



**INDEPENDENT INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF INQUIRY ON THE
OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY, INCLUDING EAST JERUSALEM, AND ISRAEL**

**Public hearings on sexual and reproductive violence in the occupied Palestinian
territory, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel, since October 2023**

*Geneva
11 March 2025*

Opening remarks by Commissioner Chris Sidoti

Good morning from Geneva and welcome to these public hearings of the Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel. I'm Chris Sidoti and I am one of the commissioners on the Commission of Inquiry. Our chair, Commissioner Navi Pillay, was to preside at these hearings today and tomorrow, but unfortunately, she is unable to travel to Geneva this week. She has asked me to conduct the hearings on her behalf and is very disappointed that she herself is not able to be here to do so.

The Commission of Inquiry was created by the Human Rights Council in May 2021 to investigate in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel, all violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and the root causes of recurrent tensions and conflict in the area.

The Commission previously held two sets of public hearings. The first focused on the closure orders and terrorism designation of several Palestinian non-governmental organizations, and on the killing of the journalist Shireen Abu Akleh. The second focused on the shrinking space for civil society.

The hearings being held this week focus on sexual, reproductive and other forms of gender-based violence by the Israeli Security Forces and Israeli settlers in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and in Israel since October 2023.

The term 'reproductive violence' refers to a distinct form of gender-based violence that includes acts or omissions that cause harm by interfering with reproductive autonomy and rights, or violence directed at people because of their actual or perceived reproductive capacity.

These hearings are part of the Commission's continuing investigations and will include first-hand testimonies from victims and witnesses of sexual and reproductive violence. We will also hear testimony experts from civil society, academia and the legal and medical professions. The evidence forms part of the Commission's findings and is included in its report "*More than a human can bear: Ch Israel's systematic use of*

sexual, reproductive and other forms of gender-based violence since 7 October 2023.
That report will be released this week.

This first day of hearings will focus on sexual and gender-based violence, including rape and other forms of sexual violence, perpetrated during detention and ground offensives by members of the Israeli Security Forces and settlers across the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Tomorrow we will focus on deliberate attacks on sexual and reproductive health care facilities and the impact of the collapsed health care infrastructure on women and girls.

During the hearings, I will put questions to the witnesses after they have had an opportunity of making their own statements or presenting their own evidence. Participants are free to decline to answer any questions and are permitted to say what they wish to say in addition to the evidence to the Commission.

The Commission is very grateful to those who have agreed to participate in the hearings. Most of the sessions will be public and broadcast live on UNTV. Those participants know that what they say is being broadcast and recorded and have given their consent to that being the case. However, due to protection concerns, some of the sessions will be closed.

The Commission, during the course of this particular area of investigation, has interviewed around twenty-five male and female victims and witnesses of sexual and gender-based violence.

Those interviews have been in extensive investigative interviews. From those who were interviewed, a small number have been invited to participate in these hearings. The Commission wishes to give them the opportunity of addressing commissioners directly, telling their story to us directly and not indirectly through our investigators.

In addition, we wish to give them the opportunity where they wish to appear publicly, to address a broader international community about the experiences that they have encountered. Those who have chosen not to appear publicly have made that choice because of fear of reprisals and also fear of stigma as a result of what was done to them. This applies particularly to female victims of sexual violence who are at greater risk of social exclusion and repercussions and violence from within the community.

We respect the right of those who do not wish to speak publicly, and we are still keen to hear them during these two days so that they can tell us, the Commission, directly about their experience. The Commission is not a court. However, the public hearings are held to direct attention and to obtain direct testimony from victims and witnesses with a view to ensuring legal accountability and justice – justice first and foremost for the victims, but also providing them with a voice to speak more broadly.

We seek to allow victims and survivors on all sides to speak for themselves to the international community in a formal but comfortable setting. In this way, the Commission hopes that their plight will be better understood by a wider international audience, and especially understood in the region where the events have taken place. We have invited the Israeli authorities to provide all relevant documentary evidence and information in their possession, along with relevant information on accountability proceedings being conducted on sexual violence. But we have received no response to our repeated requests.