

Al-Haq Joint Statement – General Debate
20th session of the Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute
7 December 2021, The Hague

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to address you today on behalf of the following Palestinian human rights organisations, Al-Haq, the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights and Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights. As you are all aware, six Palestinian civil society organisations have recently been designated as “terrorist organisations” by the Israeli occupying authorities. These organisations are Al-Haq, Addameer, Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, Defence for Children International, Union of Agricultural Work Committees, Bisan Center for Research and Development, and the Union of Palestinian Women’s Committees.

The decision to label these organisations as “terrorist” is the culmination of years-long orchestrated campaign that aims at silencing human rights defenders. The tactics used include several intimidation and harassment methods, such as smearing campaigns, attempts to dry financial resources, targeting with Pegasus spyware, and even death threats. This is primarily because of our long-lasting constructive engagement with the ICC. Former Prosecutor Bensouda acknowledged in her 2016 report on the preliminary examination that **“staff members of certain organisations that have gathered information of relevance to the Office of the Prosecutor’s preliminary examination, such as Al-Haq and Al Mezan, have been subjected to threats and other apparent acts of intimidation and interference.”**

Excellencies,

Israel systematically denies international access to the occupied Palestinian territory, including UN Special Rapporteurs and Commissions of Inquiries. As a result, the only access the international community and the relevant investigative bodies, including the ICC, have to the requisite documentation of the alleged international crimes in the situation in Palestine is through our organisations. Israel’s targeting of our organisations, aspires to hinder the work of the ICC by depriving it of one of its main sources of information, evidence and supporting analysis. Our organizations have been submitting vital communications to the Office of the

Prosecutor. Our organisations have also played a pivotal role in advocating for the State of Palestine's accession to the Rome Statute.

Excellencies,

The Apartheid Convention lists “*Persecution of organizations and persons by depriving them of fundamental rights and freedoms, because they oppose apartheid*” as one of the acts of apartheid. Israel's unsubstantiated designations are a clear attempt by an Apartheid regime to conceal its crimes and to prevent the ICC from acquiring the information and evidence that have been collected by our organisations. Such acts of “**tampering with or interfering with the collection of evidence**”, when at the trial stage, for example, amount to “offences against the administration of justice” as stipulated by the rules of the Rome Statute.

We, therefore, urge the Office of the Prosecutor to expedite its investigation in the Situation in Palestine, including of the evident crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution.

In addition, the Assembly of States Parties has a unique responsibility to address this matter. State parties must act swiftly and decisively to protect human rights defenders in Palestine. This Assembly and its States Parties must boldly and unequivocally condemn Israel's designation. The silence of this Assembly and its State Parties in this situation sends a very unfavourable message to other civil society organisations working actively on the ground, especially in situation countries to which the ICC has no access.

Excellencies,

If colonial occupying powers will be allowed to interfere, influence and even outlaw human rights organisations under baseless allegations of terrorism, then we can only envisage a very dystopian future ahead of the human rights movement as a whole, in which victims will be abandoned, impunity will prevail, justice will be denied and the ICC itself could be rendered irrelevant. Together, we must make the purpose of our lives to prevent such an outcome.

Palestinian victims have placed their hopes and trust in us to make their voices heard, and we will stay the course – undeterred.

Thank you,