



# General Assembly Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
24 June 2021

Original: English

**General Assembly  
Seventy-sixth session  
Item 65 of the preliminary list\***  
**Permanent sovereignty of the Palestinian people in the  
Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East  
Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied  
Syrian Golan over their natural resources**

**Economic and Social Council  
Substantive session of 2021  
Agenda item 16  
Economic and social repercussions of the  
Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the  
Palestinian people in the Occupied  
Palestinian Territory, including East  
Jerusalem, and the Arab population in the  
occupied Syrian Golan**

## **Economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan**

**Note by the Secretary-General\*\***

### *Summary*

In its resolution [2021/4](#), entitled “Economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan”, the Economic and Social Council requested the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly at its seventy-fifth session, through the Economic and Social Council, a report on the implementation of that resolution. The Assembly, in its resolution [75/236](#), entitled “Permanent sovereignty of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan over their natural resources”, requested the Secretary-General to submit a report to it at its seventy-sixth session. The present report, which was prepared by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), has been submitted in compliance with these resolutions.

The report covers persistent Israeli practices and policies, particularly those that are in violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law and that affect the social and economic conditions of the people living under its military occupation.

\* [A/76/50](#).

\*\* The present report was submitted after the deadline so as to include the most recent information.



ESCWA would like to express its appreciation for the contributions of the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, the Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the World Health Organization.

## I. Introduction

1. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution [2021/4](#), expressed concerns about the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan. The General Assembly, in its resolution [75/236](#), demanded that Israel, the occupying Power, cease the exploitation, damage, cause of loss or depletion and endangerment of natural resources in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan.
2. The present report provides information on relevant developments in this regard during the period from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.

## II. Occupied Palestinian Territory

### Israeli practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

3. The reporting period was characterized by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and efforts to combat it. During the period, Israel continued such policies and practices as settlement expansion, the demolition of Palestinian structures and homes, closures, access and movement restrictions, and other aspects of its protracted occupation that have had a severe humanitarian, economic, social and political impact on Palestinians and their ability to exercise their fundamental human rights.<sup>1</sup>
4. As previously reported, the Israeli zoning and planning policies in Area C, which constitutes 60 per cent of the West Bank, and East Jerusalem, are discriminatory and are considered incompatible with requirements under international law. Policies that allocate land almost exclusively to Israeli settlements or to the military and that facilitate the growth of Israeli settlements make it almost impossible for Palestinians to obtain building permits. The average rate of approval of Palestinian applications for building permits in Area C during the 2010s stood at 3 to 4 per cent. As a result, many Palestinians are compelled to build without a permit, risking eviction, house demolition and displacement.<sup>2</sup>
5. Palestinians in the occupied territory continue to be subject to a complex combination of Israeli and Palestinian legal systems. In the West Bank, Israeli domestic law is applied extraterritorially to Israeli settlers, while Palestinians are subject to Israeli military law in addition to the Palestinian legal system. As a result, lower human rights standards are applied to Palestinian suspects and defendants compared with Israeli suspects and defendants. The application of two different legal systems in the same territory on the sole basis of nationality or origin is inherently discriminatory and violates the principle of equality before the law, which is central to the right to a fair trial. The application of Israeli domestic law to settlers and of Israeli military law to Palestinians in the West Bank also raises concerns as to the obligation of the occupying Power to respect the laws in force in the territory it occupies, unless it is absolutely prevented from doing so.<sup>3</sup>
6. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination expressed its concern “at the consequences of policies and practices that amount to segregation”.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [A/75/84-E/2020/61](#), para. 152.

<sup>2</sup> See [A/75/86-E/2020/62](#), para. 2; and United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021: OPT* (2020), p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> See [A/75/86-E/2020/62](#), para. 5; [A/71/86-E/2016/13](#), para. 7; [A/72/90-E/2017/71](#), para. 4; and [A/73/87-E/2018/69](#), para. 3; see also [A/HRC/43/67](#), para. 29.

<sup>4</sup> [CERD/C/ISR/CO/17-19](#), para. 22.

The Committee cited in this regard the two separate legal systems and the unequal use of roads and infrastructure or access to basic services, lands and water resources. The Committee also pointed to several laws that discriminate against Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and that create differences among them, with regard to their civil status, legal protection, access to social and economic benefits, or right to land and property.<sup>5</sup>

### **Violence and the use of force**

7. As the occupying Power, Israel has the obligation to take all the measures in its power to restore and ensure, as far as possible, public order and life in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and to protect the Palestinian population from all acts of violence in all circumstances.<sup>6</sup>

8. Israeli security forces and military continued to employ measures and practices that raise serious concerns about excessive use of force, in some cases possibly amounting to arbitrary deprivation of life, including extrajudicial execution.<sup>7</sup>

9. Of particular and grave concern is the recurrent use by Israeli security forces of crowd control measures against children inside and near schools close to settlements. Documented cases reveal the unwarranted use of force and violations of the right to physical and mental integrity of Palestinian children.<sup>8</sup>

10. During the reporting period, Israeli military and security forces killed 21 Palestinians, including 6 boys, and injured another 1,662 Palestinians, including 185 children (7 girls and 178 boys) and 21 women.<sup>9</sup>

11. Lack of accountability for excessive use of force and other violations by Israeli security forces remained pervasive.<sup>10</sup> An Israeli non-governmental organization (NGO), Yesh Din, concluded that permissive rules of engagement with regard to firing at unarmed protestors, coupled with a law enforcement system that does not allow genuine and effective investigations, results in the loss of many lives.<sup>11</sup> The Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories has expressed serious concern over the prevailing culture of impunity, in particular in cases alleging excessive use of force by Israeli security forces in both the West Bank and Gaza.<sup>12</sup>

12. In March 2021, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court confirmed the initiation by her Office of an investigation regarding the situation in Palestine. The investigation will cover crimes within the jurisdiction of the Court that are alleged to have been committed since 13 June 2014, the date to which reference was made in the referral of the situation to her Office.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., para. 13.

<sup>6</sup> A/74/357, para. 26.

<sup>7</sup> A/75/336, para. 4.

<sup>8</sup> A/74/357, para. 68.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Data on Casualties database. Available at [www.ochaopt.org/data/casualties](http://www.ochaopt.org/data/casualties) (accessed on 31 March 2021).

<sup>10</sup> A/75/336, paras. 4–9.

<sup>11</sup> Yesh Din, “Killing time: the slow processing of complaints regarding Gaza Great March of Return casualties and the use of the fact-finding assessment mechanism to thwart prosecution of soldiers”, 22 November 2020.

<sup>12</sup> A/75/199, para. 22.

<sup>13</sup> International Criminal Court, *Prosecution Request Pursuant to Article 19(3) for a Ruling on the Court’s Territorial Jurisdiction in Palestine*, Case No. ICC-01/18-12, 22 January 2020; and Fatou Bensouda, Prosecutor, International Criminal Court, statement respecting an investigation of the Situation in Palestine, 3 March 2021.

## Detention and ill-treatment

13. Israel has continued the use of administrative detention for inordinately lengthy periods, which contributes to perpetuating the arbitrary detention of Palestinians. The Committee against Torture has expressed concern that administrative detention does not conform to article 16 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment because, among other reasons, it is used for “inordinately lengthy periods”. Administrative detention thus deprives detainees of basic safeguards, including the right to challenge the evidence that is the basis for the detention.<sup>14</sup> The practice by Israel of administrative detention against journalists and human rights defenders, as well as children, continued. Israeli authorities intensified the arrest and detention of Palestinian political figures in Jerusalem.<sup>15</sup>

14. By 31 March 2021, 4,450 Palestinians were held as “security prisoners” in Israeli prisons, including 140 children, 37 women and 10 members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, while by 30 September 2020, 376 Palestinians, including 2 children, were held in administrative detention.<sup>16</sup> The Israeli Prison Service has stopped releasing monthly comprehensive and disaggregated figures on Palestinian “security detainees”, previously released in response to freedom of information requests from Israeli NGOs.<sup>17</sup>

15. Israeli authorities continue to hold most Palestinian detainees inside Israel, in violation of international humanitarian law. This has a negative impact on the right of detainees to receive visitors and family members who reside in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.<sup>18</sup> As of September 2020, nearly two thirds of detained children had been transferred from the West Bank and were held in facilities inside Israel.<sup>19</sup>

16. It has been reported that Palestinians were systematically subjected to ill-treatment in detention. “Special interrogation methods” were reportedly used by the Internal Security Agency, based on internal guidelines previously approved by the Attorney General and upheld by the High Court of Justice. In many cases, detainees were kept in incommunicado detention and not allowed to meet with their lawyers. The Palestinian Prisoners’ Commission and the Palestinian Prisoners’ Club raised concerns about medical negligence by the Israeli authorities and reported that punitive measures were enforced by the Israel Prison Service to pressure detainees who were protesting their detention through a hunger strike.<sup>20</sup> Female Palestinian detainees have been reportedly subjected to intrusive body searches, beatings, insults, threats and sexual harassment, sometimes as punitive measures.<sup>21</sup>

17. Israeli authorities have reportedly arrested and detained family members of Palestinian detainees, including women, as a form of pressure or punitive measure.<sup>22</sup>

18. Patterns of ill-treatment of children in detention also have been indicated by testimonies from 81 children held in Israeli detention,<sup>23</sup> including beatings and harsh

<sup>14</sup> CAT/C/ISR/CO/4, para. 17; and CAT/C/ISR/CO/5, paras. 22 and 23.

