

International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

**Remarks by
Andrew Gilmour, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights
29 November 2017**

Many thanks for your attendance at this important event.

Since 1977, each year on 29 November, we have marked this day of solidarity. This year, in particular, it is essential that we reflect on the past. 2017 marks 50 years since the start of the occupation. Over these 50 years, the international community has seen a continuous degradation of the human rights of the Palestinian people.

Year after year, the reports of the Secretary-General and of the High Commissioner for Human Rights – not to mention countless others – paint a bleak picture of a conflict in which serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law drive an ongoing cycle of violence, resulting in suffering by both sides.

These reports set out with depressing regularity violations by Israel as the occupying power with respect to obligations under both international humanitarian law and international human rights law. These violations have a significant impact on the most basic rights - and indeed the daily lives - of Palestinians living in the occupied territory.

Over the years, it has become clear that the 50-year occupation is the source of many human rights violations, and that the atmosphere of impunity that prevails with respect to these violations does little to discourage further violence.

Settlements continue to expand, despite repeated declarations of illegality by the United Nations and the international community. Freedom of movement is severely restricted, not least because of these settlements. Many Palestinians are subject to frequent arrest and administrative detention, and the rights to development, to education, and to health, are stifled.

The blockade of Gaza continues, now in its tenth year. In view of the electricity crisis of recent months, residents of Gaza have lived in an unbearable situation. Access to healthcare, clean water and other essentials has become increasingly restricted. The deterioration in infrastructure, due to repeated escalations of

hostilities and significant restrictions on reconstruction, have further compounded the human-made humanitarian crisis.

Amidst these events, human rights defenders are increasingly under attack. Palestinian human rights defenders find themselves subject to arrest and detention for participation in peaceful protests, which remain severely restricted under Military Order 101. Israeli human rights organizations, many of whom have taken principled and courageous stances on the human rights of the Palestinian people, have been targeted by legislation, political rhetoric and repeated efforts to undermine their credibility, legitimacy and patriotism.

In this atmosphere, in which many have lost hope for the future, the United Nations and the international community must renew support for the peace process, and strive to help the parties achieve the long promised two-state solution. It also essential that all efforts to move forward must take into account - and indeed have at their core - a strong commitment to upholding human rights; to ensuring their respect, protection, and fulfillment.

Let me share what the High Commissioner for Human Rights told the Human Rights Council in June this year:

"(...) compliance with international law, and ensuring its respect, are not optional: they are the sine qua non condition for peace. (...) Human rights violations (...) are not merely symptoms of the conflict, but further fuel the cycle of violence, which has now persisted for half a century.

To break this cycle, the root causes must be addressed. These include bringing the occupation to an end. Respect for human rights is the path which leads out of this conflict, creating the space for peace."

To end on a hopeful note: the latest Cairo brokered intra-Palestinian reconciliation agreement is an important step towards addressing the energy crisis and its devastating consequences in Gaza, and towards ending the occupation.

We do hope it can contribute to moving the process forward, so that the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza can finally see some hope of ending the harsh occupation that translates – for them – into the sustained and systematic suppression of almost every single human right.