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Israeli practices and settlement activities affecting the rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs of the occupied territories

Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories

Note by the Secretary-General*

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly the fifty-sixth report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [78/76](#).

* The present report was submitted after the deadline in order to reflect the most recent information.



Report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories

Summary

The present report contains information regarding the efforts of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories to implement its mandate and documents human rights concerns in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the occupied Syrian Golan from October 2023 to July 2024. The Special Committee was not able to conduct visits to the occupied territories, but did conduct its annual consultations in Geneva and undertook a visit to Amman, and met with government officials, United Nations organizations and mechanisms, representatives of civil society organizations, youth representatives, human rights defenders, and Palestinian families.

The report raises serious concerns of breaches of international humanitarian and human rights laws in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including starvation as a weapon of war, the possibility of genocide in Gaza and an apartheid system in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. It documents the impact of the conflict escalation since 7 October 2023 on Palestinians' rights to food; to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment; to physical integrity, liberty and security of persons; as well as the disproportionate effects on the rights of women, children, and future generations more broadly. The report also highlights the ongoing attacks against the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and refers to developments in the occupied Syrian Golan. The report provides recommendations to the General Assembly and Member States; to the State of Israel; and to businesses operating with Israel, that in any way contribute to maintaining Israel's unlawful presence in the occupied territories.

I. Introduction

1. The Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories was established in 1968 by the General Assembly in its resolution 2443 (XXIII). It is composed of three Member States: Malaysia, represented by the Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations, Ahmad Faisal Muhamad; Senegal, represented by the Permanent Representative of Senegal to the United Nations, Cheikh Niang; and Sri Lanka, represented by the Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations, Mohan Pieris, serving as Chair. The Special Committee reports to the Secretary-General. Its reports are reviewed in the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) of the General Assembly.

II. Mandate

2. Pending complete termination of the Israeli occupation, the Special Committee is mandated by resolution 2443 (XXIII) (1968) and subsequent resolutions to investigate Israeli policies and practices affecting the human rights of Palestinian people and other Arabs of the occupied territories. The occupied territories are considered to be those remaining under Israeli occupation since 1967, namely the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which comprises the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza, as well as the occupied Syrian Golan. The Special Committee is not mandated to investigate human rights violations committed by other duty bearers in the occupied territories. The present report, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 78/76, covers the period from 1 October 2023 to 31 July 2024.

III. Activities of the Special Committee

3. The previous formal request by the Special Committee for cooperation from Israel with its mandate and access to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Israel, and the occupied Syrian Golan, was in a letter dated 4 May 2023 to the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva. Prior to the Special Committee's annual field mission, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) further requested a meeting for the Special Committee with Permanent Representative of Israel during the Special Committee's consultations in Geneva. The Government of Israel did not respond to these requests. Since its establishment in 1968, the Special Committee has not been granted access by Israel to the occupied territories.

4. In the absence of access to the occupied territories, the Special Committee conducted a field visit to Amman from 21 to 24 June 2024, during which it visited the Baqa'a camp for Palestinian refugees and met with high-level Government officials, United Nations organizations, civil society and youth organization representatives, human rights defenders, and Palestinian families. Prior to this, the Special Committee travelled to Geneva for its annual consultations and to attend the fifty-sixth regular session of the Human Rights Council. There, the Special Committee met with Government officials, United Nations organizations, Special Procedures mandate holders, members of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, and Geneva-based representatives of civil society organizations. The Special Committee subsequently held consultations with Member States and other stakeholders. On

17 July, the Chair of the Special Committee briefed the Security Council during a meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question.¹

IV. 7 October 2023

5. On 7 October 2023, members of the armed wing of Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups, as well as Palestinian civilians, carried out attacks on Israeli communities, civilian locations and military bases in southern Israel.² Attackers entered Israel by land, sea and air, while simultaneously launching a large-scale rocket and mortar attack on civilian communities and military bases in southern and central Israel. Around 1,200 persons were killed, either directly by members of the various Palestinian armed groups or as a result of rockets and mortars launched from the Gaza Strip. “At least 252 people were taken hostage to Gaza, including 90 women, 36 children, and older people and members of Israeli security forces. About 20 of these abductees were members of Israeli security forces, many of whom have since been killed in captivity”.³

