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**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL CONSIDERS ECONOMIC, SOCIAL
REPERCUSSIONS OF ISRAELI OCCUPATION OF PALESTINIAN TERRITORY,
SYRIAN GOLAN**

The Economic and Social Council heard the introduction of two key reports on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory and assistance to them, as its 2002 substantive session entered its fourth and final week.

Introducing the report of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of ESCWA, Mervat Tallaway, said the use of force against the Palestinian people had been indiscriminate and disproportionate. Intensive military incursions and the reoccupation of areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority had caused many civilian deaths. From September 2000 and 31 January 2002, in Gaza alone, the destruction of 660 homes housing 845 families had been recorded. Most demolitions took place at night, without any advance warning to residents.

Moreover, she said, the Israeli army had destroyed a significant amount of agricultural land. The creation of buffer zones for constructing bypass roads and building settlements had caused large swaths of farmland to be bulldozed. The deaths of male heads of households, coupled with frustration caused by unemployment and enforced immobility, had sharply increased the crime rate. The crisis and the growing atmosphere of profound political and economic uncertainty were also economically devastating. As a result, the percentage of Palestinians living in poverty had more than doubled.

The Palestinian people were facing a threat of economic collapse, John Renninger, Director of the Asia Pacific Division, Department of Political Affairs, told the Council as he introduced the

report of the Secretary-General on assistance to the Palestinian people. The realities and priorities in the occupied Palestinian territory had shifted significantly, due to the rapid escalation of violence and confrontation. That had led to extensive destruction of Palestinian social and economic infrastructure and a sharp deterioration in the living conditions of the Palestinian people.

He said that their humanitarian needs were growing; underpinning that trend was a fundamental economic crisis eroding the coping capacity of the population. The principal challenge was Israeli closures and movement restrictions. The international community was responding with a two-track approach. Efforts were continuing to support the Palestinian Authority's capacity to deliver essential services. Also, emergency aid for damaged institutions, infrastructure and property was being rendered, and collaborative efforts among donors, the United Nations and the aid community had been strengthened.

Several speakers from the region added their voice to those concerns. Key among them was a Counsellor of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine, who said that the military siege had confined hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to their homes under 24-hour curfews. Socio-economic despair was deepening, and the humanitarian crisis was becoming graver each day. The restrictions and curfews had denied Palestinians work, trade, education, and access to proper medical care, and had precluded any semblance of normalcy in daily life.

The representative of Israel said the issue of the living conditions of his Palestinian neighbours was of great concern to his Government. As neighbours, Israel had a vested interest in seeing their social and cultural life flourish and their economy prosper. The Palestinian leadership had rejected Israel's most far-reaching proposal at Camp David and, in a matter of weeks, had launched a campaign of terror against the people of Israel, apparently out of the notion that violence would beget a better deal than that which could be won at the negotiating table. The obvious conclusion was that the Palestinians' current predicament was the result of their decision to forgo a political process in favour of a campaign of terrorism.

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Background

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The Council was next scheduled to take up the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem and the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan (document [A/57/63-E/2002/21](#)).

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Documentation

The report of the Secretary-General entitled "[Assistance to the Palestinian people](#)" (document [A/57/130-E/2002/79](#)) describes measures taken by United Nations agencies and the donor community at large to assist the Palestinian people in the implementation of [General Assembly resolution 56/111](#). During the reporting period, the realities and priorities in the occupied Palestinian territory shifted significantly, owing to the rapid escalation of violence and confrontation in March-April, which led to extensive destruction of Palestinian social and economic infrastructure and a sharp deterioration in living conditions. The new situation required rapid adjustments in international assistance to the Palestinian people.

To reflect this shift in emphasis, the report contains a separate analysis of the assistance provided in the periods from June 2001 to March 2002 and from March to May 2002. The Secretary-General goes on to say that the international community is responding to the crisis facing both the Palestinian Authority and the civilian population with a two-track approach: continuation of efforts to support the Palestinian Authority's capacity to deliver essential services; and emergency assistance with regard to damage to institutions, infrastructure and property, and in the area of urgent social and humanitarian needs.