<sup>15</sup> A/75/336, para. 48.

<sup>16</sup> Addameer, Statistics database, available at [www.addameer.org/statistics](http://www.addameer.org/statistics); and B’Tselem, Statistics on Administrative Detention database. Available at [www.btselem.org/administrative\\_detention/statistics](http://www.btselem.org/administrative_detention/statistics) (accessed on 1 April 2021).

<sup>17</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights input.

<sup>18</sup> A/75/336, para. 10.

<sup>19</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) input citing Israel Prison Services data.

<sup>20</sup> A/75/336, paras. 12–14.

<sup>21</sup> A/75/199, para. 51.

<sup>22</sup> A/75/336, para. 19.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., para. 20.

disciplinary measures that included solitary confinement and the deprivation of family visits when the children protested against being moved.<sup>24</sup>

19. The inadequate conditions under which children have been detained in Israeli prisons are reported to include lack of access to proper food, hygiene and ventilation, and exposure to cold weather and humidity. Those who complained reportedly faced a severe response by the prison administration, including night raids in cells, beatings, subjection to stress positions, solitary confinement and the denial of family visits for prolonged periods of time.<sup>25</sup>

20. Interrogation techniques used against detained children are often mentally and physically coercive and incorporate intimidation, threats, verbal abuse and physical violence to obtain confessions. In addition, cases in which Israeli authorities attempt to recruit Palestinian children as informants during interrogations have been documented.<sup>26</sup>

21. Of some 1,300 complaints of torture involving the Israel Security Agency that have been submitted to the Israeli Ministry of Justice since 2001, only 1 has resulted in a criminal investigation, with no indictments.<sup>27</sup>

### **Destruction and confiscation of property and infrastructure**

22. The demolition of structures and related forced evictions by Israel of Palestinians entail numerous human rights violations, exacerbate the coercive environment and raise concerns about the risk of forcible transfer.<sup>28</sup> The extensive destruction of property, as well as the forcible transfer of protected people, are considered grave breaches of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and may amount to war crimes.<sup>29</sup> In addition, confiscations under the Absentee Property Law and the Legal and Administrative Matters Law in East Jerusalem are carried out solely on the basis of the nationality or origin of the owner, rendering them inherently discriminatory.<sup>30</sup>

23. The year 2020 witnessed the highest number of demolitions and people displaced by the Israeli authorities in recent years.<sup>31</sup> Israel mainly cites the lack of building permits in this regard, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain, as the Israeli authorities continued its ordered moratorium on the approval of master plans prepared and submitted by the Palestinian communities in Area C of the West Bank.<sup>32</sup>

24. During the first two months of 2021 alone, the Israeli authorities had demolished or seized at least 227 Palestinian-owned structures, including 93 donor-funded structures. This represents an increase of almost 185 per cent in structures targeted

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<sup>24</sup> UNICEF input.

<sup>25</sup> UNICEF input and [A/75/336](#), paras. 20 and 21.

<sup>26</sup> Defence for Children International Palestine, *Isolated and Alone: Palestinian Children Held in Solitary Confinement by Israeli Authorities for Interrogation* (2020), p. 12.

<sup>27</sup> Public Committee against Torture in Israel, *Torture in Israel 2020: Situation Report*, p.1.

Available at <https://stoptorture.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/%D7%90%D7%A0%D7%92%D7%9C%D7%99%D7%AA.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> [A/75/376](#), para. 34.

<sup>29</sup> Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War, arts. 53 and 147; see also [A/73/410](#).

<sup>30</sup> [A/75/376](#), para. 54.

<sup>31</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, “Peak in demolitions and confiscations amidst increasing denial of the right to justice”, Humanitarian Bulletin, October–December 2020.

<sup>32</sup> United Nations Human Settlements Programme input.

and a nearly 450 per cent increase in donor-funded structures targeted, compared with the equivalent period in 2020.<sup>33</sup>

25. Recent years have seen a steady increase in the seizure of structures targeted as a result of a lack of building permits in Area C. The percentage of structures seized, out of all structures targeted (demolished and seized), increased from 8 per cent in 2016 to 30 per cent in 2020.<sup>34</sup> During the first two months of 2021, it increased to 59.5 per cent.<sup>35</sup>

26. Since 2009, Israeli authorities have demolished 1,343 donor-funded structures.<sup>36</sup> Since 2016, international donors have requested that the Israeli authorities return more than 210 seized humanitarian aid structures to Palestinian beneficiaries. None of these structures have so far been recovered.<sup>37</sup>

27. During the reporting period, Israeli authorities demolished 1,015 Palestinian-owned structures, including 223 homes,<sup>38</sup> and 233 structures owned by Palestine refugees. Demolitions more than tripled during Ramadan in 2020, compared with the same period in 2019.<sup>39</sup>

28. Demolitions in East Jerusalem can be seen in the context of expanding settlements in the E1 area, which when completed would disrupt the geographical contiguity with the West Bank and divide it into two disconnected enclaves.<sup>40</sup> Israeli authorities had announced or advanced the expansion of the settlements ring around East Jerusalem in areas that continue to witness high rates of demolitions, particularly in East Jerusalem and Bethlehem.<sup>41</sup>

29. The acceleration in the number of demolitions was coupled with the increased use of legislation and measures that limited the ability of Palestinians to challenge the targeting of their homes and sources of livelihood in Israeli courts, including military orders permitting expedited demolitions and confiscations in Area C.<sup>42</sup>

30. The introduction of greater punitive measures against unauthorized construction in East Jerusalem has led to an increase in self-demolitions. In addition to fines that may reach up to 300,000 new Israeli shekels, the owners of an illegal structure may be charged extra fines for any additional day's use of such a structure, as well as the cost of the demolition itself, if it was carried out by the municipality. The proportion of self-demolitions in 2020 reached 47 per cent, up from an average of 21 per cent from 2016 to 2019.<sup>43</sup> In East Jerusalem, in addition to those living in homes at risk of

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<sup>33</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, "Humsa-Al Bqai'a", Flash Update, No. 5, 25 February 2021.

<sup>34</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, "Peak in demolitions and confiscations".

<sup>35</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, "COVID-19 emergency situation report, No. 28", February 2021.

<sup>36</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "The confiscation of land is the reason for Land Day", 30 March 2021.

<sup>37</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, "Peak in demolitions and confiscations".

<sup>38</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, West Bank Demolition and Displacement database. Available at [www.ochaopt.org/data/demolition](http://www.ochaopt.org/data/demolition) (accessed on 31 March 2021).

<sup>39</sup> A/75/376, para. 35.

<sup>40</sup> A/75/199, para. 27.

<sup>41</sup> A/75/376, para. 47.

<sup>42</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021*, p. 26.

<sup>43</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, "Peak in demolitions and confiscations".

demolition, some 218 Palestinian households were at risk of eviction, primarily as a result of court cases filed mainly by Israeli settler organizations.<sup>44</sup>

31. Israeli authorities continued to target the relatives of Palestinians suspected of attacks against Israelis. Israeli authorities also continued punitive demolitions of the family homes of Palestinians suspected of killing Israelis in a measure that may amount to collective punishment.<sup>45</sup>

32. Between July 2014 and May 2020, at least 68 Palestinian homes were demolished or sealed, while only eight orders were revoked by the High Court of Justice. Punitive demolitions have never been used against Israeli Jewish civilians who have committed “nationalist” crimes similar to those for which Palestinian homes have been destroyed.<sup>46</sup>

### **Israeli settlement activity and settler violence**

33. In its resolution [75/236](#), the General Assembly stressed that the wall and the settlements being constructed by Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, were contrary to international law. This has been confirmed in other resolutions, such as Security Council resolution [2334 \(2016\)](#), in which the Council reaffirmed that the establishment by Israel of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, had no legal validity and constituted a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of a lasting and comprehensive peace.