6. On that day, the Secretary-General condemned in the strongest terms the attack by Hamas against Israeli towns, including the firing of thousands of rockets toward Israeli population centres. The Secretary-General was appalled by reports that civilians had been attacked and abducted from their own homes.⁴ Since then, the Secretary-General has repeatedly denounced the 7 October attacks as abhorrent and reiterated his call for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages.⁵

7. The 7 October attack, the largest on Jews since the establishment of the State of Israel, has marked a turning point in the decades-long conflict and “suffocating”⁶ Israeli occupation. It has triggered a military response on Gaza that has dwarfed all previous escalations in the number of Palestinians killed, destruction and extent of disregard for international law. The situation in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, has also dramatically worsened since then.

V. Situation of human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Human rights and humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip

8. During the reporting period, the human rights and humanitarian crisis in Gaza spiralled to unprecedented levels. Israel’s means and methods of warfare, including its indiscriminate bombing campaign, resulted in the widespread killing of civilians and mass destruction of civilian infrastructure, raising grave concerns of violations under international humanitarian law as to the fundamental principles of distinction,

¹ See www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hw9dnIRI4dE.

² See A/HRC/56/CRP.3.

³ *Ibid.*, para. 21.

⁴ Stéphane Dujarric, Spokesman for the Secretary-General, statement attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General regarding the situation in the Middle East, 7 October 2023.

⁵ António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, remarks to the Summit of the League of Arab States, 16 May 2024.

⁶ António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, remarks to the Security Council on the Middle East, 24 October 2023.

proportionality and precautions in attack.⁷ Meanwhile, Palestinian armed groups continued to launch indiscriminate missile attacks towards Israel and hold Israeli hostages. The crisis was further aggravated by Israel's blockade and ongoing siege, including its unlawful restrictions on the entry and distribution of humanitarian assistance and other essential goods, attacks on humanitarian workers, and the repeated displacement of Palestinians. These measures not only exacerbated humanitarian needs but also severely compromised the ability of humanitarians to reach people in Gaza.⁸ As the High Commissioner of Human Rights summarized, clear violations of international humanitarian law, including possible war crimes, have been committed by all parties.⁹

9. As the hostilities persisted, record numbers of deaths and injuries continued to soar. According to the Ministry of Health in Gaza, between 7 October 2023 and 31 July 2024 39,445 Palestinians were killed and 91,073 injured in Gaza.¹⁰ These shocking numbers are expected to grow, as they do not account for bodies yet to be retrieved. On 2 May 2024, the United Nations reported that 10,000 people were feared buried under the rubble in Gaza, warning that it could take up to three years to retrieve the bodies, while the decomposition of bodies was raising serious health concerns and the risk of further fatalities.¹¹ In Israel, according to Israeli media citing official sources, at least 1,162 people, including 33 children, were killed and around 5,400 injured, including foreign nationals, during the reporting period.¹²

10. The devastating impact on civilians continued unabated at the end of the reporting period, with a series of deadly attacks on schools-turned-shelters. Between 12 and 19 July, 503 Palestinians were killed, according to the Ministry of Health in Gaza. On 13 and 14 July alone, three mass casualty incidents in Khan Younis, the Ash Shati' (Beach) refugee camp and an UNRWA school, killed over 124 people, and left hundreds injured. Further strikes on 15 and 16 July struck UNRWA schools in Al-Rimal and Nuseirat camp, and a street in Khan Younis, killing 59 Palestinians and injuring at least 76 others.¹³

11. The Special Committee is deeply alarmed by the unprecedented destruction of civilian infrastructure and high death toll in Gaza, which raise serious concerns about the use by Israel of artificial intelligence in directing its military campaign. Credible media reports¹⁴ indicate that the Israeli military lowered the criteria for selecting

⁷ Nada Al Nashi, Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights, speech on the call for action: urgent humanitarian response for Gaza, 11 June 2024; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "Thematic report: indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks during the conflict in Gaza (October–December 2023)", 19 June 2024; and OHCHR, "Renewed wave of deadly Israeli strikes on Gaza must stop – UN Human Rights Office, 19 July 2024.