Using the Local Aid Coordination Committee as its principal forum, donors and United Nations agencies, supported by the Committee's co-chairs (Norway, the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories, and the World Bank), launched a joint emergency response to the crisis based on immediate humanitarian assistance and repairs, as well as on damage assessment and rehabilitation of infrastructure and institutions. The present report also describes the challenges faced by the United Nations system and the international community in providing short-, medium- and long-term assistance.

The report states that the consequences of Israel's policy of internal and external closures have been devastating, and, since April, these have been tightened further. The closures are increasing the cost and complexity of the efforts of donors and the United Nations to strengthen Palestinian institutions, and to support the provision of basic services to an increasingly impoverished population.

Among his conclusions, the Secretary-General notes that, despite the death and destruction, there is a growing consensus in the international community around a vision for peace — one of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders in an economically prosperous region. The international community remains committed to pursuing this vision in a comprehensive manner, seeking parallel progress in the security, political and economic dimensions of the crisis.

The situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, however, is characterized by a deepening economic crisis with growing humanitarian consequences, the report says. The Palestinian people are facing a threat of economic collapse and social destitution. Continued emergency economic and social assistance is needed, but this cannot be a substitute for a resumption of political dialogue and progress towards an agreed solution. Specific steps can be identified which could ease the economic and humanitarian impact of closures and other movement restrictions, as well as the fiscal situation.

The report finds that the tightening closure regime in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, implemented by Israel as its response to terrorist attacks on its citizens, is the immediate and single most important cause of this looming economic and social crisis, whose ramifications are profound. It is also undermining Palestinian, United Nations and donor efforts to pursue and support a reform process for the Palestinian Authority.

The aid community, the report concludes, is faced with a multidimensional challenge: to continue to support medium- and long-term development activities and capacity-building for the Palestinian Authority and Palestinian civil society, while, at the same time, assisting in the repair of physical and institutional damage and responding to the growing emergency humanitarian needs of the population. The aid community is attempting to do this in a context of violence and violations of the norm established by international humanitarian law pertaining to the protection of civilians. Particularly distressing have been the impediments faced by the aid community in reaching civilian victims of the conflict.

United Nations involvement and assistance to the Palestinian people will require close collaboration and a constant review of priorities in light of changing circumstances, the report states. Existing funds may need to be reprogrammed and additional funding must be found to support repair, reconstruction and growing humanitarian needs. Unless and until there is real political progress, the United Nations system needs to be prepared to face a situation in which an increasing number of Palestinians will be dependent upon welfare and the generosity of the international community.

The report also concludes that meeting the immediate challenges requires full respect by the parties for their obligations under international humanitarian law, and also requires that they make every effort to facilitate the work of United Nations agencies and the donor and aid communities. The Secretary-General calls upon the international community to provide the necessary resources for the assistance programmes for the Palestinian people. He draws particular attention to the latest emergency appeal of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which provides vital services for hundreds of thousands of Palestinians.

For its part, the report concludes, the United Nations, working both within the Quartet and the donor community, will continue to advocate an end to violence, including terrorism, and to promote a meaningful resumption of political dialogue between the parties leading to the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting political settlement of the conflict based on relevant United Nations resolutions and "land for peace". At the same time, the United Nations will continue to seek a resumption of progress towards an economically vibrant region where Palestinian living conditions, as well as those of Israel and all others in the region, would provide a strong underpinning to peace and reconciliation between peoples.

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A note by the Secretary-General on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan (document

A/57/63-E/2002/21) annexes a report prepared by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA).

According to the ESCWA report, the living conditions of the Palestinian people continue to be aggravated by the continued occupation of the Palestinian territory by Israel, delays in the implementation of agreements reached between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the delay in reaching a final solution to settle all outstanding claims between the two parties.

The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) have resorted to excessive use of force, house demolitions, increasingly severe mobility restrictions and closure policies, negatively affecting the Palestinian economy and living conditions, says the report. Internal closures have divided the West Bank and the Gaza Strip into 54 isolated areas. At the end of 2001, the Gaza International Airport and the Gaza harbour were severely damaged by the Israeli army. In addition, the strict closure policy and movement restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities since September 2000 have seriously impeded the ability of aid agencies to deliver humanitarian assistance.

Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory remain the primary issue fuelling the conflict between the two peoples, the report continues. There are some 190 settlements in the West Bank and Gaza inhabited by about 380,000 settlers, of whom some 180,000 live in the East Jerusalem area. Settlements are linked to each other and Israel by a vast system of bypass roads. The settlements and roads, which separate Palestinian communities and deprive Palestinians of agricultural land, have fragmented both land and people.

An extensive yet comparatively smaller settlement infrastructure exists in the occupied Syrian Golan Heights with some 17,000 Israeli settlers in 33 settlements, the report adds. The failure of negotiations between Israel and Syria in March 2000 has resulted in decision, which are aimed at reinvigorating settlement expansion. Employment opportunities for the Arab population in the Syrian Golan Heights continue to be restricted, and access to education facilities are limited.

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Statements

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JOHN RENNINGER, Director of the Asia Pacific Division, Department of Political Affairs, introduced the report of the Secretary-General on assistance to the Palestinian people (document E/2002/79). During the reporting period, the realities and priorities in the occupied Palestinian territory had shifted significantly, due to the rapid escalation of violence and confrontation. That had led to extensive destruction of Palestinian social and economic infrastructure and a sharp deterioration in the living conditions of the Palestinian people.

He said that their humanitarian needs were growing; underpinning that trend was a fundamental economic crisis eroding the coping capacity of the population. The international community was responding with a two-track approach. First, efforts were continuing to support the Palestinian

Authority's capacity to deliver essential services. Second, emergency assistance also continued with regard to damage to institutions, infrastructure and property.

During the reporting period, there had been a strengthening of collaborative efforts among donors, the United Nations and the aid community at large, he said. Using the Local Aid Coordination Committee as its principal forum, the international community had rapidly set in motion a priority response based on two courses of action: immediate humanitarian assistance and repairs; and rehabilitation of infrastructure and institutions.

In addition, he said that a physical and institutional damage assessment had been launched on a regional basis under the auspices of the newly created Donor Support Group, which consisted of Palestinian Authority officials, the European Commission, UNDP, the United Nations Special Coordinator, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the World Bank. The assessment was completed in mid-May, and the estimated total physical and institutional damage in the West Bank resulting from Israel's military incursions during March and April stood at \$342 million. A separate United Nations assessment had been launched in May.

He noted that donor funding had increased dramatically between the outbreak of the current crisis and the first quarter of the year. But that surge in assistance was misleading, as the bulk of it was in the form of budgetary support. Disbursements on growth-oriented infrastructure and capacity-building projects dropped from over \$400 million in 1999 to \$175 million in 2001, and many large capital projects had been delayed, halted, damaged or destroyed. The principal challenge was Israeli closures and movement restrictions.

While recognizing that Israel had legitimate security concerns, the United Nations and broader donor community had repeatedly pointed out to that Government the need to ease closure and the tight movement restrictions, he said. That would serve both to facilitate humanitarian action and allow for a successful emergency response. The current situation in the occupied Palestinian territory had been characterized by a deepening economic crisis with growing humanitarian consequences. The Palestinian people were facing a threat of economic collapse.

At the same time, he continued, there was remarkable consensus in the international community that peace in the region could best be promoted by parallel efforts on the political, security and socio-economic fronts. As the Secretary-General recently noted in the Security Council, there were signs that Israel was beginning to appreciate the gravity of the economic and humanitarian situation affecting the Palestinian population. Indeed, the Government of Israel had recently expressed interest in what had been called a "worldwide humanitarian operation".

JOHN LANGMORE, International Labour Organization (ILO), said that the Director-General of the ILO had presented an appendix to the report before the Labour Conference held in June on the situation of workers in the Arab territories. Based on an assessment of employment situation in the occupied territories, West Bank, Golan and Gaza strip, it was available on the ILO Web site. The Director-General said that in order to understand that situation, the reader must approach the report in a spirit of empathy and compassion for all concerned. Then political discourse could shift to dialogue. Security in Israel could not be separated from the security of

the Palestinians living in the occupied territories.

He said that poverty, unemployment and economic decline were advancing at an alarming rate in the occupied territories, leading to a widespread economic crisis. The facts described in the Director-General's report and that of the Secretary-General on the subject were terrible. The military incursion launched in March likely pushed unemployment up even further. Thus, the incidence of poverty had also multiplied, perhaps to 62 per cent this year. The war had also damaged the economy of Israel, where unemployment had risen from around 9 per cent to 10.2 per cent.

