



مركز الميزان لحقوق الإنسان
AL Mezan Center for Human Rights



14 May 2018

Permanent Representatives of United Nations Security Council Member States

Your Excellencies,

It is with grave concern that we write to you on behalf of the Palestinian human rights organisations Al-Haq, Adalah, Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights and Palestinian Human Rights Organizations Council about the ongoing and imminent escalation of violence across the occupied Palestinian territory, and in the Gaza Strip specifically, where Palestinian protesters have been met with deadly force at the hands of Israeli occupying forces since 30 March 2018.

Over the past seven weeks, Israeli occupying forces have excessively used force to suppress the Great Return March in the Gaza Strip, wilfully targeting and killing protected persons. Since the mass protests began, the Israeli military has fired live ammunition from snipers, used plastic-coated steel bullets, and launched tear gas grenades from drones. Human rights organisations have documented that 42 Palestinians have been killed while participating in these peaceful demonstrations, including six children, two journalists, one person on crutches, and two persons with disabilities. During the same period, 3,979 Palestinians were injured, including 732 children, 131 women, 35 paramedics, and 37 journalists, among them 2,186 by live ammunition.¹

The Great Return March is expected to last through the seventieth Nakba Day, marked on 15 May, in commemoration of the mass expulsion of Palestinian refugees in 1948 and seven decades of Israel's ongoing displacement and dispossession of Palestinians on both sides of the Green Line. As the large-scale Great Return March demonstrations coincide with protests across Palestine against the unlawful United States embassy move to Jerusalem today, 14 May, we are deeply concerned that Israel will continue to violate international law by resorting to lethal force against peaceful Palestinian protesters. Israel's current unlawful actions against protesters must be viewed within the context of 11 years of closure in the Gaza Strip, amounting to unlawful collective punishment, the continued denial of Palestinian refugees' internationally recognised right of return, and Israel's systemic pattern of violence and repression against the Palestinian people.

Your Excellencies, the United Nations has repeatedly warned that the Gaza Strip will become uninhabitable by 2020, but the Security Council has failed to take concrete steps to lift the unlawful closure and protect the Palestinian population in Gaza. This lack of meaningful international action has pushed Gaza to the brink of collapse and has given Israel a green light to further breach international law, including the commission of war crimes, with full impunity. As the protests progress this week, our organisations call upon United Nations Security Council Member States to take immediate and concrete action to protect civilians and bring Israel's unlawful closure of Gaza to an end. Specifically, we ask you to:

¹Al Mezan. Press Release: "310 Palestinians Injured on the Sixth Friday of Demonstrations in Gaza." 5 May 2018: <http://www.mezan.org/en/post/22803/310+Palestinians+Injured+on+the+Sixth+Friday+of+Demonstrations+in+Gaza>

1. Convene an **emergency Security Council session** to address the urgent situation in the Gaza Strip and the unlawful conduct of the Israeli occupying forces;
2. Demand that Israel take concrete action to immediately **lift its unlawful closure and blockade** of the Gaza Strip, and cease all forms of collective punishment imposed on the Palestinian population therein;
3. Implement all options to **protect Palestinian civilians** and ensure that Israel refrains from resorting to force, including lethal force, against unarmed civilian protesters;
4. Establish an **independent and transparent investigation** into the Israeli occupying forces' use of live fire and snipers and the resulting killings and injuries of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip since 30 March 2018.

Your Excellencies, as the longest unresolved question to fall under the responsibility of the United Nations, Palestine has become a litmus test for the efficacy of the international system as a whole and the willingness of the international community to respect the rule of law and act in the face of widespread and systematic violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

As Palestinians mark 70 years since the Nakba, Al-Haq, Adalah, and Al Mezan urge the United Nations Security Council to act on its responsibility by ensuring Palestinians' demands are finally heard and their rights realised, holding perpetrators accountable, and delivering victims their rights and effective remedy.

Please accept, Your Excellencies, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Yours sincerely,

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Palestinian Human Rights Organizations Council members:

- Al Haq - Defending Human Rights

- Al Mezan Center for Human Rights
- Aldameer Association for Human Rights
- Palestinian Centre for Human Rights
- Defence for Children International - Palestine
- Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center
- ADDAMEER Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association
- Ramallah Center for Human Rights Studies
- BADIL - Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights
- Center for Defense of Liberties and Civil Rights – Hurryyat
- The Independent Commission for Human Rights “Observer”