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### HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN PALESTINE AND OTHER OCCUPIED ARAB TERRITORIES

**Joint written statement\* submitted by CARE International – Cooperative for Care and Assistance Everywhere, Doctors of the World, non-governmental organizations in general consultative status, and Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), 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.

[21 February 2008]

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\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

## **Statement on Human Rights and Humanitarian Situation in Occupied Palestinian Territory<sup>1</sup>**

We welcome the report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territories occupied since 1967 which underlines the deteriorating situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.<sup>2</sup> The situation in the OPT remains marked by continuing violence, unprecedented closure regime in West Bank, and collective punishment in the Gaza Strip all of which the international community must address.

This climate of violence across the OPT has furthermore overshadowed a continual process of displacement as a result of the continued construction of the Wall and its associated regime increasing settlement expansion, land confiscation and house demolitions, which though recognised, remains untold, unspoken by the wider international community and risks untold miseries on the Palestinian question.

### Climate of Violence

The security situation continues to sharply deteriorate at the expense of Palestinian and Israeli civilian lives. Targeted Palestinian militant attacks on Israeli civilians continue on a daily basis, such attacks constitute serious violations of international law. Israeli incursions into the Gaza Strip, and to a lesser extent the West Bank, continued settler violence, and intra-Palestinian fighting have served to affect the security of all Palestinians. Policies of occupation associated with the collective punishment of the Gazan population, the construction of the Separation Wall and its associated regime, and forced displacement have created a climate of violence which needs be addressed urgently. Neither targeting civilians nor collective punishment can ever be tolerated. The international community, notably state signatories to the Geneva Conventions, have a responsibility under international law to ensure all parties to the conflict abide by the laws of war.

### Impact of Israeli Sanction and Closure Regimes

Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip since June 2007 have fallen victim to an unprecedented enforced isolation. There must be allowed unimpeded access to supplies to keep essential public services like electricity and water functioning. Key infrastructure and basic services in the densely populated Gaza Strip are under extreme duress, which deprives an entire community of the ability to secure basic needs.

Restrictions on freedom of movement in the West Bank remain unprecedented in their scope, duration and in their severity. The total number of internal closure measures reached 563 physical obstacles by end 2007 – not counting a further monthly average of 113 ‘flying

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<sup>1</sup> DIAKONIA, Premiere Urgence, the Israeli Committee Against Home Demolitions (ICAHN), MA'AN Development Centre, and the Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli (CISP), Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC-NRC), NGOs without consultative status also share the views expressed in this statement.

<sup>2</sup> [Human Rights Situation in Palestine and Other Arab Occupied Territories A/HRC/7/17](#), UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, 21 January 2008

checkpoints'.<sup>3</sup> While welcoming recent comments by Israeli experts that such restrictions should be reviewed, the present restrictions remain and continue to severely affect Palestinians.

The international community has an obligation to uphold the right of Palestinians to self-determination, to respect their human dignity and fundamental freedoms, and to protect as a minimum, their economic, social and cultural rights at all times. The United Nations humanitarian and human rights systems should act in tandem to take this issue forward, including for the purposes of holding all parties - including non-state actors - legally to account.

### Forced Displacement

Forcible displacement is both a consequence and root cause of the Israeli-Palestinian/Arab conflict. The international community needs to address forced displacement in OPT as a matter of urgency. While restrictions on freedom of movement and closure continue to have grave consequences in both Gaza and the West Bank and many Palestinians are thus unable to leave their habitual places of residence, many of those same Palestinians have been previously displaced, and still more continue to be forcibly displaced daily.

The deteriorating security situation and policies of occupation – military incursions, settler expansion, demolishing of homes, and land appropriation, revocation of residency permits, construction of the Separation Wall and its associated regime which includes fences, barriers, security systems, land and property confiscations, permits systems and regulations, and considerable environmental degradation – continues to cause displacement changing the demographic boundaries of the OPT within the confinements of a territory increasingly subject to restrictions on people's movement tantamount to a state of siege.

If the international community is committed to the establishment of a Palestinian State then displacement must be systematically and comprehensively addressed as a matter of urgency. The changes to facts-on-the-ground by means of forcible displacement, and the international community's modest response is rendering a political solution to the Palestinian right of self determination increasingly bleak and unforgiving.

### Humanitarian access and operations

Humanitarian access continues to be denied to the international humanitarian community on an arbitrary basis. International aid organisations and their counterparts operating in Gaza require immediate, full and guaranteed humanitarian access to be able to help secure the basic humanitarian needs of the local population. Humanitarian organisations also continue to encounter access restrictions in the West Bank. It is imperative that Israel lifts its blockade of Gaza. Mindful of the right to life and to the adequate standard of living, the definition of what constitutes essential humanitarian supplies in Gaza needs to be widened as a matter of urgency to secure the basic necessities of life of the population.

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<sup>3</sup> [The Humanitarian Monitor: December 2007](#), UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), 22 January 2008

The security operating environment continues to deteriorate and safety and security risks for humanitarian personnel are on the increase. The threats to the safety and security of our humanitarian personnel by all parties negatively impact on the ability of organisations to assist people in need. The lack of urgency by the international community as it relates to both preventing and responding to forced displacement, deprives the humanitarian community of a means to either act effectively or at all to help secure basic rights of those displaced, and to thereby address a salient feature of the conflict often neglected by the international community.

All parties to the conflict should privilege pacific dispute settlement over use of force and/or sanctions. Until such time as the international community actively brings all parties to the table, just and durable solutions to this conflict will remain illusive and the human rights threat to Palestinian and Israeli civilians, and international humanitarian personnel, will continue unabated.

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