The Director-General, he went on, had suggested that the ILO take the following steps: immediately access programmes of technical cooperation; and consider new initiatives in the fields of employment promotion, youth, social protection, social dialogue, and institutional support. The ILO should also give full institutional support to the establishment by donor countries of a Palestinian fund for employment and social protection. It would make available to the Palestinian Authority a feasibility study regarding the creation of such a fund. It would also explore with all constituents the opportunity for social dialogue aimed at building trust and easing tensions. Finally, the capacity of ILO's Jerusalem office would be strengthened.

MERVAT TALLAWAY, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), presented the Secretary-General's note and accompanying report by ESCWA on the economic and social repercussions of the Israeli occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and of the Arab population in the occupied Syrian Golan (document A/57/63—E/2002/21).

She said that since the last Council session, the upsurge in violence had continued and the nature of confrontations had intensified. The situation had been characterized by the utilization of heavy conventional weapons, extrajudicial killings and the collective punishment of civilians. As the situation deteriorated, many innocent people had been killed in the bombings of villages or in exchange of gunfire, in circumstances indicating an "indiscriminate and disproportionate" use of force. Lately, intensive military incursions and the reoccupation of Palestinian areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority had resulted in many civilian deaths.

The Secretary-General's note indicated that the Israeli authorities had continued in the widespread practice of destroying property, she said. Between September 2000 and 31 January 2002, in the Gaza Strip alone, the complete or partial destruction of 660 homes housing 845 families had been recorded. Most demolitions took place at night, without any advance warning to residents. Moreover, the Israeli army had destroyed a significant amount of agricultural land. The creation of buffer zones for constructing bypass roads and building settlements had resulted in the bulldozing of large swaths of farmland.

She said that such violent acts, as well as the occupation itself, had negatively impacted the psyche of the Palestinian population. The death of male heads of households, coupled with frustration caused by unemployment and enforced immobility, had sharply increased the crime rate. The Secretary-General's note underscored that, considering the high percentage of the

population under the age of 18, the impact could be expected to significantly affect the next generation for years to come.

Also, she continued, between September 2000 and September 2001, 600 of the thousands of Palestinians arrested by the Israeli authorities were children, and some 160 of those remained incarcerated. Almost all Palestinian child detainees were subjected to physical and psychological torture while under interrogation. While in prison, children were also denied the right to education and visits from family and lawyers, a right under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In addition, checkpoints, closures and curfews severely impeded access to medical care, education and employment for the general population.

Israel's imposition of severe restrictions on freedom of movement had devastated the Palestinian economy, which was already affected by the hardships endured by the Palestinians; the crisis and the growing atmosphere of profound political and economic uncertainty were also economically devastating. As a result, the percentage of Palestinians living in poverty had more than doubled. The economy had suffered considerable income losses. From 1 October 2000 to 31 December 2000, that had ranged between \$3.1 billion and \$4.1 billion. Furthermore, 50 per cent of the Palestinian work force was now unemployed.

There were some 190 settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip inhabited by approximately 380,000 settlers, she said. Settlements were linked to each other and Israel by a vast system of bypass roads. Those settlements and roads, which separated Palestinian communities and deprived them of agricultural land, had fragmented both land and people, seriously hampering the prospects of a Palestinian State. Furthermore, despite the number of unoccupied houses in many existing settlements, Israel still pursued policies for building additional settlements.

She said delays in implementation of agreements between Israel and the PLO continued to aggravate the living conditions of the Palestinian people and relentlessly sustained the current cycle of violence. Apart from the misery and suffering in the occupied territory and Israel, the conflict was negatively affecting the entire region and would continue to do so. Socio-economic development had been gravely influenced by the Palestinian-Israeli struggle, which was diverting enormous human and financial resources away from development, away from economic and political reforms and away from addressing the basic needs of the people of the region.

SALAH SULAIMAN (Iraq) said the tragedy of the Palestinian people was still escalating because of daily aggression by the Zionist entity, including the killing of children and the elderly, the demolition of homes, the displacement of residents, all in contravention of international law. The Zionist entity had perpetrated what must be called crimes against humanity. All that occurred under the full view of the international community, in particular, the Security Council, which seemed incapable of restoring the rights of the Palestinians.