⁸ UN News, "Israel continues to block aid into northern Gaza; UN sending team to shattered Al-Shifa Hospital", 1 April 2024.

⁹ UN News, "All parties to Gaza crisis may have committed war crimes: UN rights chief", 28 February 2024.

¹⁰ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Reported impact snapshot: Gaza Strip", 31 July 2024.

¹¹ UN News, "10,000 people feared buried under the rubble in Gaza", 2 May 2024.

¹² United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Reported impact snapshot: Gaza Strip", 31 July 2024.

¹³ OHCHR, "Renewed wave of deadly Israeli strikes on Gaza must stop".

¹⁴ For instance, Yuval Abraham, "A mass assassination factory": inside Israel's calculated bombing of Gaza", *+972 Magazine*, 30 November 2023; Geoff Brumfiel, "Israel is using an AI system to find targets in Gaza. Experts say it's just the start", NPR, 14 December 2023; Yuval Abraham, "Lavender": the AI machine directing Israel's bombing spree in Gaza", *+972 Magazine*, 3 April 2024; Bethan McKernan, "The machine did it coldly": Israel used AI to identify 37,000 Hamas targets", *The Guardian*, 3 April 2024; Sophia Goodfriend, "Why human agency is still central to Israel's AI-powered warfare", *+972 Magazine*, 25 April 2024; Cédric Petaluma, "Israeli army

targets while increasing their previously accepted ratio of civilian to combatant casualties. These directives reportedly enabled the military to use artificial intelligence systems (which rely on mass surveillance to process large volumes of data), to rapidly generate tens of thousands of targets, as well as to track targets to their homes, particularly at night when families shelter together. Reliance on the artificial intelligence-assisted targeting purportedly accelerated decision-making to the point of soldiers reportedly authorizing strikes in a matter of seconds, while the home-tracking of targets and night strikes would have disproportionately increased civilian casualties.¹⁵ The Committee is profoundly concerned about the indiscriminate loss of life apparently caused by these artificial intelligence-enhanced targeting systems, especially when combined with the use of explosive weapons with wide-area effects. This approach systematically disregards Israel's obligation to distinguish between civilians and combatants and to take adequate safeguards to prevent civilian deaths, as required by international humanitarian law. As stated by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the requirement to select means and methods of warfare that avoid or at the very least minimise to every extent civilian harm appears to have been consistently violated in Israel's bombing campaign.¹⁶

12. Due to the ongoing military operations, Gazans have also been displaced into ever-shrinking areas, exacerbating human rights and humanitarian concerns in what was already among one of the most densely populated areas in the world.¹⁷ The Special Committee notes that Israeli restrictions on movement have made it impossible for Gazans to flee the Strip. On 13 October, following the intensification of hostilities in Gaza, the Israeli security forces ordered 1.1 million people in northern Gaza to evacuate southward within 24 hours.¹⁸ By the end March, over 1.7 million people were displaced,¹⁹ rising to 1.9 million – 90 per cent of the population – by 31 July.²⁰ The Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons deplored the fact that internally displaced persons in Gaza have been arbitrarily driven from their homes multiple times with no regard for their rights to life, dignity, liberty and security. It is impossible to conceive of any durable solution to their displacement, given Israel's systematic destruction of civilian infrastructure, atop the immense psychological toll the conflict has taken on the people of Gaza.²¹ The Special Rapporteur further condemned Israel's continued efforts to obstruct and weaponize humanitarian aid, including through attacks on civilians seeking aid.²² On 12 July, the Secretary-General repeated his warning that nowhere was safe in Gaza and that everywhere was a potential killing zone.²³

uses AI to identify tens of thousands of targets in Gaza”, *Le Monde*, 5 April 2024; and *The Economist*, “Israel’s use of AI in Gaza is coming under close scrutiny”, 11 April 2024.

¹⁵ OHCHR, “Gaza: UN experts deplore use of purported AI to commit ‘domicide’ in Gaza, call for reparative approach to rebuilding”, 15 April 2024.

¹⁶ OHCHR, “UN report: Israeli use of heavy bombs in Gaza raises serious concerns under the laws of war”, 19 June 2024.

