



45th Regular Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council
Item 7 – Human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories
Joint Oral Statement¹
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In her opening statement at the start of this Council session, High Commissioner Bachelet rightfully referred to the situation in Gaza, occupied Palestine, as an “escalating tragedy” where the population continues to face “deeper suffering” and “humanitarian burdens”.² Al Mezan emphasizes that the crisis in Gaza is intentional, it is human-made and it is strategically maintained by the Israeli government.

“This is purely a human-made disaster,” said the Special Rapporteur on the oPt, “and could be quickly reversed if the political will existed.”³ Instead, 14 years into the illegal closure and blockade, last month,⁴ Israel launched a series of additional punitive measures on Gaza that dramatically restricted the population’s access to electricity, and subsequently, to water. A devastating spike in the violation of the population’s basic human rights followed, including the rights to water and sanitation, to an adequate standard of living, to health, and to the prohibition on the use of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment. The measures coincided with the spread of COVID-19 and served to further undermine Gaza’s ability to implement even basic health measures—such as hand hygiene.

Israel’s 14-year closure and blockade policy “contravenes international law,” as the High Commissioner reiterated,⁵ and amounts to the unlawful collective punishment of two million people, to whom justice is due.

Al Mezan calls on this Council and its Member States to address the root causes of the escalating crisis in the Gaza Strip by calling on Israel to fully, immediately and unconditionally end its illegal closure of Gaza; end all forms of collective punishment imposed on Palestinians, and pursue international justice and accountability for Israel’s widespread and systematic human rights violations and apparent international crimes committed against the Palestinian people.

¹ Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights, Al Haq, Law in the Service of Man, Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, and Women’s Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling

² 45th Session of the Human Rights Council, Item 2: Global Human Rights Update. Statement by Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 14 Sept 2020

³ “Israel/OPT: Respecting Fundamental Rights in Gaza is Pre-Condition to Achieving Peace, says UN Human Rights Expert,” 1 Sept 2020. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26201&LangID=E>

⁴ Between 13-31 August 2020

⁵ Ibid, footnote 1