34. The establishment and expansion of Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory amounts to the transfer by Israel of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies, which is prohibited under international humanitarian law.

35. By the end of 2020, more than 630,000 Israeli settlers lived in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in some 250 settlements and settlement outposts that directly control approximately 10 per cent of the West Bank.<sup>47</sup>

36. Settlement expansion projects currently under way threaten to further encroach onto Palestinian land, increase fragmentation and heighten the risk of displacement.<sup>48</sup> The advancement of the E1 settlement project to the east of East Jerusalem, if implemented, would intensify the coercive environment for 18 Palestinian Bedouin communities located in the area,<sup>49</sup> further separate East Jerusalem from the remainder of the West Bank, and effectively divide the West Bank into two disconnected enclaves.<sup>50</sup>

37. Israeli authorities continue to encourage Israelis to move to settlements and develop financial ventures in and around them. Benefits and incentives are provided to settlers and settlements in this regard, through both official and unofficial channels, including housing benefits, significant tax benefits, discounted land fees and employment subsidies for industrial zones. These drive consistent growth in the

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<sup>44</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021*, p. 39; and United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, “Palestinian family evicted from its home in East Jerusalem”, Humanitarian Bulletin, October–December 2020.

<sup>45</sup> [A/75/336](#), para. 33.

<sup>46</sup> [A/HRC/44/60](#), paras. 50 and 51.

<sup>47</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021*, p. 17.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>50</sup> [A/75/199](#), paras. 16 and 27.

number of settlers and factories there. Israel also encourages Israelis to set up new outposts, which operate as agricultural farms and enable extensive takeovers of Palestinian farmland and pastureland. Forty such farms have been established in the past decade, effectively taking over tens of thousands of dunams.<sup>51</sup>

38. During 2020, according to Israeli NGO Peace Now, four outposts were regularized retroactively and plans to similarly regularize three others east of Jerusalem were deposited.<sup>52</sup> It should be noted that between 2007 and 2017 an average of 1.7 outposts were established each year.<sup>53</sup>

#### *Settler violence*

39. Settler violence against Palestinians and damage to their property remained high during the reporting period, as 2 Palestinians were killed and 138 were injured by Israeli settlers.<sup>54</sup> The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) recorded at least 960 incidents involving Israeli settlers in which over 10,000 productive trees were destroyed.<sup>55</sup>

40. Despite efforts made by the Israeli authorities in recent years, accountability for settler violence against Palestinians remained an issue.<sup>56</sup> The resulting distrust in the Israeli legal system and fears of reprisal prompted Palestinians to submit fewer complaints.<sup>57</sup>

41. Settler violence has facilitated the takeover of Palestinian land and the establishment of settlement outposts, many of which are subsequently “legalized” (regularized) under Israeli legislation.<sup>58</sup> Repeated and apparently organized settler violence, coupled with other coercive factors, has forced Palestinian families to leave their homes in a number of areas.<sup>59</sup> Such violence includes, most notably, shooting at Palestinians, burning and uprooting trees, and physical attacks.<sup>60</sup>

42. There were reported cases of settlers spitting on Palestinians during attacks, causing fear of exposure to the COVID-19 virus and prompting victims to go into quarantine or self-isolation. In several incidents, settlers appeared to attempt to take over Palestinian land, taking advantage of the restricted movement of Palestinians owing to the state of emergency.<sup>61</sup>

43. On numerous occasions, Israeli security forces did not prevent such attacks and instead accompanied and protected settlers even at times when movement restrictions applied to all in the context of the pandemic.<sup>62</sup> Attempts by settlers to enter and/or attack Palestinian communities continued to cause friction between Israeli security forces and Palestinians. Israeli security forces killed 1 Palestinian and injured 230 in such contexts. Settlers also attacked Palestinians and their property in response to

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<sup>51</sup> Eyal Hareuveni and Dror Etkes, *This Is Ours: And This, Too – Israel’s Settlement Policy in the West Bank* (B’Tselem and Kerem Navot, 2021).

<sup>52</sup> A/75/376, para. 16.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., para. 10.

<sup>54</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Data on Casualties database. Available at [www.ochaopt.org/data/casualties](http://www.ochaopt.org/data/casualties) (accessed on 15 May 2021).

<sup>55</sup> UNRWA West Bank Protection and Neutrality Department.

<sup>56</sup> A/75/376, para. 63.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., para. 33.

<sup>58</sup> A/HRC/43/67, paras. 10 and 15.

<sup>59</sup> A/75/376, paras. 18 and 23.

<sup>60</sup> A/75/199, para. 23.

<sup>61</sup> A/75/376, para. 24.

<sup>62</sup> A/75/199, para. 13.

measures taken by the Israeli authorities against them, leaving messages suggesting that those attacks were acts of retribution.<sup>63</sup>

### **Coercive environment and population displacement**

44. There is continued concern that a combination of Israeli policies and practices in Area C, East Jerusalem and the city of Hebron, such as the demolition and threat of demolition of homes and schools and the destruction of livelihoods; the denial of service infrastructure; the restriction of access to farming and grazing land; settler violence and poor law enforcement in response thereto; and the revocation of residency rights, among other things, have created a coercive environment,<sup>64</sup> which may force Palestinians to leave their places of residence.

45. Involuntary displacement and relocation to alternative residential areas as a result of such policies may amount to forcible transfer if it is carried out without the free and informed consent of the individuals who relocate, in violation of the obligations of Israel under international humanitarian and human rights law. Forcible transfer is a grave breach of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and amounts to a war crime.

46. Forced evictions and demolitions are a key factor in the creation of a coercive environment and increase the risk of forcible transfer. The transfer of property pursuant to utilizing legal means in East Jerusalem also facilitates the transfer of its population into the occupied territory.<sup>65</sup>

47. During the reporting period, demolition and confiscation of structures by Israel resulted in the displacement of 1,255 Palestinians, the majority of whom were women (296) and children (666, including 305 girls). Demolitions also negatively affected another 6,055 Palestinians.<sup>66</sup>

48. The stated intention of the Government of Israel to relocate thousands of Palestinians residing in Area C remains a key concern and contributes to a coercive environment. Some 18 communities in and around East Jerusalem, including the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood, are at particular risk of forced eviction.<sup>67</sup>

49. Israel continued to use its control over the movement of people to maintain the separation between Gaza and the West Bank. The policy effectively prevents most Palestinians from Gaza from reaching the West Bank, with dramatic consequences for families, given that around a third of Gaza residents have relatives in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and that family visits do not represent an accepted criterion for obtaining an exit permit from Gaza.<sup>68</sup> Some 2.1 million Palestinians are estimated to be affected by problems related to displacement and a lack of protection.<sup>69</sup>

50. The implementation of the policy has also increased pressure on West Bank residents to move to Gaza. West Bank residents requesting to temporarily relocate to

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<sup>63</sup> [A/75/376](#), paras. 17–22.

<sup>64</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021*, p. 16.

<sup>65</sup> [A/75/376](#), para. 64.

<sup>66</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, West Bank Demolition and Displacement database. Available at [www.ochaopt.org/data/demolition](http://www.ochaopt.org/data/demolition) (accessed on 31 March 2021).

<sup>67</sup> [A/75/376](#), para. 39. See also United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Protection of civilians: Occupied Palestinian Territory”, 7–20 January 2020; and Marya Farah, *Occupying Jerusalem’s Old City: Israeli Policies of Isolation, Intimidation and Transformation* (Ramallah, Al-Haq, 2019).

<sup>68</sup> [A/75/336](#), para. 27.

<sup>69</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021*, p. 19.