¹⁷ United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), “Gaza is facing a humanitarian catastrophe”, 1 November 2023.

¹⁸ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel: flash update No. 7”, 13 October 2023.

¹⁹ UNRWA, “UNRWA situation report No. 97 on the situation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem”, 1 April 2024.

²⁰ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Reported impact snapshot: Gaza Strip”, 31 July 2024.

²¹ OHCHR, “Gaza: Israel’s dehumanisation of displaced persons must end, says UN expert”, 6 March 2024.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, “‘Nowhere is safe. Everywhere is a potential killing zone’ in Gaza”, remarks at the opening of the UNRWA Pledging Conference, 12 July 2024.

13. The Special Committee is gravely alarmed that Gaza has become unliveable for Palestinians and has echoed²⁴ the repeated warnings by the Secretary-General that nothing could justify the collective punishment of the Palestinian people and that it was time for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance throughout Gaza.²⁵ The Special Committee notes that Israel has yet to comply with this call, reiterated in Security Council resolution [2735 \(2024\)](#),²⁶ or with the three binding orders from the International Court of Justice (see para. 25 below). In the light of those ongoing violations, the Special Committee shares the view of the Secretary-General that the humanitarian crisis has become a moral stain on us all.²⁷

14. Considering the above, the Special Committee is seriously concerned about the escalating media censorship and suppression of dissent in Israel since 7 October, obstructing the global public's access to critical information about the situation in Gaza and the impact of Israel's military operations. Since the start of the current escalation, extraordinarily high numbers of journalists have been killed, attacked, injured and detained in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, particularly in Gaza, making it one of the deadliest, most dangerous conflicts for journalists in recent history.²⁸ United Nations experts have emphasized that unlawful attacks²⁹ on clearly identifiable journalists appear to be a deliberate strategy by Israeli forces to obstruct the media and silence critical reporting.³⁰ Furthermore, on 1 April, the Knesset passed a bill allowing the temporary closure of foreign broadcasters deemed to be harming the State.³¹ On 5 May, Al Jazeera's offices and operations were shut down and its channels blocked within Israel.³²

15. In November 2023, amendments were made to the 2016 Counter-Terrorism Law, which led to a disproportionate increase in Palestinian arrests, including journalists, activists and human rights defenders, under broadly defined charges of "incitement" or "terrorism" for posting or consuming social media content related to 7 October and the Gaza conflict. Between 7 October and 27 March, Israeli police filed complaints against 667 individuals for suspected speech-related offenses under article 24 of Israel's Counter-Terrorism Law, 590 of whom were Palestinian, compared with 13 Jewish Israelis and 64 of unknown background. In two notable cases in the occupied West Bank, Israeli authorities detained a Palestinian photojournalist for covering a raid and a Palestinian female journalist for alleged incitement and Hamas affiliation due to Facebook posts perceived as minimizing the gravity of the 7 October attacks.³³ The Special Committee notes that such posts displaying a "pro-Palestinian standpoint" were disproportionately removed by social media companies compared

²⁴ OHCHR, "UN Special Committee on Israeli practices in occupied territories concludes field mission", 25 June 2024.

²⁵ António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, remarks to the Summit of the League of Arab States, 16 May 2024.

²⁶ UN News, "Gaza: Security Council adopts US resolution calling for 'immediate, full and complete ceasefire'", 10 June 2024.

²⁷ United Nations, "Humanitarian situation in Gaza 'a moral stain on us all', Secretary-General tells Security Council, stressing international law must be respected by all", SG/SM/22310, 17 July 2024.

²⁸ OHCHR, "Gaza: UN experts condemn killing and silencing of journalists", 1 February 2024.

²⁹ Security Council resolution [2222 \(2015\)](#).

³⁰ OHCHR, "Gaza: UN experts condemn killing and silencing of journalists".

³¹ Israel, Prevention of Foreign Broadcasting Entity Harm to State Security Law (Temporary Order-Iron Swords), 5774-2024.

³² Israel, Prime Minister's Office, "PM Netanyahu and communications Minister Shlomo Karhi: Government unanimously approves closure of Al Jazeera", 5 May 2024.

