties and infrastructures in the Gaza Strip during operation *Summer Rain* conducted by Israel security forces, including houses, schools, at least four bridges, and the only power plant providing 45 per cent of the electricity consumed in Gaza. The out of commission of the power plant severely hampered the functioning of health facilities, water wells, sewage disposal facilities and access to water in buildings of Gaza city. Public buildings such as offices of the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of National Commerce and

an office of the Palestinian Legislative Council in the northern area of the Gaza Strip have been completely or partially destroyed during these operations.

As compared to 2005, the situation of Palestinian detainees in Israeli jails did not improve. A conservative estimate of 9'400 detainees is accounted, an increase of 900 persons since last year, while some 810 administrative detainees are said to be mainly held in the Neguev, Ofer, Ayalon and other detention centres. As of June 2006, about 360 children were detained in Israeli prisons, a few dozen more than in 2005, enduring like adults similar instances of torture, medical negligence and other forms of ill-treatment, including inadequate food and nutrition, and denial of visits and recreational facilities. There are 120 women presently detained, a relative decrease, since last year.

Regarding Syria, official reports confirm the Israeli settlement and land confiscation policy which goes unabated. The 44 existing Israeli settlements continued to expand and the largest one, Katzrin, had now more than 18'000 settlers. On the eve of general elections, the Israeli Government announced a massive project to encourage settlements in the occupied Golan with the establishment of a new neighbourhood of houses and the construction of a new high-tech factory, as well as of a wineries and a luxury resort. As noted in last year's report, the occupation authorities pursued their policy of using water resources of the occupied Syrian Golan on behalf of Israel. The exploitation of water resources by the Tahal and Mekorot companies, continued with adverse effects on agricultural yields and citizens' livelihoods, by the drying up of springs supplying Arab villages with water. Official reports indicated that Israeli mines were a persistent danger as they were laid in locations adjacent to inhabited areas, threatening the population and farm animals and preventing inhabitants from freely accessing and exploiting their lands. The burying of Israeli nuclear waste in a wide tract of land close to the Syrian border, not far from the summit Jabal al-Sheikh, continues to be a cause of acute concern.

More than ever, the Special Committee is convinced that the situation as a whole and the human rights situation in OPT have reached an unprecedented level of

deterioration which, if it remains unattended, will lead to further violence, destruction, despair and hatred, and may lead to a total collapse of the Palestinian community life. The path taken throughout 2006 by the Quartet, including the European Union and some other major donors, combined with the non-payment of customs taxes and revenues by Israel does not seem to bring about the contemplated results and is only perceived by Palestinians as economic sanctions imposed on them in the aftermath of democratically held elections to elect their leaders.

As said at the outset of this statement, impunity enjoyed by Israel in OPT must be urgently brought to an end. The Special Committee has essentially reiterated its recommendations of last year with one significant addition; that the General Assembly should request the Security Council to consider sanctions against Israel if it persists in paying no attention to its international obligations. The Special Committee hopes that in the aftermath of the crisis presently affecting the OPT, the General Assembly and the Security Council will take appropriate steps to undo the current situation and encourage compliance by Israel of all its international obligations. Until such a time, the Special Committee stands ready to receive a renewed mandate to fulfil its responsibilities on behalf of Palestinian people and other Arabs in the occupied territories.

Thank you.