Gaza for family purposes have been required to waive their right to return to the West Bank. Refusing to allow West Bank residents living in Gaza to return to their homes may amount to their forcible transfer.<sup>70</sup>

51. Palestinians in the West Bank are constantly vulnerable to arbitrary invasion of their homes by Israeli security forces and the harm that may result. Home invasions deprive individuals, families and communities of the fundamental security of their own homes. Military law in the West Bank does not require a judicial warrant to invade the private domain. Of all invasions documented by Yesh Din, 88 per cent took place between midnight and 5 a.m.<sup>71</sup>

52. There are also concerns that Israeli security forces occupy the rooftops of private Palestinian homes in Hebron, forcing families to leave their front doors open for soldiers to enter.<sup>72</sup>

53. Another major factor contributing to the coercive environment is the progressive deterioration of the living conditions of Palestinians, namely in Area C and East Jerusalem. Depriving communities of essential services or sources of livelihoods is another tool employed in escalating the coercive environment in specific areas. Frequent and prolonged security operations have caused such a deterioration among the entire population of the neighbourhood of Isawiyah, East Jerusalem. The recurrence, scale and modalities of Israeli operations raise concerns that they may amount to a form of collective punishment of the population.<sup>73</sup>

54. The Palestinian herding community of Humsa Al Bqai'a is one such example. It is located in Area C in the northern Jordan Valley, mostly in an area designated as a "firing zone" for Israeli military training, where Palestinian residency or access is prohibited. Designated firing zones, which cover nearly 30 per cent of Area C, are home to 38 Palestinian Bedouin and herding communities with a population of 6,200. On 22 February 2021, Israeli authorities confiscated 18 residential and animal structures, food parcels, unassembled structures and all the water tanks. Most of the structures had been provided as a humanitarian response following incidents on 3 and 8 February 2021, in which 37 structures were demolished or confiscated. Ten households, comprising more than 60 people, including 36 children, were again displaced and are at heightened risk of forcible transfer.<sup>74</sup> The first demolition of the community was in November 2020, when 76 structures were demolished, more than in any other single demolition in the past decade.<sup>75</sup>

55. Bedouin communities are among the most economically vulnerable. The repeated destruction and confiscation of their homes and property, including structures and other forms of assistance provided by the humanitarian community, is having a devastating economic, social and traumatic impact.<sup>76</sup> A recent assessment identified at least 3,200 residential shelters in Palestinian Bedouin and herding

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<sup>70</sup> [A/75/336](#), para. 28.

<sup>71</sup> Miryam Wijler and others, *A Life Exposed: Military Invasions of Palestinian Homes in the West Bank* (Yesh Din and Physicians for Human Rights Israel and Breaking the Silence, 2020), p. 17.

<sup>72</sup> United States, Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2020* (2021), p. 88.

<sup>73</sup> [A/75/336](#), para. 32.

<sup>74</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, "Humsa-Al Bqai'a".

<sup>75</sup> United Nations, "Dozens displaced in largest demolition in years in the West Bank, reports UN relief office", 5 November 2020.

<sup>76</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, "Humsa-Al Bqai'a".

communities in Area C, including tents, metal shacks and caves, as being substandard and in need of urgent rehabilitation.<sup>77</sup>

56. An estimated 11,000 Palestinians who hold West Bank identification cards are stranded in the “seam zone”. Most of these communities lack health centres, schools and shops, obliging residents to pass through checkpoints in order to reach workplaces and essential education and medical services and maintain family and social relations in the remainder of the West Bank.<sup>78</sup>

57. In Gaza, as of April 2020, approximately 350 families had yet to start rebuilding their destroyed shelters. Due to funding gaps, UNRWA was unable to resume transitional shelter cash assistance payments for those in need, owing to a suspension of the programme in June 2018.<sup>79</sup>

58. A 2020 assessment found that 28,500 existing housing units across Gaza were substandard and did not meet the minimum requirements of living space per person, weather protection, hygiene facilities and privacy. Of these, 7,000 were assessed as being beyond repair, thus requiring complete reconstruction, while the other 21,500 required different degrees of rehabilitation. In addition, it is estimated that some 9,500 families in Gaza living in rented accommodation were at risk of eviction owing to their inability to pay rental costs. This figure is expected to increase over the coming year as a result of the increase in unemployment, poverty and the spread of COVID-19.<sup>80</sup>

#### **Movement and access restrictions**

59. Israeli authorities continued to restrict the freedom of movement of Palestinians across the Occupied Palestinian Territory, primarily through the permit regime regulating passage between Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and abroad.<sup>81</sup> As freedom of movement is a prerequisite to the exercise of other human rights, such as the rights to family, health and education, the closures and related practices imposed by the Israeli authorities, in particular the restrictions on movement, have had a devastating impact on the lives of Palestinians, in particular on families, and have a compounded effect on women and girls. During the COVID-19 pandemic in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Israel continued the implementation of its permit regime, with patients, their companions and health-care workers comprising categories of persons eligible to apply for Israeli-issued permits to travel.<sup>82</sup>

#### *Gaza closure*

60. Imposed since June 2007, following the takeover by Hamas, the closures in Gaza, which affect the movement of goods and people, continue to undermine the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of Palestinians in Gaza and continue to affect all areas of Palestinian life. The blockade may amount to collective punishment, which is prohibited under international law. The closure remains a major impediment to combating the COVID-19 epidemic.

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<sup>77</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021*, pp. 39–40.

<sup>78</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, “16 years after the International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion, some 11,000 Palestinians are still isolated by the Barrier”, *Humanitarian Bulletin*, August–September 2020.

<sup>79</sup> UNRWA input.

<sup>80</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021*, p. 39.

<sup>81</sup> [A/75/336](#), paras. 36–38.

<sup>82</sup> World Health Organization (WHO) input.

61. The closure imposed on Gaza continues to severely restrict the movement of persons and goods to and from Gaza, and has affected every aspect of Palestinians' rights, including freedom of movement, the right to life, the right to health, the right to an adequate standard of living and the right to food.<sup>83</sup>

62. Israeli authorities continued to adopt measures that aggravated the suffering of civilians, including intermittently reducing or entirely closing the fishing zone and closing the crossings, which severely limited the movement of people, fuel, gas and other essential supplies into and out of Gaza.<sup>84</sup>

63. In response to escalations in hostilities, the Israeli authorities reduced the permissible fishing zone and halted the entry of most goods to Gaza, including fuel, leading to the shutdown of the Gaza power plant and triggering power cuts for up to 20 hours a day.<sup>85</sup> On several occasions, Israeli officials expressly cited violence emanating from Gaza as a reason for imposing such measures. In view of their punitive effect on persons who did not commit violence, and the severe human rights impact on the entire population of Gaza, these measures may amount to collective punishment.<sup>86</sup>

64. The prolonged closure of Gaza and the ensuing severe restrictions have virtually eliminated its export sector. The volume of exports from Gaza witnessed a slight increase in 2020 compared with 2019, yet remained at only a quarter of the level seen in the first half of 2007, before the imposition of the closure. The sector is also constrained by lack of access to raw materials and agricultural inputs and technology, power shortages and uncertainty. Conservative estimates suggest that without Israeli restrictions, Palestinian exports could be twice their current levels, given the Occupied Palestinian Territory's proximity to large regional markets.<sup>87</sup>

65. Along the Gaza coast, the Israeli navy continued to enforce unilaterally imposed access restrictions, aiming live ammunition, rubber-coated bullets and water cannons towards Gaza fishers while conducting arrest and seizure operations, often within the authorized fishing zones. In several cases monitored by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, fishers were subjected to excessive force and degrading treatment during arrest operations, such as being handcuffed, blindfolded and forced to undress and jump into the water.<sup>88</sup>

66. Israel also unilaterally declared a restricted area inside the territory of Gaza along the perimeter fence. Though Israel has officially designated up to 200 m from the fence as "no go" area for heavy machinery, most Palestinian farmers report that, in practice, up to 300 m from the perimeter fence is a "no go" area and up to 1,000 m is designated a "high risk" area.

#### *Movement restrictions in the West Bank*

67. The movement of Palestinians in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is restricted through a complex system of checkpoints, permits, military roadblocks, settlements, a bypass road system, parallel legal regimes and the West Bank barrier.

<sup>83</sup> A/75/199, para. 31.

<sup>84</sup> A/75/336, para. 24.

<sup>85</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, "Gaza strip: snapshot", August 2020.

<sup>86</sup> A/75/336, paras. 25 and 26.

<sup>87</sup> United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) input and United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Gaza crossings: movement of people and goods database. Available at [www.ochaopt.org/data/crossings](http://www.ochaopt.org/data/crossings).

<sup>88</sup> A/75/336, para. 38.