He said the continuation of aggression and destruction showed the great imbalance in the present international order. Although the matter was related to aggression and international humanitarian law, some forces in the Security Council were keeping silent. However, they quickly condemned events that occurred when the Palestinians attacked and resisted the occupation. What the Palestinians were facing in the occupied territories and the occupied

Syrian Golan put the Security Council in an acid test concerning implementation of the Charter and international law, and questioned the prestige and credibility of the United Nations.

NASSIR ABDULAZIZ AL-NASSER (Qatar) said negotiations must take due account of the Arab and Palestinian views, international law, relevant Security Council resolutions and the principle of land for peace. There was an urgent need to agree on Israel's total withdrawal from the West Bank, including Jerusalem and the occupied territories, enabling the peoples of the region to achieve development. The repeated illegal acts and aggression by occupying Israeli forces against people living in the occupied territories was against the will of the international community. Those acts also flouted Security Council resolutions, which stipulated that the occupying forces must guarantee the integrity of the occupied territories and the free movement of the Palestinian people. Instead of heeding such resolutions, the occupying forces had defied them by consecrating the status quo. Civil and government bodies had continued their policies of expansionism, destruction of the environment, the blockade of roads, the pollution of water systems, the denial of sanitary resources, and the establishment of settlements on occupied Arab territories. Roads had been built all over the West Bank. Such acts went against the will of the international community which had called for a stop to aggression.

Israeli expansion in the Palestinian and Arab territories involved wholesale destruction of houses, he said. From September 2000 to January 2002, some 660 houses had been destroyed, housing about 845 families. In addition to such large-scale destruction and the use of weapons of mass destruction, agricultural facilities had also been destroyed. Some 190 schools had been closed temporarily and 55 per cent of students were having difficulty accessing higher education. Health services had deteriorated and movement was restricted, which had led to a fall-off in the number of childhood vaccinations. The economic situation had also deteriorated. The Palestinians had been severely affected by taxation policies. The occupying forces were also strengthening their presence in the occupied Syrian Golan. Israeli occupation policy reduced the freedom of movement and work opportunities for the Palestinian people, who were limited to low-level jobs, he said.

SOMAIA BARGHOUTI, Counsellor, Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine, said that since the Secretary-General's report covered the period of April 2001 to March 2002, it was important to present a brief overview of the situation and living conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory as of March 2002. In late March 2002, the situation had deteriorated dramatically with the Israeli invasion and reoccupation of major Palestinian cities and population centres, including refugee camps, and the escalation of military assaults by the Israeli occupying forces against the Palestinian people. Using heavy weaponry and excessive force, the occupying forces had continued killing Palestinians, including women and children; extrajudicial executions; abducting and detaining Palestinians in mass roundups; targeting ambulances; destroying electricity and water networks; and destroying agricultural land.

The Israeli occupying forces, moreover, continued to impose a strict military siege and severe restrictions on the movement of all Palestinian persons and goods in order to impose collective punishments on the entire population, she said. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were being confined to their homes under 24-hour curfews. The socio-economic despair of the Palestinian people was deepening, and the humanitarian crisis was becoming graver each day.

The restrictions and curfews had denied Palestinians work, trade, education, and access to proper medical care, and had precluded any semblance of normalcy in daily life. Access to food and other basic necessities, including infants' milk and medicines, had been obstructed by the occupying forces. Those restrictions had also seriously restricted the capacity of humanitarian assistance to reach those in need. In cases where the curfews had been lifted after several days, they were usually lifted for only about two hours: Palestinians must spend most of that brief time trying to cross one of the many Israeli checkpoints and blockades erected throughout the occupied Palestinian territory. Palestinian men, women and children were frequently subjected to humiliation and harassment, including physical harassment, by the occupying forces at checkpoints and blockades.

Serious breaches of international humanitarian law had caused extensive harm to the Palestinian civilian population, infrastructure and its institutions. As of today, at least 1,680 Palestinians had been killed by the Israeli occupying forces. She stressed the urgency of unobstructed access for humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people, which was necessary and in many cases for their survival. She called upon the international community and the United Nations system to strengthen their humanitarian assistance and protection to Palestinian civilians living under foreign occupation. She emphasized the importance of continuing the work of United Nations agencies on the ground. The international community must demand that Israel, the occupying Power, respect the relevant provisions of international humanitarian law, and that it comply with the provisions of the Geneva Convention.