³³ [A/HRC/55/28](#), paras. 68–69; and OHCHR, "Thematic report: detention in the context of the escalation of hostilities in Gaza (October 2023–June 2024)", 31 July 2024.

with posts containing hate speech and incitement to violence against Palestinians,³⁴ including those by Israeli officials, soldiers and security personnel.³⁵ The Special Committee further notes that calls to end violence, advocate for a humanitarian ceasefire, or criticism of the Israeli Government's actions have often been misleadingly equated with support for terrorism or antisemitism.³⁶ Yet, more than 92 per cent of the 21,000 social media content removal requests submitted by the Government of Israel for allegedly inciting violence and terrorism in the 50 days following 7 October, were approved and taken down by Meta and TikTok.³⁷ The Committee is deeply concerned that these restrictive measures and attacks on journalists severely limit press freedom and Palestinians' right to information and expression, while also raising concerns about unlawful and discriminatory online surveillance of Palestinians.

Human Rights in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem

16. The Committee observed that the human rights situation in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, has drastically worsened, aggravated by chronic impunity. In a report published in December 2023, OHCHR warned about the rapidly deteriorating situation,³⁸ citing settlement expansion; mass detentions, arrests, torture and ill-treatment; movement restrictions; increased settler attacks displacing communities; the excessive use of force by the Israeli security forces; and economic strangulation through restrictive policies, harming Palestinians' economic, social and cultural rights.

17. In April, the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process expressed grave concern about increased levels of violence in the occupied West Bank, stressing that attacks on civilians, including settler violence, needed to end.³⁹ Two months later, the High Commissioner for Human Rights highlighted that the people of the occupied West Bank were being subjected to day-after-day of unprecedented bloodshed, adding that since the start of 2024, almost 200 Palestinians had been killed by Israeli security forces, as compared with 113 and 50 killed during the same periods in 2023 and 2022, respectively.⁴⁰

18. In July, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) reported a dramatic rise in child casualties in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, since October 2023, with an average of one Palestinian child killed every two days by conflict-related violence. In total, 143 Palestinian children have been killed since 7 October – a nearly 250 per cent increase compared with the preceding nine months. In addition, over 440 Palestinian children have been injured with live ammunition. Two Israeli children were also killed in the occupied West Bank in conflict-related violence during the same period.⁴¹ As at 29 July, 569 Palestinians had been killed in the

³⁴ [A/HRC/55/28](#), para. 69; and OHCHR, "Speaking out on Gaza/Israel must be allowed: UN experts", 23 November 2023.

³⁵ [A/HRC/55/73](#), para. 53.

³⁶ OHCHR, "Speaking out on Gaza/Israel must be allowed".

³⁷ Israel, Ministry of Justice, "Fighting incitement online", 26 November 2023.

³⁸ OHCHR, "The human rights situation in the occupied West Bank including East Jerusalem 7 October–20 November 2023", 27 December 2023.

³⁹ UN News, "World news in brief: rising West Bank violence, dialogue critical in Kosovo, free Afghan activist", April 2024.

⁴⁰ United Nations, "More than 500 Palestinians killed in occupied West Bank: UN rights chief", 6 June 2024.

⁴¹ UNICEF, "Child casualties in the West Bank skyrocket in the past nine months", 22 July 2024.

occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, since 7 October, including 554 killed by Israeli forces (including two who died of wounds sustained prior to 7 October).⁴²

19. In its advisory opinion of 19 July 2024, the International Court of Justice held that Israel's expanding settlement policies – including housing permit denials, widespread demolitions, land grabs, natural resource exploitation and forcible displacement of Palestinians – violated international law. The Committee concurs with the findings of the International Court of Justice, notably that Israel's failure to prevent or punish settler attacks, and its excessive use of force in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are clear violations of its international obligations.⁴³

VI. Thematic human rights issues

20. In the light of the extensive information reviewed during the reporting period, the Committee is particularly concerned about the life-threatening conditions and severe physical and mental harm deliberately inflicted on the Palestinian people, through Israel's means and methods of warfare in Gaza and policies and practices in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The Committee has taken cognizance of these measures and the specific impact on Palestinians' rights to food; to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment; and to physical integrity, liberty, and security of person. The Committee also pays particular attention to the disproportionate effects on women, children and future generations.

