

## **IPHRC strongly condemns the Israeli aggression and prolonged blockade against Gaza, expansion of illegal settlements and worsening of human rights situation throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territories**

**Jeddah, 28<sup>th</sup> November 2019:** The OIC Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission (IPHRC) expressed its strong condemnation of the military aggression carried out by the Israeli occupation forces in the Gaza Strip earlier this month which, in a blatant violation of international human rights and humanitarian law, resulted in the death of dozens of innocent civilians. The Commission added that the deteriorating human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), is a result of the violations committed by the Israeli occupation forces and authorities. It underlined the importance of bringing an end to all systematic violations against basic human rights and fundamental freedoms of Palestinians, including the fundamental rights to life, worship and freedom of movement.

During its 16<sup>th</sup> Session, IPHRC organized an Open Meeting for the Member and Observer States to review the worsening human rights situation in the OPT, including the recent military aggression against innocent civilians in Gaza. Besides the IPHRC Chairperson, the keynote speakers included the IPHRC Chairperson, Assistant Secretary General of Al-Quds from the OIC General Secretariat and the Permanent Representative of Palestine to the OIC. In addition, the meeting benefited from a detailed briefing by Professor Michael Lynk, the UN Special Rapporteur for the Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967.

The keynote speakers focused on severe humanitarian crisis in Gaza, which was termed as a human-made catastrophe rather than simply a tragedy. The 12-year-long Israeli air, sea and land blockade of Gaza is an injustice, ending of which must be at the top of the world's human rights agenda. The Special Rapporteur highlighted that the two most recent UN Secretary-Generals have described that the blockade of Gaza is a form of collective punishment, which is expressly prohibited under Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. It was underscored that the main focus of his recent report to the United Nations General Assembly last month was the lack of accountability and the endurance of impunity in the course of this 52-year-old occupation: which is the longest belligerent occupation in the modern world. Mr. Lynk stressed that 'accountability is the key to unlocking the titanium cage of the endless Israeli occupation of Palestine'.

Participants of the meeting extensively deliberated on all recent human rights developments and expressed grave concern on the range of violations committed by Israel, the Occupying Power, against innocent Palestinians. The Commission strongly condemned the ongoing expansion of Israeli settlement

activities, and warned that support from any country or quarter, which aims at legitimizing the colonial settlement areas in the West bank are null and void by virtue of international law and in stark violation of relevant UN Resolutions. To this end, IPHRC recalled and commended the UN Security Council Resolution 2334 (December 2016) stipulating that under the 4<sup>th</sup> Geneva Convention, Israel must stop its activity and meet its international obligations. In March 2017, the UN Human Rights Council also condemned the illegal Israeli settlements by adopting a resolution and demanding an end to such activities. This signifies that Israel's expansion and construction of settlements in OPT carries no legal basis, and in fact thwarts the two-State solution of peace and security.

IPHRC also welcomed the consensual adoption of the latest set of resolutions on Palestine in the Fourth Committee of the UN General Assembly, particularly the resolution concerning the renewal of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)'s mandate for another three years. Calling its consensual adoption as an expression of international commitment to supporting the Palestinian people's rights, including the refugees' right to return to their homes, in accordance with UN resolution No.194, the Commission called on all Member States to further concretize this political support through financial contributions. The much-needed financial assistance will enable UNRWA to continue supporting Palestinian refugees of its much-needed services, it added.

The Meeting affirmed that the recent indiscriminate targeting of civilians in Gaza, through airstrikes by Israeli occupation forces, constitutes war crimes and crimes against humanity, and cannot be justified under any circumstances or reasons. This comes in addition to the repetitive human rights abuses and violations; an Israeli norm against Palestinians, such as the use of excessive and unjustified force against civilians, regular physical and psychological abuse of Palestinians at military checkpoints, and depriving the Palestinian prisoners of their basic human rights in Israeli prisons and detention centers.

Expressing dismay over the inability of the UN Security Council to end the decades-long Israeli occupation of Palestine, which is the root cause of all human rights violations against the Palestinian people, both the participants of the Meeting and the Commission stressed the need to investigating the ongoing Israeli human rights violations by the relevant international mechanisms. Such investigations and their results will help in holding Israel, the occupying power, accountable for violations of international human rights and humanitarian laws.

The Commission also urged the international community to intensify its efforts at all levels to facilitate a comprehensive and just solution of the

Palestine question, in accordance with the relevant UN resolutions. The Commission reiterated its call on Member States to join the ongoing movement of Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions on products coming from Israeli settlements. It also urged Member States to take lead in providing political, economic, and diplomatic support, at all levels, to the Palestinian people in their struggle to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination for the establishment of their own independent, viable and contiguous State, with Al -Quds Al-Shareef as its capital including their unquestionable right to return to their homes and property, as decided in various UN Resolutions and guaranteed by international law.

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