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**Human rights situation in Palestine and other
occupied Arab territories**

Written statement* submitted by Institute for NGO Research, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[1 February 2021]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



End Covid-19 Vaccine Disinformation Campaign

Summary

In the midst of Israel's efforts to vaccinate its population against the COVID-19 virus, numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) invented the claim that Israel failed to carry out a legal obligation to provide vaccinations to Palestinians, and that this failure was motivated by racial animus. This disinformation campaign has been reinforced by Palestinian Authority (PA) officials and several United Nations (UN) Special Rapporteurs (who reiterated this false claim and several others in a 14 January 2021 press release). This false narrative, created in conjunction with several NGOs tied to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) terror group, serves not only to target Israel for demonization, but also deprives the PA of agency concerning the public health of Palestinians.

These accusations have been levelled regardless of the facts: Israel has and is vaccinating hundreds of thousands of Palestinians; Israel has provided and will continue to provide upon request thousands of vaccines to the Palestinian Authority; the Palestinian Authority has its own program to procure vaccines directly from manufacturers and via the Gavi COVAX Advance Market Commitment. The disinformation campaign also obfuscates the relevant and applicable law: under the Oslo accords, mutually agreed to between the PA and Israel, and guaranteed by the international community, the PA, and not Israel, is responsible for the administration of public health to Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. Similarly, even if one applies an occupation paradigm, this arrangement is fully compatible with Articles 55 and 56 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.¹

Background

In December 2020, Israel began a massive drive to vaccinate its population against the COVID-19 virus. While the vaccine rollout received significant international media attention due to its efficiency, several Israeli, Palestinian, and international NGOs initiated a spurious disinformation campaign alleging that Israel had neglected a legal and moral responsibility to vaccinate Palestinians alongside its own citizens. They levied this charge, despite the PA's reported purchase from the Russian Federation of enough of the Sputnik V vaccine for 50% of West Bank and Gaza residents. This propaganda campaign also ignored that the Palestinian population skews significantly younger than the Israeli population and is therefore much less at risk from the devastating physical impacts of Covid. Moreover, Israel has had a much more severe Covid outbreak and a significantly higher death rate than the Palestinian areas during the pandemic.

Additionally, they asserted that Israel has a responsibility to prevent the passage of Russian-produced COVID-19 vaccines to the PA as long as these are not approved for use in Israel, ignoring the PA's own stated vaccine policy. This narrative, based on false pretenses and a deliberately misleading description of the arrangement of medical care in the West Bank and Gaza, has since found itself repeated by other human rights organizations, numerous media outlets, and UN officials, notably the Special Rapporteur Michael Lynk.

Legal and Moral Responsibility

The NGO vaccine disinformation campaign is premised on the allegation that it is Israel's legal and moral imperative to provide vaccines to Palestinians living in the West Bank and

¹ For a more in-depth discussion of these issues, listen to NGO Monitor's podcast: Human Rights and Hot Coffee, "Vaccinating Palestinians: Israel or the PA?", <https://podcasts.google.com/feed/aHR0cHM6Ly9mZWVkcY5idXp6c3Byb3V0LmNvbS8yMjg5ODYucnNz/episode/QnV6enNwcm91dC03Mjg4MTgw?hl=en-IL&ved>.

Gaza, and that by prioritizing vaccination of its own citizens, Israel is shirking this responsibility. Setting aside the *jus cogens* norm that countries have an obligation to prioritize protection to their own citizens, to bolster their invented legal argument, the NGOs cite Article 56 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which states that an occupying power must ensure “the adoption and application of the prophylactic and preventive measures necessary to combat the spread of contagious diseases and epidemics.”

Legally, however, whether one accepts the occupation paradigm or not, the arrangement of medical care in the West Bank and Gaza is delineated by the Oslo Accords (1993-5), a series of agreements mutually agreed to by the PA and Israel and guaranteed by the UN and the international community. Article 17 of the Oslo Accords stipulates that the PA is the sole authority responsible for administering public health to Palestinians: “Powers and responsibilities in the sphere of Health in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip will be transferred to the Palestinian side, including the health insurance system.”²

The NGO vaccine campaign also asserts a false moral claim. This belies a moral standard that has not been applied to any other country since the distribution of vaccines began. Morally, as with any other government, it is Israel’s first and foremost responsibility to vaccinate its own citizens. Israel has thus far done so without prejudice, vaccinating Arab citizens in the same manner as their Jewish neighbors. It is ironic that NGOs, UN officials, and Palestinian leaders – which all purport to recognize what the UN calls “the State of Palestine” – now suddenly claim that the PA is incapable of carrying out one of the foundational responsibilities of government – protecting public health.

The vaccine disinformation campaign perpetuated by human rights NGOs also crucially omits that the Palestinian Authority has chosen to go at it alone in procuring vaccinations. Only in the past month has the PA asked Israel to provide vaccines to help inoculate medical workers in the PA, and Israel did so.

Missing Funding

The NGOs in question claim that due to the “budgetary shortages” faced by the PA, Israel “must provide the necessary funds [for the purchase of vaccines], as part of its legal obligations” and “must not deduct the vaccine costs from the tax revenue it collects on behalf of the PA.” These apparent budgetary shortages stand in stark contrast to the hundreds of millions of dollars that the PA spends on incentivizing the murder of Israeli civilians in its twisted “pay to kill” program and the billions in international aid dollars that have been diverted by Palestinian terror groups and Palestine Liberation Organization corruption. In addition, using tax revenue to pay for vaccines is precisely the purpose of taxpayer monies.

One wonders why these NGOs and UN officials, including the Special Rapporteur, do not demand that the PA use its billions of dollars in annual international aid to help its population, rather than diverting these funds to pay off murderers; build rockets and terror tunnels; and line their personal pockets.

Conclusion

Like many previous disinformation campaigns on Israel, the vaccine libel has been widely circulated without regard to the facts or the law. Rather than serving Palestinian interests, such campaigns entrench the infantilizing of the Palestinian population and entrench the Arab-Israeli conflict.

² Oslo Accords, Article 17. See: <https://mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/the%20israeli-palestinian%20interim%20agreement%20-%20annex%20iii.aspx#app-17>.