AMR MOHAMED ROSHDY (Egypt) said that the ESCWA report was a source of grave concern. The situation on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territory was well known to all. Equally well known was the party responsible — the one that had provoked the situation and reversed history, thereby turning the region into one of conflict and violence. But the region was also witnessing an obfuscation of facts. The question now was no longer about safeguarding the occupying Power, but of safeguarding the welfare of the settlers. The question was not about establishing new institutions, but actually reforming them.

He said that as long as there was occupation, there would be suffering. As long as there was suffering, resistance would remain a right of the Palestinian people, a right that was supported by all international agreements and treaties. Israeli blood was not better or more valuable than Palestinian blood; safeguarding civilians from both cultures was an obligation. His delegation was taking the necessary steps to present the annual draft resolution on the economic and social repercussions of the occupation on the living conditions of the Palestinian people.

He said the text, which would be available tomorrow morning, took account of the reality of the situation on the ground, particularly in its third operative paragraph, which defined Israel as the occupying Power and demanded that it end its occupation and destruction. Ms. Tallaway had concluded her statement by pointing out that events in the Middle East had changed the duty of the United Nations. Indeed, the prestige of the Organization would be affected by its ability to force the occupying Power to put an end to the occupation.

MOHAMMED SALEH MOHAMMED SALEH (Bahrain) also thanked ESCWA for its comprehensive report and Ms. Tallaway for shedding light on that dire situation. The constant

deterioration of the situation over the past year was the result of Israeli policies and practices, which had become a form of State terrorism of the most terrifying kind in the world today. Israeli terrorism was characterized by excessive recourse to the use of military force against civilians, and establishment of blockades or buffer zones to keep the Palestinian people confined both economically and psychologically, recalling the Berlin Wall and the former apartheid policy of the South African Government.

He said that the buffer zone policy had increased the suffering of the Palestinian people. That policy of isolation had also had a disastrous effect upon their living conditions and their economic and social development, and restricted the movement of humanitarian personnel seeking to aid them. One thousand Palestinians, including mostly young people and children, had been killed during the past year. The ESCWA report had also highlighted the policy of destruction which had totally ruined the infrastructure of the Palestinian Authority, including President Arafat's residence.

Moreover, mass violations of humanitarian law by Israelis had prevented doctors from caring for the wounded and transferring them to hospitals. Also, in flagrant violation of the Geneva Conventions, Israeli restrictions on the movement of Palestinians had prevented Palestinian women from giving birth in clinics and hospitals.

ARIE MEKEL (Israel) said the issue of the living conditions of his Palestinian neighbours was of great concern to his Government. The Palestinians were and would always be Israel's neighbours. Thus, his country had a vested interest in seeing their social and cultural life flourish and their economy prosper. "We are destined to live eventually as good neighbours, forever and ever", he said. The path to reaching the potential of the Palestinians had been obstructed by the persistence of conflict with Israel. Full realization of their goals could only be accomplished through a lasting and negotiated agreement with Israel.

He said it was that understanding that had led to the Oslo process and to Camp David, where Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak had extended Israel's most far-reaching proposal to date. That offer had received a negative response by the Palestinian leadership, which, in a matter of weeks, launched a campaign of terror against the people of Israel, apparently with the notion that violence would beget a better deal than that which could be won at the negotiating table. With the onset of terrorism, that positive trend had been reversed.

The obvious conclusion was that the current predicament of the Palestinians was the result of their decision to forgo a political process in favour of a campaign of terrorism against innocent civilians, he said. It was that choice and the wave of suicide bombers that had forced Israel to take defensive steps to protect the lives of its people and defend its inherent rights, as defined by the United Nations Charter. There had been more than 13,000 attacks against Israelis during the past two years. Amnesty International this month described the suicide bombings as crimes against humanity, but the Palestinian terror organizations saw them as part of the Jihad against Israel.

