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**Alarmed by Surging Construction Activity, Palestinian Rights Committee**

**Supports Call for Israel to Choose between Peace, Settlements**

 The Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People adopted on 14 January the following statement on Israel’s illegal settlement activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem:

The Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is greatly alarmed by the recent upsurge in Israeli settlement activity.  The Israeli Government has ignored the international community’s repeated calls for a complete cessation of settlement activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, which are illegal under international humanitarian law and constitute a major obstruction to the efforts to resume the peace process towards achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine.These illegal policies run counter to all international efforts at helping the permanent status negotiations succeed.  The recent decision of the Israeli Government to allocate more than half a billion United States dollars worth of subsidies for the expansion of settlements through the year 2012 is signaling Israel’s clear intent to continue its illegal policies, thus rendering the negotiations with the Palestinians futile and further threatening the possibilities for achieving the two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 borders.

Following the expiration of the partial settlement moratorium last September, construction of more than 1,600 settlement units has already been undertaken in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in and around East Jerusalem.  Palestinian homes continue to be demolished to make room for illegal settlers, in defiance of universal condemnations of such unlawful and provocative practices.  The Committee would like to remind Israel that a complete halt to settlement construction, including natural growth, is an Israeli obligation under the Quartet’s Road Map.  The Security Council, by its resolution 446 of 22 March 1979, determined that settlements were both contrary to international law and an impediment to peace.  The Committee calls upon Israel to extend the moratorium indefinitely, apply it to East Jerusalem, and remove the unauthorized outposts in line with the Road Map.  In addition, actions by settlers — such as the uprooting of olive trees belonging to Palestinians, vandalism, theft, desecration of cemeteries, and harassment and intimidation of Palestinians — have become an almost daily occurrence and often seem to be tolerated by the Israeli authorities.  Such actions violate Palestinian human rights, raise tensions between the two sides and must be halted.

The Committee is of the view that the implementation of a renewed settlement moratorium would contribute significantly to a resumption of meaningful direct negotiations between the parties.  These crucial talks can only succeed in an atmosphere of mutual trust and good faith.  Settlement construction is contradictory to the goal of ending the Israeli occupation that began in 1967 and gravely undermines trust and the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people to live in a viable State of their own.  The Palestinian leadership has demonstrated political maturity by engaging in direct negotiations with Israel, while making it abundantly clear at the outset that Israel would have to choose between settlements and peace.  The Committee fully supports that principled stance.

There is an unambiguous international consensus with regard to the illegality of the settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.  What is lacking is the political will to take action in order to stop settlement expansion with a view to eventually remove them from the occupied land.  While appreciative of the efforts in recent years by the Quartet and its individual members to promote a settlement freeze and a return to negotiations, the Committee strongly urges the Security Council, the Quartet, and the High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Conventions to unequivocally reaffirm their position of principle on the settlement issue with a view to compelling Israel to live up to its obligations.  The future of the peace process hangs in the balance.  The international community should send a clear and unambiguous message:  settlement activity is illegal and incompatible with peace.  It must stop.  This is imperative for having credible negotiations that can achieve the stated objective of the peace process on the basis of the relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, including the land-for-peace principle, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet Road Map.