Such measures disrupt Palestinians' daily life, with an impact on a range of rights, such as access to education and health care, work and an adequate standard of living.<sup>89</sup>

68. Within the West Bank, Israeli authorities manage or obstruct the movements of Palestinians by employing more than 590 fixed permanent obstacles, such as checkpoints, earth mounds and road gates, as well as the frequent use of flying or temporary checkpoints. Current restrictions remain particularly obtrusive in Hebron and in regions affected by the barrier.<sup>90</sup>

69. The area controlled by the regional council of Israeli settlements in the West Bank (including closed areas allocated for expanding those settlements) was about 542 km<sup>2</sup> by the end of 2020, representing about 10 per cent of the total area of the West Bank. The confiscated areas for the purposes of military bases and military training locations represent about 18 per cent of the West Bank area. All those areas are off limits to Palestinians.<sup>91</sup>

70. The principal obstacle to movement within the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is the wall that has been deemed illegal by the International Court of Justice, 85 per cent of which is located within the occupied territory,<sup>92</sup> isolating 10 per cent of the West Bank.

71. Palestinians in the seam zone are obliged to pass through checkpoints to reach other parts of the West Bank. In turn, the entry of goods such as dairy products, meat and eggs, as well as the entry of service providers, is restricted and requires Israeli-issued permits or verbal approval from the Israeli authorities. Family members and friends face similar restrictions on entering, with the result that social and religious functions must be held on the "West Bank side" of the barrier.<sup>93</sup>

72. Palestinian access to and within the central part of the H2 zone, physically segregated from the rest of the city of Hebron by multiple checkpoints and barriers, is still permitted only to those registered as residents of that area.<sup>94</sup>

73. During the reporting period, UNRWA continued to report access-related incidents in the West Bank which negatively affected the delivery of education, health and relief services to Palestine refugees.<sup>95</sup>

#### **Deprivation of access to natural resources**

74. Area C continues to be almost entirely off limits to the Government of Palestine, as well as to producers and investors, even though it contains the most valuable natural resources. Closures, particularly in Gaza, limit Palestinian access to materials and technologies that could promote the efficient use of energy, water and other natural resources.<sup>96</sup>

75. Water resources in the region continue to be extremely limited and are projected to decrease further as climate change drives temperature rise and precipitation declines. In the West Bank, severe water shortages continue to be reported as Israel retains full control of the distribution and extraction of most water resources, including aquifers. More than 77 per cent of the water resources used by Palestinians

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<sup>89</sup> A/74/468, para. 26.

<sup>90</sup> A/HRC/44/60, para. 78.

<sup>91</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "The confiscation of land is the reason for Land Day".

<sup>92</sup> A/HRC/44/60, para. 79.

<sup>93</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, "16 years after the International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion".

<sup>94</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021*, p. 17.

<sup>95</sup> UNRWA input.

<sup>96</sup> United Nations Environment Programme input.

are extracted from the ground. Palestinians continue to be prevented by Israel from accessing and extracting water from the Jordan River.<sup>97</sup>

76. In Gaza, more than 97 per cent of the water pumped from the coastal aquifer does not meet the water quality standards of WHO, leading to the depletion of groundwater reserves.<sup>98</sup>

77. More than 43 per cent of the land in the West Bank is not available to Palestinians for agricultural use as a result of Israeli settlements. In addition, and because of the regulatory framework applied to land tenure, idle and/or unused lands can be seized from farmers who are unable to bring the land to production.<sup>99</sup>

78. In September 2019, Israeli authorities tightened the access permit regulations, restricting the number of days that farmers are allowed to enter the seam zone. The new regulation seems to redefine the purpose of an agricultural permit and to modify the entire purpose of the permit regime in relation to landowners, denying the right of landowners to freely reach their plots of land.<sup>100</sup>

79. The restricted access area that Israel imposes along the perimeter fence surrounding Gaza comprises approximately 35 per cent of its agricultural lands.<sup>101</sup> The Israeli military's use of warning fire, land levelling and the spraying of herbicides has inhibited agricultural development in that area.<sup>102</sup>

80. The ability of 4,000 families to access their fishing livelihoods continues to be disrupted by Israeli restrictions on access to the sea off the Gaza coast.<sup>103</sup> The Oslo Accords entitled Palestinians to fish within 20 nautical miles of the shore, but the reality over much of the past 10 years has been a constricted fishing zone of 3 to 6 nautical miles.<sup>104</sup>

81. In addition to exploiting mineral resources in the Occupied Palestinian Territory while simultaneously preventing Palestinians from doing so, Israel has prevented Palestinians from developing their natural gas fields. Natural gas fields in Palestinian waters off-shore of Gaza are estimated to encompass reserves of 1 trillion cubic feet of good quality natural gas. With the closure imposed by Israel on the Gaza Strip since 2007, any access to the gas fields, and the billions of dollars they represent, has become even more difficult.<sup>105</sup>

### **Social and economic conditions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory**

82. Israeli policies and practices have led to the physical fragmentation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory and stifled social and economic activity, resulting in the emergence of different economies in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has damaged development prospects and led to the further deterioration of the living conditions of the

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<sup>97</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and Palestinian Water Authority, "Joint press release on the occasion of World Water Day", 22 March 2021.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) input.

<sup>100</sup> A/75/336, para. 39.

<sup>101</sup> A/HRC/44/60, para. 64.

<sup>102</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021*, p. 33.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>104</sup> A/HRC/44/60, para. 63.

<sup>105</sup> *The Economic Costs of the Israeli Occupation for the Palestinian People: The Unrealized Oil and Natural Gas Potential* (United Nations publication, 2019), p. 18.

Palestinians. There is little doubt that the events of 2020 will negatively shape Palestinian development trajectories for many years to come.<sup>106</sup>

83. Approximately 2.45 million Palestinians will require some form of humanitarian assistance (1.57 million in Gaza and 880,000 in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem). Among them, more than 1.5 million Palestinians are affected by problems related to their limited access to basic services.<sup>107</sup>

#### *Economic conditions*

84. COVID-19 struck a weakened Palestinian economy and compounded the dire economic conditions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. After three years of economic slowdown and decline in real gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, 2020 was one of the worst years for the Palestinian economy since the recession of 2002, with persistent fiscal deficits, high poverty and unemployment.

85. Customs tax, value added tax and excise tax collected by Israel for the Palestinian Authority represent 65 to 75 per cent of the Palestinian Authority's revenues.<sup>108</sup> The fiscal standoff with Israel over clearance revenues weighed heavily on the Palestinian economy. The impact of this fiscal loss was compounded by the continuously declining levels of international support and the increasing funding needs stemming from the pandemic.

86. Economic activity and livelihoods in Gaza have been further slowed by, among other things, the blockade, internal quarantines and safety measures, aid shortages, a lack of demand for goods and services and a liquidity crunch. The situation was compounded by military escalations in August and September 2020, and by periodic restrictions on the entry of critical materials, including donor-purchased fuel necessary for the operation of Gaza's only power plant.<sup>109</sup>

87. In this context, the Palestinian economy witnessed a sharp decline in activity and contracted by 11.5 per cent in 2020 (11.3 per cent in the West Bank and 12.3 per cent in the Gaza Strip).<sup>110</sup> This drop in GDP, coupled with the increasing population, yielded a 13.7 per cent decline in per capita GDP (13.4 per cent in the West Bank and 14.8 per cent in the Gaza Strip) compared with 2019, in 2015 prices.<sup>111</sup>

88. The World Bank estimates a growth in the GDP of the Palestinian economy of 3.5 per cent in 2021, reflecting in part the effect from the sharp contraction in 2020 and the uncertainty about the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccinations.<sup>112</sup>

89. As a result of the pandemic, compared with the second quarter of 2019, estimates in constant prices showed a 19.5 per cent decline in GDP (20.4 per cent in the West Bank and 15.4 per cent in Gaza), a 21.6 per cent decline in GDP per capita (22.3 per cent in the West Bank and 17.8 per cent in Gaza), a decline in private

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<sup>106</sup> Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, "Report to the Ad-Hoc Liaison Committee", 23 February 2021, p. 4.

<sup>107</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021*, p. 20.

<sup>108</sup> Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, "Report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee", p. 6.

<sup>109</sup> Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, "Socioeconomic report", 10 November 2020, p. 9.