He said that even some Palestinian religious leaders had been condoning the suicide attacks. Just last week, there were two more such attacks, killing and injuring numerous Israeli civilians. A

previous speaker had said that everyone knew what was happening and whose fault it was; indeed, everyone did. Israel supported international efforts aimed at eliminating the dire humanitarian situation confronting the Palestinians. But neither they nor the international community could afford to lose sight of the fact that that was the result of the choice made by the Palestinian leadership in favour of violence over dialogue.

YUSSEF KANAAN, Permanent Observer Mission of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), said that amidst the intense upsurge in violence in the area, Israel's imposition of severe restrictions on freedom of movement in the occupied Palestinian territory was jeopardizing the prospects of the resumption of the peace process. The Israeli closure policy with its far-reaching impacts had negatively affected the Palestinian economy and living conditions. Closures had brought to a halt numerous infrastructure projects supported by the international community to improve the Palestinian environment, including even the denial of access to drinking water for Palestinian villages. There was also disturbing information about the rapid increase in Israeli settlement activities, which contravened the Fourth Geneva Convention and which numerous Security Council and General Assembly resolutions had declared illegal. The settlements had fragmented both land and people and hampered the pace of developments leading to the establishment of a Palestinian State.

The economic situation of the Arab population in the Syrian Golan was also highlighted in the report, he said. Arab workers in the Syrian Golan had no access to social benefits or health insurance. Their job security was unstable, with no terms of unemployment compensation. The OIC shared the Secretary-General's concern in seeking a solution, bearing in mind that the continued Israeli occupation of the Palestinian and Arab territories was the core of the problem. The twenty-ninth session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers strongly condemned Israel's policy of refusing to comply with Security Council resolutions, and called on Israel to fully withdraw from the whole of the occupied Syrian Golan back to the lines of June 1967.

To find a fair resolution to the conflict, he said, the OIC had stressed the need for the establishment of the independent Palestinian State, which Jerusalem as its capital. The OIC hoped for the achievement of a just and lasting resolution of the escalating conflict. The Palestinian National Authority had faithfully endeavoured to fulfil its part of the agreement. The OIC looked to the Security Council to compel Israel to respond positively to those efforts. The goal of the peace process could only be achieved through peace initiatives and negotiations, not military action.

Mr. SHAMINA (Libya) expressed serious concern at the figures contained in the ESCWA report. The term "IDF" should not have been used, however. The proper term was "occupying force", not IDF. The rights of the Palestinian people and the Arab residents of the occupied Syrian Golan were inalienable. The matter should be dealt with as an issue of occupation. It was incumbent on the international community to work to end that occupation and help the Palestinian to ending the current dilemma. Regrettably, the international community had not been able to do anything in the face of Israeli violations of legitimate resolutions designed to aid people living under severe restrictions.

The fact that Israel had not permitted the fact-finding commission to enter the Jenin refugee

camp, he said, meant it had undertaken genocide in that camp. From the killing of innocents and extrajudicial killings to the confiscation of land, all those actions had increased the suffering of the Palestinian people. The impact of those actions would last a long time. Policies to expand settlements at the expense of the agricultural land of the Palestinian people would change demographic facts in the area. The international community must exert pressure on the occupying force to stop building settlements and remove those already established. He appreciated the difficulties facing UNRWA, particularly in health care. The living conditions in the refugee camps faced large-scale deterioration.

HUSSEIN SABBAGH (Syria) said the report before the Council had described the daily suffering of the Syrian people in the occupied Syrian Golan, including the abject poverty which was increasing as a result of the brutal practices of the occupying force. All forms of weaponry, including guided missiles and tank fire, were being used disproportionately. The report also noted the large-scale demolition of houses, which was occurring at night without any prior warning. The report also drew attention to the large number of Palestinian children being incarcerated. All indications were that they were being tortured physically and psychologically, and deprived of family visits.

He said the decisions to expand settlements flouted international resolutions, and transferring populations was a war crime. Despite the fact that the international community continued to condemn such brutal practices, the Israeli Government was extending those practices by assassinating innocent Palestinian people, occupying their towns and villages, and destroying their infrastructures, including facilities built by the United Nations with the assistance of the whole international community. That Government was also imposing a siege on the movement of Palestinians, purportedly for security reasons.

