

## Call for Holding a special session at the Human Rights Council

To the Permanent Representatives of Member States and Observer States of the United Nations Human Rights Council,

Excellencies,

We, the undersigned non-governmental organizations, are deeply concerned about the escalating human rights crisis in the occupied Palestinian territories, particularly in the Gaza Strip. The civilian population has been experiencing a wave of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the Israeli occupation forces since October 7. Indiscriminate bombings of entire neighborhoods in the Gaza Strip have resulted in a severe risk of starvation and mass casualties due to shortages of food, fuel, and medicine caused by the ongoing Israeli-imposed siege.

In light of these grave violations, we urgently call for the United Nations Human Rights to hold a special session to address the human rights dimensions of the occupied Palestinian territories. The Council has a mandate to prevent violations and respond promptly to emergencies, and it is the responsibility of Member States to convene an emergency special session to investigate all alleged violations. We implore your delegations to exert pressure on the Israeli occupation forces to immediately cease these unspeakable violations and flagrant crimes against the Palestinian people. **Especially, in light of the continuation of the bloody Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip, the most recent of which was the targeting of Al-Ahly Baptist Hospital, which resulted in hundreds of innocent victims, wounded and injured Palestinian citizens in Gaza, intentionally, in the hearing and sight of everyone, which is a clear violation of international law and the resolutions of international legitimacy and humanity.**

On October 7, 2023, Palestinian factions initiated Operation "Al-Aqsa Flood," targeting the "Gaza Envelope," a buffer zone along the land borders with the Strip, comprising three regional councils: Eshkol Regional Council, Shaar HaNegev Regional

Council and Ashkelon Regional Council and housing approximately 50 towns and illegal settlements. This attack resulted in the capture of several Israeli civilians and soldiers.

In response to this attack, the Israeli Prime Minister authorized a massive and deadly assault by the Israeli occupation forces' air force on the Gaza Strip. This devastating aerial bombardment continues unabated, causing severe violations against civilians and civilian infrastructure in the Gaza Strip, which has been under siege by the Israeli occupation forces since 2006, with land, sea, and air restrictions. Entire neighborhoods have been decimated, and numerous families have been tragically wiped out due to the relentless bombings by the Israeli Air Force. Public and private properties, including ministries, universities, schools, commercial and industrial facilities, as well as media institutions, have been deliberately targeted. Moreover, hospitals and medical facilities have been damaged, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis.

**We would like to draw your attention to the findings of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which concluded that the Gaza Strip is currently under military occupation and subject to international humanitarian law. Despite Israel's claim of withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005, the evidence on the ground demonstrates that Israel still exercises control over the land, including land, air, and sea access, as well as control over vital infrastructure such as water and sewage plants, electricity grids, and communication networks. Additionally, Israel maintains control over the management of the Palestinian population registry.**

This near-total control exerted by Israel over the Gaza Strip has resulted in severe violations of basic human rights, including the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to work, and the right to clean drinking water. These rights are enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, which the Israeli occupation authorities ratified on October 3, 1991. We emphasize that this control has led to systematic practices that primarily harm civilians.

Throughout nine successive Israeli governments since the imposition of the blockade, policies of collective punishment have been imposed on the 2.3 million people living in the Gaza Strip.

Clear indicators of the impact on civilians include the alarming rise in unemployment and poverty rates. Before the blockade, the unemployment rate stood at 23%, but it has now escalated to nearly 50%, the highest in the world. Similarly, poverty rates have surged from 40% to 65%. These distressing figures are a direct consequence of the coercive measures applied by the Israeli occupation forces, including the restriction of commercial goods, the prohibition of imports and exports, the destruction of industrial and economic facilities, and the denial of entry for crucial medicines and medical treatments to the Gaza Strip.

The undersigned organizations share the concerns previously expressed by the Special Rapporteur on human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories, who stated that the blockade has stifled the economy and impeded reconstruction efforts. The harsh measures planned by the occupation forces will not only delay development in the Gaza Strip for decades but also perpetuate a vicious cycle of violence with no foreseeable end. The Israeli government's tacit approval of its forces' actions may lead to crimes against humanity and genocide. Consequently, Israel's persistent disregard for its obligations as an occupying power under the Fourth Geneva Convention and customary international law will only exacerbate the cycle of impunity and perpetuate grave violations against civilians.

### **Civilians Targeting**

The deliberate targeting of civilians by the Israeli occupation forces in the ongoing bombing campaign in the Gaza Strip since October 7, 2023, has resulted in the use of powerful concussion bombs and the evidence of white phosphorus, an incendiary weapon. Tragically, these attacks have claimed the lives of more than Three thousand people, including 1,000 children, and 12,500 injured- so far. It is important

to note that these statistics are not final, as they only represent the victims who have reached hospitals and do not account for those still trapped under the rubble, suggesting that the actual number of casualties may be significantly higher.

The intentional targeting of civilians, as witnessed by the occupation forces, is a clear violation of Articles 50 and 51 of the First Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions of 1977, which expressly forbid attacks on civilians. Article 50 establishes a fundamental rule that must be adhered to by all governments, regardless of their membership status, including occupying forces. The indiscriminate targeting of civilians constitutes a violation of the right to life, which is a fundamental right protected by international human rights law, applicable in times of both war and peace. Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights explicitly prohibits the deprivation of the right to life, a provision that Israel has failed to uphold. Moreover, the violation of the right to life is also contrary to Article VI of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which Israel ratified on October 3, 1991.

