

Date: 14 May 2018

Re: Palestinian Human Rights Organization Council (PHROC) call for an immediate statement to be released by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Your Excellency Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein,

It is with grave concern that Palestinian Human Rights Organization Council (PHROC) write regarding the rapid escalation of killings by Israel at the Gaza fence, to enforce and maintain its unlawful sea and land closure and prolonged occupation of Palestinian territory. Today Israel continues its implementation of unnecessary, indiscriminate, and disproportionate use of force against unarmed civilians, including women, children and families marching in the “Great Return March” to secure their right to return to their places of origin and in commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the “Nakba”.

Critically the killing of civilians in pursuit of their right of return, and right to peacefully assemble, further represents a manifest violation of the right to life. Since the mass protests began, the Israeli military has fired live ammunition from snipers, used plastic coated steel bullets, and launched tear gas grenades from drones. Between 30 March and 13 May 2018, human rights organizations have documented that 41 Palestinians have been killed while participating in these peaceful demonstrations, including five children, two journalists, one person on crutches, and two persons with disabilities. During the same period, 3,979 Palestinians were injured, including 732 children, 131 women, 35 paramedics, and 37 journalists, among them 2,186 by live ammunition.¹ As such, the killings carried out in the context of the ongoing occupation may amount to willful killings, grave breaches under Article (147) of the Fourth Geneva Convention including wilfully causing great suffering or serious injury to body or health and war crimes under Article 8(2)(a)(i) of the Rome Statute. In this vein, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court has warned “any new alleged crime committed in the context of the situation in Palestine may be subjected to my Office's scrutiny. This applies to the events of the past weeks and to any future incident.” Today, as of 20:00 pm, a further 54 people were killed, including 41 civilians of which five were children, and as of 16:30pm the Palestinian Ministry of Health documented 1,960 injuries.

Today, Israel and the United States have acted in abject violation and disregard of general international law, relocating the United States embassy to Jerusalem in an effective endorsement of Israel's annexation of Jerusalem. The recognition of internationally unlawful acts such as annexation, as lawful, sends a strong message to violating States, to continue their systematic denial of the human rights of

¹Al Mezan. Press Release: “310 Palestinians Injured on the Sixth Friday of Demonstrations in Gaza.” 5 May 2018. <http://www.mezan.org/en/post/22803/310+Palestinians+Injured+on+the+Sixth+Friday+of+Demonstrations+in+Gaza>.

occupied populations, including the rights to return, self-determination and permanent sovereignty over natural and national resources. In addition, the recognition grants Israel a carte blanche to flagrantly disregard the rule of law, further its unlawful settlement of Palestine, and employ shoot to kill policies to maintain its prolonged occupation, with impunity.

On 10 May 2018, Palestinian human rights organizations [called upon the UN](#) to take action to ensure Israel's compliance with international law ahead of large-scale protests expected in Palestine in commemoration of the "Nakba" and against the opening of the US embassy in Jerusalem. The Palestinian organizations warned against potential excessive use of force, including lethal force, by the Israeli Occupying Forces in suppression of the right to peaceful assembly. Today, following the failure of the international community to act to prevent the expected high civilian death toll and casualties, PHROC call for a strong statement of condemnation by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. In light of the escalating death toll and mass civilian casualties in the Gaza Strip, PHROC asks that the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights call for the convening of an emergency session of the Human Rights Council to examine violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law committed during the "Great Return March" since 30 March 2018 across the OPT, and conduct an independent, impartial, investigation by means of establishing a Commission of Inquiry. It is a matter of urgency that the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights immediately and publicly condemns Israel's resort to force, including lethal force, in the Gaza Strip, and considers further actions to ensure the continued non-recognition of Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem by the international community.

It is imperative in this regard that the international community act collectively to enforce international law and sanction Israel. Israel must be held accountable for gross violations of international human rights and international humanitarian law, incurring both state and individual criminal responsibility for sanctioning killings as a matter of state policy. Failure to act now to stop human rights violations and end occupation will lead to further mistrust in the international justice system among Palestinians, which will pave the way for further violence and violations of international law.

Yours Sincerely,

Addameer Prisoners' Support and Human Rights Association
 Al-Haq – Defending Human Rights
 Defense for Children International – Palestine Section
 Jerusalem Center for Legal Aid and Human Rights
 BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and
 Refugee Rights



Aldameer Association for Human Rights
 AL-Mezan Center for Human Rights
 Ramallah Center for Human Rights Studies
 The Palestinian Center for Human Rights
 Hurryyat-Center for Defense of Liberties and Civil Rights
 Independent Commission for Human Rights (Observer)

Palestinian Human Rights Organizations Council members:



Addameer Prisoners' Support and Human Rights Association

Sahar Francis
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