End of Mission Statement of the UN Special Rapporteur On the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied Since 1967

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“I have just concluded my first official visit as the newly appointed UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967. I travelled to Amman, Jordan where, over the course of 10-15 July, I met with a range of civil society groups, community representatives, UN officials, and Palestinian government officials to discuss the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

I was struck by a sentiment repeated by almost all of those with whom I met: that, in the face of an increasingly difficult situation, people living in the Occupied Palestinian Territory including East Jerusalem are, more and more, struggling with feelings of hopelessness, particularly among the young. It is clear that the longstanding Occupation is more entrenched than ever, and that this is having an impact across the broad spectrum of human rights and the development trajectory of the OPT.

I am concerned about the escalation of violence that began last September, and about the many deaths, both Palestinian and Israeli, that resulted from this violence.  I would urge the Israeli authorities to thoroughly investigate cases which may have amounted to an excessive use of force or to an extrajudicial killing, and to ensure that genuine accountability is made a priority. I am particularly concerned by the recently published police regulations which state that Israeli police forces may react to stone throwing with live ammunition. Use of deadly force should only be used in extremely limited cases – only when a law enforcement officer is faced with a life-threatening danger.

It is clear that the longstanding Occupation continues to affect a broad spectrum of rights under international law, and to hinder the economic and social development of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.  The existence and spread of the Israeli settlements amount to a grave breach of international law, and they spawn a host of other violations under international human rights and humanitarian law. This has been long stated by the international community, and as the 50th year of the Occupation approaches in 2017, more of the world’s attention should be focused on reversing the seeming intractability of this situation.

I heard from several individuals about the impact of movement restrictions and closures of entire towns, which not only limit the daily activities of affected persons, but also deprive children of the right to education by preventing consistent access to schools and keeping teachers from getting to their students. They endanger the right to health by preventing people from accessing life-saving medical care, and keeping doctors from traveling for much-needed training and educational opportunities.  Commerce and business are adversely affected when markets for goods cannot be consistently accessed, and when much-needed resources cannot be reached due to challenges such as exclusion zones or access-restricted areas.

I would like to emphasize that the work of the civil society organizations with whom I met is critical to ensuring respect for human rights in the OPT.  The worldwide problem of shrinking space for the work of human rights defenders is clearly evident, for example with Israel’s recent passage of the so-called NGO Transparency law, which appears to disproportionately affect organizations working to advocate for human rights, including in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

I met with the groups in Amman because I did not receive a response from Israel’s Permanent Mission in Geneva to my request to be permitted to travel to the Occupied Palestinian Territory in order to assess the human rights situation first-hand. This lack of response by Israel, the occupying power, is a matter of deep concern, given the specific obligations under the Charter of the United Nations to allow those who represent the United Nations to enjoy such privileges and immunities in the territory of States Members as are necessary to for the independent exercise of their functions in connection with the Organization (Article 105, paragraph 2).

I will present my first report to the United Nations General Assembly at its 71st session in October 2016.”