On October 17, the Israeli occupation forces targeted Al-Ahly Baptist Hospital in the Gaza Strip, which resulted in hundreds of innocent victims, wounded and injured Palestinian citizens in Gaza, which constitutes a serious violation of the provisions of international and humanitarian law and the most basic values of humanity.

### **The intention of Committing Genocide Crimes**

Furthermore, on October 9, 2023, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant announced the intention to impose a comprehensive siege on the Gaza Strip, stating, "I ordered my forces to impose a complete siege on Gaza. There is no water, no electricity, no food, no gas. We are dealing with human-like animals." These deplorable and fascist statements by the Israeli Defense Minister not only serve as a green light for the Israeli occupation forces to commit genocide but also constitute confessions suggestive of the potential commission of war crimes against civilians in the Gaza Strip.

Israel's attempt to enforce a total siege on the Gaza Strip violates its obligations as an occupying power under the Fourth Geneva Convention, which Israel has ratified but failed to implement. The use of starvation as a method of warfare is explicitly prohibited under Article 54 of the First Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, which unequivocally bans the use of starvation as a tactic in armed conflicts. The policy of siege implemented by Israel represents a form of collective punishment that contradicts the right to self-determination of the occupied people, and such policies targeting civilians directly contravene Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which prohibits collective punishment and any measures aimed at terrorizing or threatening civilians.

Furthermore, the targeting of the only land crossing providing an outlet for Palestinians in the Gaza Strip constitutes another crime committed by the Israeli occupation forces. During the aerial bombardment, the occupation forces' air force targeted the Rafah land crossing connecting the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula on three occasions, resulting in injuries to two Palestinian employees and partial damage to the crossing gate. This attack has halted the movement of people to and from the Gaza Strip and the entry of crucial relief supplies. Bombing land crossings during times of war is a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and the Hague Convention of 1907.

The bombing of land border crossings, which are crucial for transporting the wounded and sick, delivering food supplies, and transporting humanitarian and relief aid, including medical assistance, constitutes a clear violation of Articles 55 and 59 of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949. These articles explicitly require the occupying power to facilitate operations that provide the occupied population with essential food and medical supplies. Moreover, the occupying power is obligated to consider the needs of the civilian population, a duty that Israel has neglected. As a result of the bombing and subsequent closure of the crossings, patients in need of treatment have suffered.

We, the undersigned organizations, affirm that Israel's actions, which amount to collective punishment against the Palestinians, have long been part of their doctrine. These actions aim to deprive the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip of their basic means of sustenance, such as food, water, and electricity. Additionally, the intense and indiscriminate bombing of residential areas to forcibly displace the population constitutes war crimes and genocide against Palestinians. The lives of 2.3 million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are at serious risk under international law. We urgently call upon member states to intervene to protect civilians, prevent further violations, and address the root causes of these recurring episodes of violence. It is imperative to adhere to international law and put an end to the illegal Israeli siege of the Gaza Strip, which has persisted for 16 years.

In light of these developments, we urge your delegations to support a resolution to urgently convene a special session of the UN Human Rights Council on the crisis in the occupied Palestinian territories, in addition, to consider the following actions:

- Conduct a comprehensive investigation into the violations of international human rights law, international humanitarian law, and related crimes committed by the Israeli occupation forces in Palestine since October 7, 2023, and determine whether these actions constitute international crimes, to prevent further deterioration of the human rights situation.
- Exert pressure on the Israeli occupation authorities to immediately cease the indiscriminate bombing of civilians in the Gaza Strip.
- Demand the occupation authorities halt policies of collective punishment that may lead to genocide crimes against civilians in the Gaza Strip.
- Urge the occupation authorities to ensure the prompt delivery of humanitarian and relief aid to the Gaza Strip.
- Condemn the indiscriminate bombing carried out by the Israeli occupation forces, which has resulted in a significant number of civilian casualties.

- Exert pressure on the occupation authorities to immediately allow the entry of humanitarian relief shipments into the Gaza Strip and cease targeting the Rafah crossing, which connects the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula.

**We appreciate your attention to these urgent matters and are ready to provide your delegations with any additional information required.**

Thank you for your support and consideration,

List of signatory organizations and alliances:

- Maat for Peace, Development and Human Rights
- The Global Coalition for Limitation of Armaments (GCLA)
- International Alliance for Peace and Development, in Geneva
- Elizka Relief Foundation
- Partners for Transparency
- Mandela for Rights and Democracy
- Egypt Peace for Development and Human Rights
- Peace Environment for Development
- Mayon Organization for human rights, in Yemen
- Musawah Organization for Rights and Liberties
- The National Union of the Marginalized
- Association Ma'onah for Human Rights
- Tunisian Doctors Association, in France
- Union of Palestinian Jurists, in Tunisia
- Politic4her Organization
- Al-Jahiz Forum, in Tunisia
- African Law Students' Association
- Sahara Youth Organization for Development and Human Rights
- Tawajud Association for Development and Human Rights
- Egyptian Idea Bank Association

- Future Social and Developmental Society - Yemen
- Al-Awaser Forum - Mauritania
- Commission Independante des Droits de l'Homme en Afrique du Nord (CIDH)
- Bahrain Human Rights Watch Society