<sup>110</sup> Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) calculations from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> World Bank, "Economic monitoring report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee", 23 February, 2021, para. 23.

consumption of 19.8 per cent and in capital investment of 37.1 per cent, and a decline in the trade deficit of 33.2 per cent.<sup>113</sup>

90. GDP rebounded in the third quarter but declined again in the fourth quarter of 2020 by 12.2 per cent compared with the fourth quarter of 2019 (11.8 per cent in the West Bank and 14.1 per cent in Gaza).<sup>114</sup>

91. The labour force participation rate decreased to 41 per cent in 2020 compared with 44 per cent in 2019 (from 46 to 44 per cent in the West Bank and from 41 to 35 per cent in Gaza), which explains why unemployment rates did not increase significantly during 2020 during the same period. In this context, unemployment increased in 2020 to 26 per cent (16 per cent in the West Bank and 47 per cent in Gaza) from 25 per cent in 2019. Of the total number employed in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, some 14 per cent were absent from their jobs in 2020 as a result of the pandemic.<sup>115</sup> Despite the partial easing of pandemic-related restrictions in the third quarter, unemployment continued to rise until it began to decline in the fourth quarter.<sup>116</sup>

92. Throughout 2020, unemployment was highest among youth (19 to 29 years) who held an associate diploma and above (54 per cent: 69 per cent for women; 39 per cent for men). Around half of wage employees, who comprised 72 per cent of total employment in 2020, were classified under informal employment.

93. Projections by the World Bank based on GDP per capita growth suggest that the poverty rate has been steadily increasing since 2016, reaching 28.9 per cent in 2020, representing approximately 1.4 million Palestinians.<sup>117</sup>

94. In the West Bank, limited market transactions disrupted food value chains during the first wave of the pandemic. In the Gaza Strip, the lack of agricultural inputs for farmers, herders and fishers have been a major constraint for food production.<sup>118</sup> The decline in output prices owing to low demand, coupled with the increase in the price of inputs for agricultural production, prompted farmers and traders to limit production.<sup>119</sup>

#### *Food security*

95. A total of 1.4 million Palestinians in Gaza and another 560,000 in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, suffer from food insecurity, primarily as a result of high unemployment and poverty.<sup>120</sup> The erosion of resilience and the capacity to cope with shocks resulted in a net increase of approximately 300,000 newly food-insecure people since 2019. Furthermore, more than 217,000 people, previously considered moderately food-insecure, have become severely food-insecure.<sup>121</sup>

96. During the reporting period, UNRWA played a critical role in ensuring that a food security crisis was averted through the provision of in-kind food and cash assistance to over 1.1 million Palestinians, most of whom are refugees in Gaza.<sup>122</sup>

<sup>113</sup> ESCWA calculations from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "The Labour Force Survey results 2020", February 2021.

<sup>116</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "The Labour Force Survey: (October–December 2020) round (Q4/2020)", February 2021.

<sup>117</sup> World Bank, "Economic monitoring report", para. 21.

<sup>118</sup> Palestine Food Security Sector, "FSS COVID-19 Crisis Sitrep-05", 19 April 2020.

<sup>119</sup> Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute, *Food Security Bulletin*, Issue 22–23 (Winter 2021).

<sup>120</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021*, pp. 32–33.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>122</sup> UNRWA input.

97. As a coping mechanism to ensure basic needs, 67 per cent of families in Gaza and 31 per cent in the West Bank consumed food of less quality or that was less preferred, whereas 57 per cent of families in Gaza and 36 per cent in the West Bank purchased food on credit.<sup>123</sup>

*Water, sanitation and hygiene*

98. The water, sanitation and hygiene sector has suffered from chronic vulnerability, mainly as a result of Israeli restrictions on developing the sector's infrastructure, compounded by climate change, and limitations facing the Palestinian Government and local authorities.<sup>124</sup>

99. It is estimated that more than 1.6 million Palestinians are suffering from insufficient access to water, sanitation and hygiene services and will need related humanitarian assistance in 2021.<sup>125</sup> Some one third of household members in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (excluding East Jerusalem) have access to safely managed water (66.2 per cent access in the West Bank and 4.3 per cent in Gaza).<sup>126</sup>

100. Israeli authorities have prevented Palestinian communities in Area C from connecting to water and sewage networks, and from deploying rain-harvesting cisterns; water, sanitation and hygiene facilities in institutions; and mobile latrines. Increased demolition and confiscation targeting water, sanitation and hygiene structures compounds the vulnerability of affected communities and the coercive environment for their residents.<sup>127</sup>

101. Restrictions on access to water and the depletion of the coastal aquifer make the Palestinian population among the most water-stressed in the world, and the situation is exacerbated by climate change.<sup>128</sup> Palestinian water consumption per capita doesn't meet the minimum standard of WHO of 100 litres per day.

102. Palestinians must purchase water from the Israeli water company Mekorot, which is allowed to extract water from the West Bank,<sup>129</sup> and prioritizes its delivery to Israeli settlements.<sup>130</sup>

103. Intensive Israeli monitoring of the Palestinian communities in Area C prevents them from rehabilitating or developing the public and household structures and assets needed to ensure the basic services that satisfy their humanitarian needs.<sup>131</sup>

104. Poor water quality further undermines the ability of families to meet basic hygiene needs, which are critical to preventing the transmission of COVID-19.<sup>132</sup>

105. In Gaza, most water management and desalination systems are non-functioning owing to a lack of equipment and spare parts, since as part of the closure of Gaza imposed by Israel, materials considered as falling under the category of "dual use"

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<sup>123</sup> World Food Programme (WFP), "WFP Palestine country brief", January 2021, p. 2.

<sup>124</sup> WASH Cluster-State of Palestine, "The West Bank WASH contingency plan: the West Bank-State of Palestine", February 2021, p. 4.

<sup>125</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021*, p. 37.

<sup>126</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and Palestinian Water Authority, "Joint press release on the occasion of World Water Day", 22 March 2021.

<sup>127</sup> WASH Cluster-State of Palestine, "The West Bank WASH contingency plan", pp. 9–10.

<sup>128</sup> IFAD input.

<sup>129</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and Palestinian Water Authority, "Joint press release on the occasion of World Water Day".

<sup>130</sup> WASH Cluster-State of Palestine, "The West Bank WASH contingency plan", p. 11.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>132</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021*, p. 37.

have been banned from entering Gaza. Such materials include cement and iron, which are essential to repairing water and sanitation infrastructure. As a result, the water infrastructure in Gaza is on the brink of collapse. Moreover, over 96 per cent of the water from the coastal aquifer – the only natural source of drinking water – is unfit for human consumption because of seawater and sewage contamination.<sup>133</sup> As a result, only 10 per cent of Gazans have access to safe drinking water through the public network (down from 98 per cent in 2000).<sup>134</sup>

106. Allocation of water for domestic purposes averages 81.9 litres per person per day in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (85.6 litres in the West Bank and 77.0 litres in Gaza), with a decrease of about 6.0 litres compared with 2019. It is estimated that the per capita share of fresh water is only 22.4 litres per day.<sup>135</sup>

107. Regarding access to sanitation services, nearly 440,000 households in the Occupied Palestinian Territory are not connected to any sewerage system. Approximately 3,700 households therefore discharge untreated sewage into adjacent streams and open areas, creating health and environmental hazards for downstream communities. About 90 per cent of these households are in the West Bank.<sup>136</sup>

108. As a result of power shortages and poor infrastructure, the quality of the treated wastewater produced in the Gaza Strip, and discharged into the Mediterranean Sea, is well below international standards. As a result, more than three quarters of Gaza's beaches are polluted and swimming there is prohibited, while the coastal aquifer is further polluted by poorly treated sewage percolation.<sup>137</sup>

109. Almost 29,000 households across the Occupied Palestinian Territory lack adequate solid waste collection services or are located near unregulated dumping sites. This exposes people to health and environmental hazards, including the mixing of dangerous medical and electronic waste and ordinary household trash. Accumulated trash also attracts animals that are possible vectors of disease and contaminates groundwater resources and agricultural land.<sup>138</sup>

110. At least 144 schools in the West Bank and 34 in Gaza lack sufficient water, sanitation and hygiene facilities (primarily toilets, drinking and handwashing stations) to meet official standards. The same applies to 132 health-care units in the West Bank and 140 in Gaza. The consequent overcrowding of existing facilities has undermined the hygiene practices required to combat the pandemic. In this context, at least seven quarantine centres in Gaza have poor access to potable water and sewage disposal systems.<sup>139</sup>

### *Health*

111. Palestinians living under occupation are exposed to high levels of violence and insecurity, affecting physical and mental health and well-being. Large numbers of injuries resulting from the use of force by Israel against participants in the Great March of Return demonstrations in Gaza during previous years have had a cumulative impact on the health system. This has created long-term needs and disabilities, while

<sup>133</sup> A/75/199, para. 30.

<sup>134</sup> A/HRC/44/60, para. 68.

<sup>135</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and Palestinian Water Authority, "Joint press release on the occasion of World Water Day".

