

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends and partners,

I am truly honored and deeply touched to stand in front of you today to receive the prestigious Bruno Kreisky Prize for Human Rights 2022. On behalf of Al-Haq, its board of directors, general assembly and our team, I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation to Bruno Kreisky Foundation and the selection committee for selecting Al-Haq to receive the Prize for this year.

It is sometimes said that human rights defenders are dreamers. I have to acknowledge that this is true, we dream to prevent extreme realists from going far with their realism in a way that distorts human concepts such as justice, rights and freedom. Al-Haq, in Arabic refers to Truth and Right. Our work seems to upset our oppressors and for decades they have smeared us, targeted us and used many attempts to silence the Palestinian people's voice calling for justice and accountability.

In these difficult times for Al-Haq, this Prize is not only an appreciation to the work that Al-Haq does, but it is a sign of appreciation to all human rights defenders in the world, a sign to our professionalism and a sign that keeps us going forward in defending the rights of the Palestinian people

including our right to self-determination and the Palestinian refugees right of return.

As you all know, Al-Haq, together with other Palestinian human rights and civil society organisations, was designated as a terrorist organisation in October of last year by the Israeli settler-colonial and apartheid regime. We cannot think of a reason other than being vocal about their violations of human rights and international law, and our efforts to hold perpetrators accountable before the ICC that drove them to take this decision.

Since we started our work with the ICC, they have made every possible effort to silence us using various tactics including by intimidation, smear campaigns, death threats, drying our financial resources and now this designation. It is sarcastic when an apartheid regime whose officials should have been behind bars for the international crimes they have committed against the Palestinian people, end up designating a human rights organization like Al-Haq as a terrorist organization.

The values of human rights and international law are universal and their applicability should be treated as such, but in our world and within the halls of power and politics, the reality is something else, and we have all witnessed the double standards, especially with the recent events in Europe. We expect the world not to be selective in their

applicability of these universal values we work for. But for us, victims are victims and criminals are criminals regardless of their nationality and power position. For us, and given this context, this prize and the selection of Al-Haq, means that you within this room not only appreciate the work that we do, but you are willing to challenge such designations and injustices made against our people.

While we are meeting here today the Israeli occupation has entered its 56th year and the Nakba (the Catastrophe of the Palestinian people) has entered its 75th year. This makes Israel's prolonged occupation the longest military occupation in the modern history. With Israeli practices on the ground, one can easily see and conclude that this has exceeded all the limits of classical and traditional occupation as set forth in International law. Furthermore, this reality faced by Palestinians is manifested with a settler-colonial and apartheid regime triggered by various laws, practices and daily injustices against our people. This has been our view and vision for more than two decades and has been partially reflected in recent reports of international organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch as well as the Israeli organisation, Btselem and many others.

Israel's prolonged occupation and settler-colonial and apartheid regime would not have reached this level of

entrenchment if the international community at large and individual states had held their legal obligations under international law to end occupation and hold perpetrators of international crimes accountable.

Today it is imperative on third party states to take action including by the imposition of sanctions and cooperation with and support to the International Criminal Court to carry out its mandate. The current Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Mr. Karim Khan, must take concrete steps towards completing the investigation that had been initiated by his predecessor Ms. Fatou Bensouda. Contrary to this, Palestinians in general and direct victims of Israeli crimes will lose the remaining little faith in the international justice and legal system.

Today, we share with you our deep concern of the continuous prevailing impunity practiced by Israel, we are disturbed of the widespread of the Israeli systematic crimes and the crimes committed by settler groups against Palestinian communities.

Within our internal context we reiterate that our unity as Palestinians is crucial and the political division that has manifested itself for more than a decade has affected the Palestinian people and their freedoms negatively. It is an obstacle for us and for the new generations to come. But I stand in front of you today hoping that this division will

end soon, we need to give hope to the new generations, we need to give them the chance in a participatory approach to select their leadership in a democratic way, it is time that the Palestinian people enjoy their right to participate in selecting their representatives and their needs are taken into account for any future political solutions.

At the end, we would like to honor our people and dedicate this prize to all Palestinian victims of Israeli crimes, especially children. We dedicate this prize to the Palestinian mothers waiting for the withheld bodies of their martyred sons, we dedicate it to the Palestinian prisoners who have paid their lives behind bars for the freedom of our people, we dedicate it to farmers standing steadfast in their lands in the face of the brutal settler violence and military machines uprooting our olive trees, and destroying our homes. We dedicate this prize to our people in Gaza living within the largest open-air prison in the world. We dedicate this prize to all Palestinian journalists working tirelessly to spread our story and give a voice to the voiceless, especially to Shireen Abu Aqleh, who was murdered by the Israeli occupying forces in Jenin 42 days ago.

We know that the reality is grim, but we also see the light at the end of the tunnel, and we know this injustice will not continue forever, and the hope is here and we will continue

to follow its light. As the former chancellor Bruno Kreisky once said, “the ideas and principles of democracy should not be limited to politics, but must pervade all areas of social life”, your solidarity with the Palestinian people and selecting Al-Haq for this prize is one of those areas of the social life, manifesting itself exactly on what standing for democratic values and principles mean for us.

We promise you that our fight for the freedom, justice and rule of law will continue, we will not be deterred by any intimidations and smearing campaigns against us. We will continue to defend our people and their rights to life in freedom and in dignity.