Yet, he said, history had shown that the only means to security was by ending occupation. The attacks on churches and mosques had persisted, as had massacres and intimidation. Heavy weaponry had been used against unarmed civilians, for example, in the Jenin camp. In the occupied Syrian Golan, the suffering of Arab citizens continued as the occupying force flouted basic human rights through all forms of pressure and intimidation of Arab citizens, under the yoke of an occupation that had continued since 1967.

MOHAMED AYARI (Tunisia) said some 2 million Palestinians were undergoing great difficulties in accessing basic primary goods, health care and education. Many children suffered from malnutrition. The legitimate resistance of the Palestinian people was being countered by massive Israeli incursions and recourse to heavy weapons of the most sophisticated kind. Attacks had led to the deaths of hundreds of Palestinians, including children. Many Palestinian civilians had died during fights in villages. Some 170 Palestinian houses had been destroyed in the West Bank in 2001. In Gaza the figure was higher, with some 600 houses destroyed. Heavy artillery was used to carry out the task at night.

Figures in the report, however, did not reflect the destruction at the Jenin refugee camp. An internationally recognized individual had described a horrific scene there. The occupying Power had also destroyed agricultural land. Some 380,000 fruit and olive trees had been uprooted. Israeli armed settlers attacked with impunity the Palestinian people and plundered their property

with impunity. He was greatly concerned with the torture of children during interrogation by Israeli forces. The buffer zone policy and restrictions on movement were also a source of great concern, as they had a great impact on economic life. Some 50 per cent of Palestinians were living in poverty. Israeli practices also impacted the environment.

On the settlements policy, he said Israel was pursuing it in violation of international law. Israeli settlements were the main cause of the conflict between the two people. Settlements were depriving Palestinian of their agricultural land. The United Nations should end expansion, in particular, in the occupied Palestinian territory and the occupied Syrian Golan. The inhabitants of the occupied Syrian Golan were living under apartheid-like conditions. As long as occupation continued, the suffering of the Palestinians would continue.

MOSTAFA ALAEI (Iran) said that having visited the war-stricken areas, he could appreciate the documentation on the atrocities committed by the Israelis, who had resorted to the indiscriminate and excessive use of force. They had fired from helicopters and wilfully killed Palestinian civilians, using them as human shields. Those were highly visible war crimes that had also been widely reported by the international media and could be documented with relative ease. Unfortunately, the efforts of the Security Council and, to some extent, the whole United Nations system, had proved impotent in constraining Israeli policy. What had happened to the fact-finding regime in Jenin had been a blow to everyone in that universal body.

He shared the conviction that occupation of the Arab lands was at the heart of the crisis in the Middle East. The international community must take a fresh look at the question of whether a regime readily inclined to commit crimes against innocent people and flout Security Council resolutions, and the principles of international law could still claim a place in the world's multilateral organizations. Repression of the Palestinians in the occupied territories had continued unabated. The recent siege of Ramallah was the latest example of a repressive and bloody campaign by the occupying Power. Invading troops had turned towns into rubble and clamped down on the movement of Palestinians within and outside the West Bank and Gaza.

The United Nations must use all necessary means to force Israel to comply with the demands of the world community, he said. Effective measures should be taken to stop for good Israeli aggression, the systematic destruction of Palestinian homes and the simultaneous expansion of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. The deployment of a protection force mandated to protect civilians from such atrocities was critical, as was bringing to justice the perpetrators of those war crimes.

Mr. ELTAYEB (Sudan) said the policy of checkpoints and enclosure had made the necessities of daily life difficult, including education, employment and health care. The excessive use of force against innocent civilians challenged the provisions of the Geneva Convention. The twenty-ninth meeting of the OIC, held in the Sudan, had condemned Israel and its expansionist policies in the occupied Palestinian territory and the occupied Syrian Golan. He called upon the international community to exert the strongest pressures to end Israeli occupation and to enable the Palestinian people to enjoy its right to self-determination.

MU'TAZ HYASSAT (Jordan) said the suffering the Palestinians were exposed to daily was the

result of Israeli policies manifested in closures and arrests. Dealing with the security aspect by excluding political and social concerns would not end the crisis. A just solution of the problem required the full response of the international community, which must call for an end to the occupation, in implementation of resolutions of international legitimacy, and in an effort to bring peace to all peoples in the region.

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