Food as a weapon of warfare

21. Given the unprecedented levels of starvation in Gaza amid continued Israeli restrictions on humanitarian aid, the Committee is deeply concerned about the impact on the right to food. At the beginning of 2023, Israel's prolonged occupation of Palestinian territory, including its 17-year blockade by sea, land and air of the Gaza Strip, had already caused widespread food insecurity across the occupied territory⁴⁴, with 80 per cent of Gaza's residents largely dependent on humanitarian aid.⁴⁵ By imposing a total siege on Gaza after 7 October, along with indiscriminate bombardment, subsequent ground operations and restricted humanitarian aid, Israeli authorities exacerbated food and water shortages, creating what the Secretary-General has described as an entirely man-made disaster.⁴⁶ In his statement on the applications for arrest warrants in the situation in the State of Palestine, the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court noted that evidence collected by his office showed Israel had intentionally and systematically deprived the civilian population in all parts of Gaza of objects indispensable to human survival.⁴⁷

22. Since the escalation of the conflict, Israeli officials have publicly supported policies depriving civilians of food, water, and fuel, indicating their intent to instrumentalize the provision of basic necessities for political and military objectives

⁴² United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Humanitarian situation update No. 198: West Bank", 31 July 2024.

⁴³ *Legal Consequences Arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, Advisory Opinion of 19 July 2024*, I.C.J. Reports 2024, paras. 142–154.

⁴⁴ Overall, 37.8 per cent of households in the West Bank and 64.4 per cent in Gaza were food insecure, see World Food Programme (WFP), "Annual country report 2023: State of Palestine", 2023.

⁴⁵ Ibid., OHCHR, "Over one hundred days into the war, Israel destroying Gaza's food system and weaponizing food, say UN human rights experts", 16 January 2024.

⁴⁶ See <https://x.com/antonioguterres/status/1769870146703904812>.

⁴⁷ International Criminal Court, "Statement of ICC Prosecutor Karim A.A. Khan KC: applications for arrest warrants in the situation in the State of Palestine image", 20 May 2024.

and retribution.⁴⁸ On 9 October, the Minister of Defence of Israel announced a “complete siege” of the Strip with no electricity, no food, no fuel and removed every restriction on Israeli forces so they could “eliminate everything”.⁴⁹ On 10, 12 and 13 October, the then Minister of Energy and Infrastructure reiterated that Gaza would not receive a drop of water or a single battery until they leave the world, adding that this is how we will do to a nation of murderers and butchers and that what was will not be.⁵⁰ Other officials, such as the Minister of National Security, emphasized that humanitarian aid to Gaza would be contingent upon the release of hostages.⁵¹ On 10 October, the Israel Defense Forces’ spokesperson reaffirmed that the army’s focus was on causing “maximum damage”⁵² and on 18 October, the Prime Minister reiterated that they would not allow humanitarian assistance in the form of food and medicines.⁵³ A retired Major General, former head of the National Security Council, and advisor to the Minister of Defence, opined: “the way to win the war faster and at a lower cost for us requires the collapse of systems on the other side and not just the killing of more Hamas fighters. The international community is warning us of a humanitarian disaster in Gaza and of severe epidemics. We must not shy away from this [...] After all, severe epidemics [...] will bring victory closer.”⁵⁴

23. Despite early and repeated calls by the United Nations⁵⁵ for urgent humanitarian aid, including food, water and fuel, Israel blocked all aid entry into Gaza until 21 October, when the Rafah crossing was re-opened.⁵⁶ Since 7 October, Israel has also prohibited sea access for boats, cutting off fishing, a vital food source for Gaza’s residents.⁵⁷ By mid-November, with only 10 per cent of necessary food supplies entering Gaza, the World Food Programme (WFP) warned of an immediate possibility of starvation,⁵⁸ while United Nations experts reminded Israel that intentional starvation amounted to a war crime.⁵⁹ Israeli authorities did not allow the entry of fuel supplies until 18 November and, even then, only at half the daily minimum required for humanitarian operations.⁶⁰ By 3 December, the WFP warned of a high risk of famine for all the people of Gaza and emphasized that aid through Rafah was the only lifeline⁶¹ due to the inability to produce or import food. The main entry point for goods from Israel into Gaza, Kerem Shalom, remained closed until 16 December.⁶²

⁴⁸ See [A/HRC/56/26](#).