<sup>136</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021*, p. 38.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

the lack of control and the unpredictability of many aspects of life under occupation contribute to stress and anxiety.<sup>140</sup>

112. The first confirmed cases of COVID-19 emerged in the Occupied Palestinian Territory in March 2020. The Palestinian Authority imposed severe lockdown restriction and slowed the spread of the virus. It eased the restrictions in June 2020. Consequently, the number of confirmed cases jumped from 19,594 in August 2020 to 270,878 in March 2021, with 2,881 deaths.<sup>141</sup>

113. Even as the number of infections exceeded the capacity of Palestinians hospitals in March 2021, and though Israel is ranked first globally in per capita vaccinations, Palestinians' access to COVID-19 vaccines has remained limited. Only 8,687 out of 3 million adults were fully vaccinated by the end of March 2021 and 78,379 had had their first shots. Israel has vaccinated Palestinians in East Jerusalem and 120,000 Palestinians working in Israel.<sup>142</sup>

114. In February 2021, a number of international humanitarian organizations stated:

The Palestinian health system has been undermined to such an extent that it lacks the necessary financial or material resources to independently sustain an effective COVID-19 response. Gaza's health system, in particular, is on the brink of collapse. Over 53 years of Israeli military occupation of Palestinian territory, including Israel's prohibitive land closure and blockade of the Gaza Strip, severing the coastal enclave from the West Bank, have all helped produce the Palestinian health system's current ailing condition.<sup>143</sup>

115. The drain of medical staff leaving Gaza to seek better living conditions also compromised the health-care system well before the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>144</sup> Limited health-care resources in Gaza are mainly deployed to sustain basic, but critical, health services. Essential maternal and reproductive health care are underprioritized and inadequately funded, which increases the risk of morbidity and mortality. Compounded stressors, including the blockade, the COVID-19 pandemic and loss of income, led to further deterioration in the humanitarian situation, resulting in a dire psychological impact<sup>145</sup> in which some 198,000 children suffer from severe and moderate mental health conditions.<sup>146</sup>

116. Discriminatory planning and zoning policies deter Palestinian communities in East Jerusalem, the H2 zone of Hebron and Area C from establishing health facilities. High-standard East Jerusalem hospitals are isolated from the rest of the West Bank, and patients face unpredictable access and arbitrary restrictions as a result of permit delays and denials.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> WHO input.

<sup>141</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, "COVID-19 emergency situation report, No. 28"; and WHO, Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in the Occupied Palestinian Territory database, available at <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjojODJlYWM1YTEtNDIxZS00OTFILThkZjktNDIxODY2OGQ3NGJkIiwidCI6ImY2MTBjMG13LWJkMjQtNGIzOS04MTBiLTNkYzI4MGFmYjU5MCIslmMiOjh9>.

<sup>142</sup> Our World in Data, Coronavirus (COVID-19) Vaccinations database, available at <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations?country=PSE>.

<sup>143</sup> Oxfam and others, "Free and equitable access and distribution of COVID-19 vaccine in OPT", joint letter on vaccine roll-out for Palestinians, 18 February 2021.

<sup>144</sup> UNCTAD input.

<sup>145</sup> United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) input.

<sup>146</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021*, p. 27.

<sup>147</sup> WHO input.

117. The fragile state of the health system has necessitated the transfer of patients to Israel, Jordan and Egypt. Such transfers were repeatedly suspended for various reasons during the reporting period, including the outbreak of COVID-19 and the suspension of coordination between the Palestinian Authority and Israel.<sup>148</sup>

118. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Israel continued to impose its permits regime on Palestinian patients, their companions and health-care workers. During the fourth quarter of 2020, 71 per cent of patients who applied for Gaza permits were approved, 27 per cent of applications were approved after the date of hospital appointment and 2 per cent of permit requests were denied. Only 44 per cent of patient companion permit applications were approved.<sup>149</sup>

119. Attacks against health care continued in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. WHO recorded 59 such attacks in 2020. These attacks included obstruction of the delivery of health-care services, including 12 incidents of obstruction of access of ambulance crews to persons who had been fatally wounded. Thirty-six incidents involved physical violence against health workers, ambulances and health facilities, and six incidents involved the detention and/or arrest of health-care workers, ambulance crews, patients and patient companions, including the arrest of paramedics for distributing COVID-19 awareness materials.<sup>150</sup>

120. On 15 April 2020, Israeli security forces raided and closed a testing clinic in the densely populated neighbourhood of Silwan under the pretext that testing kits were provided by the Palestinian Authority. The delay in ensuring an adequate response to the spread of the pandemic suggests discriminatory treatment of Palestinian communities in East Jerusalem.<sup>151</sup>

### *Education*

121. Education in the Occupied Palestinian Territory had been in a critical state prior to the pandemic, largely as a result of occupation-related policies and practices, including restrictions on access to education, attacks on students and staff and the destruction of education infrastructure.<sup>152</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated this situation, increasing the number of children in need of education assistance from 416,000 at the end of 2019 to 504,000 at the end of 2020.<sup>153</sup>

122. As the pandemic prompted the closures of schools and universities, the Palestinian Ministry of Education launched an e-learning portal, while universities independently developed their own portals and resources for e-learning. Obstacles to e-learning mainly involve infrastructure, weak Internet networks, power outages (especially in Gaza) and insufficient awareness among students and their families of the importance of e-learning,<sup>154</sup> as well as a lack of 3G mobile data service access in Gaza.

123. Moreover, online material and equipment for students, especially those in Gaza, East Jerusalem and Area C, are inaccessible to students in these areas. Only 30 per cent of households in Gaza have a computer.<sup>155</sup> These challenges are further

<sup>148</sup> World Bank, "Economic monitoring report", para. 9.

<sup>149</sup> ESCWA calculation based on data from WHO, Health Cluster Bulletin: Occupied Palestinian Territory, December 2020.

<sup>150</sup> WHO input.

<sup>151</sup> A/75/199, para. 14.

<sup>152</sup> UNICEF input.

<sup>153</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021*, p. 34.

<sup>154</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), "COVID-19 in Palestine: how distance learning will help student continue education", 12 April 2020.

<sup>155</sup> Gisha, "Remote learning", 13 October 2020.

exacerbated by the need to reach students with special needs and to provide psychosocial support to students affected by COVID-19.<sup>156</sup>

124. In 2020, the United Nations Children’s Fund’s Education Cluster recorded 119 education-related incidents affecting some 7,000 students, including the firing of tear gas canisters on school premises and/or students while commuting to schools in Area C and the H2 zone. Children most affected are those who must walk long distances to reach their schools, and often have to cross one or two checkpoints.<sup>157</sup>

125. During the reporting period, UNRWA documented six separate incidents in which live ammunition, plastic-coated metal bullets, tear gas canisters or other weapons landed in its schools in the West Bank. One of these incidents occurred at the girls’ school in the Jalazone camp during the school day, affecting 300 students.<sup>158</sup>

*The gendered impact of the occupation on women and girls*

126. The 54-year occupation and 14-year closure in Gaza have specifically gendered impacts, resulting in unique harms. The vulnerabilities of and gender-specific risks and harms to women and girls are augmented by sociocultural norms and practices and exacerbated by overlapping factors stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic and its ensuing lockdowns.<sup>159</sup>

127. The pervasive protection crisis created by the prolonged occupation for Palestinian women and girls is coupled with and compounded by gender inequality and gender-based violence, including child and forced marriage,<sup>160</sup> intimate partner violence, curbs on accessing the public sphere, limitations on decision-making power and an inability to access basic social services.<sup>161</sup> For example, early marriage is commonly used by families as a coping mechanism to reduce expenses, and is the most significant cause of school dropout among girls, followed by concerns related to incidents with Israeli forces and settlers.<sup>162</sup>

128. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased these protection concerns, as violence against women and girls in the private and online spheres has increased but access to protective or supportive services remains limited.<sup>163</sup> Notably, while the Palestinian authorities reported a decrease in cases related to domestic violence, civil society organizations confirm that incidents increased throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory.<sup>164</sup> This may be attributed to the limited ability of women to report abuse owing to lockdown-related movement restrictions.<sup>165</sup>

129. Palestinian women and girls suffer from use of force and abuse, including physical, verbal and psychological violence and harassment, by Israeli security forces

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<sup>156</sup> UNESCO input.

<sup>157</sup> UNICEF input.

<sup>158</sup> UNRWA input.

<sup>159</sup> United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) input.

<sup>160</sup> UNFPA, “Child marriage in the occupied Palestinian territory”, November 2016.

