



Human Rights Council 24th Session

Oral Intervention

Al-Haq and the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies

Item 7 General Debate

Mr. President, Distinguished Members of the Council,

Al-Haq and CIHRS would like to highlight the case of the Palestinian residents of Masafer Yatta, an area that comprises 12 Palestinian villages located in Area C of the southern West Bank. The 1,300 Palestinians living there rely on farming and husbandry of sheep and goats for their income. Palestinian communities have been living in the area since the early 19th century without obstacles until the 1980s, when Israel, the Occupying Power, designated the area as a closed military zone, the so-called ‘Firing Zone 918.’

In 1999, the Israeli army forcibly evacuated 700 Palestinian residents and destroyed their homes and water cisterns. A few months later, the residents were temporarily allowed to return to their homes, pending a final decision by the Israeli High Court of Justice. Over the years the case remained unsettled, while the Palestinians living in the area endured worsening living conditions due to military operations and trainings conducted by the Israeli army, expansion of Israeli settlements, and settler attacks. In addition, most of the residents’ homes and tents have received stop-work or demolition orders. Subsequently, in July 2012, the Israeli authorities confirmed their intention to evacuate 8 of the 12 villages of Masafer Yatta, exposing 1,000 people to the imminent threat of forcible transfer, which amounts to a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions and a war crime. On 2 September 2013, only a few weeks ago, the Israeli High Court of Justice referred the case to mediation.

Considering that the previous mediation on the case resulted in no decision, Al-Haq and CIHRS are deeply concerned that 1,000 Palestinians could be forcibly transferred from Masafer Yatta. This case is just one example of Israel’s systematic efforts to drive Palestinian communities from their land. These efforts are carried out through persistent policies and practices of land confiscation, settlement expansion, and appropriation of natural resources, among other methods.

In light of the current situation and taking into consideration the concern of the High Commissioner about “Israel’s continued policy of forced evictions and demolitions,” Al-Haq and CIHRS call on this Council to urge Israel to forestall the displacement of the residents of Masafer Yatta and abide by its obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law.

Thank you, Mr. President.