

Note of 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 East Jerusalem, and of the Arab Population in the Occupied Syrian Golan

Introductory Statement by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia - ESCWA
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Mr. Chairman, Distinguished delegates,

I have the honor of presenting, for consideration by the Council, the Note of 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 East Jerusalem, and of the Arab Population in the Occupied Syrian Golan.

The Note is mandated by resolutions from the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly.

I would like to thank all colleagues and agencies for their input and support.

I would also like to note that the report covers the period from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021. Therefore, the developments of April-May 2021, including the Gaza military escalation, are not covered in this report.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished delegates,

Israel continues its **measures to consolidate its control** over the occupied Palestinian territory, resulting in increased territorial fragmentation and systematic limitation to development. Most of these policies persisted during the reporting period despite the COVID-19 pandemic, including the following:

- **Discriminatory policies and practices**, especially in the application of law, service provision, and planning and zoning policies that prevent Palestinian construction in Area C and East Jerusalem.
- **Excessive use of force by** Israeli authorities, including unwarranted force amounting to arbitrary deprivation of life, coupled with a lack of accountability.
- Failure to protect Palestinians from **settler violence or to hold perpetrators accountable**
- **Arrest, incarceration and arbitrary detention of thousands of Palestinian men, women and children**, including holding hundreds in administrative detention, without charge or trial for an indefinite period, with documented cases of torture and ill-treatment of detainees, including children.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished delegates,

These policies and practices are combined with others in Area C and East Jerusalem to create a coercive environment that compels Palestinians to leave their homes in what could amount to forcible transfer.

Israel's policy to encourage settlement growth amounts to the transfer of its population into an occupied territory, which violates international humanitarian law.

2020 witnessed the highest number of demolitions and resulting displacement in recent years, often in relation to settlement expansion plans. Whereas Palestinian ability to legally challenge demolition orders against their property was further limited.

Punitive home demolitions and confiscation of property against the families and neighbors of Palestinians suspected of carrying out attacks continue and amount to collective punishment.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished delegates,

Israel's restrictions on Palestinians movement within and between different regions of the occupied Palestinian territory destroys social networks, disrupts livelihoods, and denies access to health care, including in life-saving situations.

Such restrictions have effectively fragmented the West Bank into more than 100 cantons and include the Wall, closed military areas and 40 km of roads for Israelis only.

Israel's 14-year blockade of more than 2 million Palestinians in Gaza amounts to collective punishment and impede reconstruction and development, as well as efforts to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

Israel unilaterally enforces "access-restricted areas" along the Gaza border fence with Israel, undermining livelihoods and conducting arrest and seizure operations.

Israeli restrictions prevent Palestinians from using more than half of West Bank agricultural area and 35% of Gaza's farmland. The latter has also been damaged by Israel's aerial spraying with herbicides.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished delegates,

Palestinians continue to be deprived of access to water and other natural resources.

Israeli settlements receive high-quality, potable water, whereas Israeli policies and restrictions result in inadequate access to water for Palestinians.

In Gaza, 96% of water resources are unfit for human consumption, and only 10% of Gazans have access to safe drinking water through the public network.

Due to power shortages and poor infrastructure, millions of litres of raw or poorly treated wastewater is discharged into the Mediterranean every day.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished delegates,

Approximately 2.45 million Palestinians required some form of humanitarian assistance, including three-quarters of the population of Gaza. This has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and a decline in external funding.

The situation in Gaza was dire and deteriorating, even before the May 2021 escalation, with the protracted humanitarian crisis that is entrenching and compounding.

After three years of economic slowdown and decline in real GDP per capita, 2020 was one of the worst years for the Palestinian economy since 2002.

As Gaza's 2020 GDP per capita remained below its 1994 levels, unemployment in the occupied Palestinian territory was 26% with a hyper-unemployment in Gaza at 46.6%. Notably, women's employment has been severely impacted in the context of the pandemic.

As a result, 1.4 million persons in Gaza suffered from food insecurity, as malnutrition plagues pregnant women, lactating mothers, and children.

The capacity of the Palestinian health care system to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic had been severely impaired, while Gaza's health infrastructure on the verge of collapse, owing to the blockade and recurrent military operations.

Palestinians' access to COVID-19 vaccines have been limited, despite Israel ranking first globally in per capita vaccinations.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished delegates,

Israel's annexation of the occupied Syrian Golan, and its active support of settlement activity in that area, violate international law.

Syrians in the Golan suffer from discriminatory policies designed to benefit Israeli settlers at their expense, particularly in land and water allocation, planning and zoning, and demining efforts.

These policies result in harsh economic and social conditions. These conditions are expected to worsen as a result of new Israeli projects and plans.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished delegates,

In conclusion, the protracted Israeli occupation is detrimental to the living conditions of Palestinians and Syrians. Current trends and persistent Israeli policies render attaining the SDGs almost impossible.

Furthermore, Israel continues to employ policies contrary to international law, including those that are discriminatory, and others that may amount to forcible transfer and collective punishment.

The COVID-19 crisis continues to heighten the vulnerability of Palestinians, particularly the population of Gaza.

The Note reiterates that adherence to international law is an absolute imperative for ensuring that no party enjoys impunity and securing justice and peace for all those living in the region.

Thank you