<sup>161</sup> Eileen Kuttab and Brian Heilman, *Understanding Masculinities: Results from the Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES)-Middle East and North Africa – Palestine* (Institute of Women’s Studies, UN-Women and Promundo, 2017).

<sup>162</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021*, p. 35.

<sup>163</sup> UN-Women input.

<sup>164</sup> Women’s Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling, “COVID-19 and women’s rights in Palestine”, 2020; Zeudi Liew, *COVID-19 Protection Needs Identification and Analysis in the State of Palestine* (UNICEF, 2020); and United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, “A crisis within a crisis: fighting gender-based violence during COVID-19”, *Humanitarian Bulletin*, March–May 2020.

<sup>165</sup> UN-Women input.

and settlers.<sup>166</sup> A number of cases illustrate that Palestinian women are particularly targeted by settler violence in their homes during the day, when men are usually absent. Pregnant women and women who have recently given birth may suffer additional injury or other consequences from such attacks.<sup>167</sup>

130. Night raids and arrests by Israeli soldiers have continued during the pandemic, causing added stress for women. Women are reported as spending a significant amount of time sanitizing their homes after raids, and worrying about the health and risk of exposure of family members to COVID-19, owing to a lack of hygiene protocols by the Israeli soldiers.<sup>168</sup>

131. Women's employment had been severely affected amid the pandemic. This has been especially true for the agriculture sector, where Palestinian women are disproportionately represented.<sup>169</sup> However, women with disabilities are the most affected, in both the formal and informal sectors, owing to the rising rate of unemployment, which hinders their ability to meet their basic needs.<sup>170</sup>

132. The pandemic, combined with existing gender norms, increased demands on women and girls to care for the sick and the elderly, increased housework obligations and added the increased burden of having to homeschool children.<sup>171</sup> The pandemic has also exacerbated risks for pregnant and lactating women, who are now less likely to attend routine appointments owing to the lockdowns and fear of infection.<sup>172</sup>

133. Women's access to life-saving health care has been negatively affected by Israeli policies during the pandemic. Access to medical care was restricted to Jerusalemites, and commuting to the West Bank was not allowed.<sup>173</sup>

### III. Occupied Syrian Golan

134. The Secretary-General continues to reaffirm the validity of Security Council resolution 497 (1981), in which the Council decided that the Israeli decision to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration in the occupied Syrian Golan Heights was null and void and without international legal effect.

135. Approximately 50,000 people live in the occupied Syrian Golan, about half of whom are Israeli settlers living in 34 illegal settlements. The Syrian population of nearly 27,000 lives in five villages that form approximately 5 per cent of the territory of the occupied Syrian Golan. Moreover, they face significant discriminatory building restrictions imposed by Israel, which leads to strained infrastructure and overcrowded conditions.<sup>174</sup>

136. The Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2021/4, reaffirmed that the construction and expansion of Israeli settlements and related infrastructure in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian

<sup>166</sup> A/75/199, para. 42.

<sup>167</sup> A/75/376, para. 21.

<sup>168</sup> Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling, "COVID-19 and women's rights in Palestine", p. 18.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., "The culture of impunity: Israel's ongoing violations against Palestinian women during COVID-19", May 2020, p. 9.

<sup>170</sup> UN-Women input.

<sup>171</sup> UNFPA and others, "Impact of the COVID-19 outbreak and lockdown on family dynamics and domestic violence in Palestine", June 2020, p. 6.

<sup>172</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021*, p. 28.

<sup>173</sup> Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling, "The culture of impunity", p. 2.

<sup>174</sup> A/74/357, para. 71.

Golan, were illegal and constituted a major obstacle to economic and social development. The continued establishment and expansion of Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the occupied Syrian Golan amount to the transfer by Israel of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies, which is prohibited under international humanitarian law.

137. On 14 June 2020, Israel approved the building of a new settlement in the occupied Syrian Golan, which, once built, will accommodate 300 families. Earlier reports by an Israeli media outlet noted that the Government of Israel was planning to settle 250,000 Israeli settlers in the occupied Syrian Golan over the next 30 years by building thousands of housing units, along with transport and tourism projects.<sup>175</sup>

138. Israel continued to employ discriminatory practices against Syrians in the occupied Syrian Golan, particularly in terms of access to land and water. Financial incentives are provided to Israeli settlers to facilitate access to housing, while the Syrians face increasing difficulties in obtaining building permits. The new Israeli land registration system imposed new regulations that require specific documentation to prove ownership. Most Syrians have old ownership documents that do not conform to the new system and face the prospect of not being able to prove ownership of their land.<sup>176</sup>

139. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic reported that residents had been threatened with the expropriation of their land if they did not accept property documents issued by the Israeli Land Registry.<sup>177</sup>

140. Serious concerns are arising from a wind turbine project that will be implemented by an Israeli energy company on farming land in three Syrian villages. According to the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, the project will be built on 6,000 dunums of agricultural land belonging to Syrian citizens. The project would physically surround Syrian villages, limiting their ability to expand, and would have a serious detrimental effect on the environment and health of those living nearby.<sup>178</sup> The Syrian Arab Republic also noted that Israeli authorities had arrested individuals who had protested the installation of the wind turbines and that some had been targeted with legal action.<sup>179</sup>

141. Changes to the curricula currently taught in schools in the occupied Syrian Golan are perceived to aim at influencing young students and detaching them from their Syrian identity, and imposing a new ideology that is inconsistent with their local culture. It is also meant to facilitate their integration into Israeli society, including serving in the Israeli army.<sup>180</sup>

142. The importance of agricultural employment has been declining over the last decade, constrained by the loss of the Syrian market, which can no longer buy apples and other produce from the occupied Syrian Golan. Most households, however, have kept a foothold in small-scale farming, often as a secondary activity. The cultural attachment to land and agriculture reportedly remains high. One in five Syrian citizens in the occupied Syrian Golan now works in construction. Many are employed in Israeli settlements and in Israel, sometimes on a seasonal basis.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> [A/75/199](#), para. 70.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 71.

<sup>177</sup> [A/75/328](#), para. 11.

<sup>178</sup> [A/75/199](#), para. 72.

<sup>179</sup> [A/75/328](#), para. 16.

<sup>180</sup> [A/75/199](#), para. 73.

<sup>181</sup> International Labour Office, document ILC.109/DG/APP, paras. 148 and 149.

## IV. Conclusion

143. The protracted Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory and the occupied Syrian Golan continues to have a detrimental effect on the living conditions of the Palestinian and Syrian populations, as well as on social and economic development in the occupied territories. The negative impact of the occupation and the Israeli policies and practices is multilayered, and their cumulative repercussions affect the future of the populations living under occupation.

144. Current social and economic trends in the Occupied Palestinian Territory indicate that the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals will be out of reach if there are no drastic positive changes to the existing conditions. Israeli-imposed restrictions, the expansion of the illegal settlements and other practices not only prevent development in the occupied territories and hamper efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, but also cause humanitarian crises that necessitate the diversion of scarce national and international resources from development to immediate relief. The Palestinian financial crisis and the fragmentation of the Palestinian territory have resulted in a fragmented economy that is dependent on Israel and foreign aid.

145. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic fallout have compounded the social and economic situation and resulted in more adverse living conditions for Palestinians. Its effects on the Palestinian people are multiplied as a result of long-standing Israeli policies and practices. The Palestinian health system had already been on the brink of collapse, particularly in Gaza, before the pandemic.

146. The closure imposed on Gaza, other restrictive Israeli measures, recurrent escalations and declining donor funding have created a severe situation in Gaza that requires immediate action by the international community.

147. Prospects for the Palestinian economy are negative, should the current status quo persist. The funding crisis facing UNRWA and the decline in donor aid is another factor that only exacerbates the already precarious conditions of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians.

148. Israel continues to employ policies and practices that are contrary to relevant Security Council resolutions, international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Some of these practices may be considered discriminatory and others may amount to the forcible transfer or collective punishment of protected persons, which would be a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention and is prohibited under international law.

149. Adherence to international law is imperative, ensuring that no party enjoys impunity and securing justice and peace for all those living in the region, including Palestinians and Syrians living under occupation. The United Nations maintains its long-standing position that lasting and comprehensive peace can be achieved only through a negotiated two-State solution. The Secretary-General will continue to ensure that the United Nations works towards the establishment of an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State, living side by side in peace with a secure Israel, with Jerusalem as the capital of both States, consistent with relevant Security Council resolutions and international law.