⁴⁹ *Application Instituting Proceedings and Request for the Indication of Provisional Measures (South Africa v. Israel)*, Document No. 192-20231228-APP-01-00-EN, 29 December 2023, *I.C.J. Reports 2023*.

⁵⁰ See https://twitter.com/Israel_katz/status/1711659347590156417?s=20.

⁵¹ A/HRC/56/CRP.4, para. 266.

⁵² Bethan McKernan and Quique Kierszaenbaum, “‘We’re focused on maximum damage’: ground offensive into Gaza seems imminent”, 10 October 2023.

⁵³ A/HRC/56/CRP.4, para. 268.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 273.

⁵⁵ For example, OHCHR, “UN Human Rights Chief Volker Türk on horrific killings at Al Ahli Arab hospital in Gaza”, 17 October 2023; and OHCHR, “‘We need an immediate humanitarian ceasefire’, statement by principals of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, on the situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory”, 5 November 2023.

⁵⁶ See [A/HRC/56/26](#).

⁵⁷ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “OCHA warns Security Council: if there is no ceasefire, famine in Gaza is ‘almost inevitable’”, 27 February 2024.

⁵⁸ WFP, “Gaza faces widespread hunger as food systems collapse, warns WFP”, 16 November 2023.

⁵⁹ OHCHR, “Gaza: UN experts call on international community to prevent genocide against the Palestinian people”, 16 November 2023.

⁶⁰ Gaza Strip and Israel: flash update No. 43, 18 November 2023; and UNRWA, “The Gaza Strip: UNRWA finally receives fuel; much more is needed for humanitarian operations”, 18 November 2023.

⁶¹ WFP, “WFP Palestine emergency response”, Situation Report 10, 3 December 2023.

⁶² [A/HRC/56/26](#), para. 52.

24. As a result of the above, over 90 per cent of the Gaza population was estimated to face high levels of acute food insecurity by the end of 2023,⁶³ with 40 per cent at emergency levels and over 15 per cent at catastrophe levels, indicating an extreme lack of food, starvation and exhaustion of coping capacities.⁶⁴ On 22 December, the Security Council demanded that all parties to the conflict allow, facilitate and enable the immediate, safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance and to open all Gaza border crossings,⁶⁵ but no further crossings were opened until March.⁶⁶ Israeli security forces continued to demolish and obstruct access to farmland and the sea, razing 22 per cent of northern Gaza's agricultural land and destroying 70 per cent of Gaza's fishing fleet by mid-January. At that time, United Nations experts warned of genocide, emphasizing that Israel was destroying Gaza's food system and using food as a weapon against the Palestinian people.⁶⁷ Despite mounting evidence to the contrary, the head of Israel's Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories for Gaza stated in January that there was no food shortage in Gaza.⁶⁸

25. Ignoring repeated appeals by the United Nations, warnings by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification initiative and binding Security Council resolutions and International Court of Justice orders, Israel continued to heavily restrict humanitarian access to and within the Gaza Strip, amid indiscriminate bombardment and ground operations. On 26 January, the Court ordered Israel to enable urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance to Gaza. In its second warning in March, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification initiative reported that the entire population of Gaza was now facing high levels of acute food insecurity – with half at catastrophe levels – a 92 per cent increase from the previous analysis.⁶⁹ The Secretary-General noted this as the highest number of people facing catastrophic hunger ever recorded – anywhere.⁷⁰ On 28 March, the Court issued additional measures requiring Israel to ensure “unhindered provision at scale” of humanitarian aid and maintain open land crossing points, Rafah in particular. The Court highlighted the worsening catastrophic living conditions, including prolonged and widespread deprivation of food and the spread of famine and starvation.⁷¹ Meanwhile, Israeli forces postponed, denied or impeded over half of aid missions from January to March and over 85 per cent of food trucks in March.⁷² United Nations experts also reported attacks on civilians seeking humanitarian aid,⁷³ as well as on humanitarian facilities,

⁶³ Ibid., para. 53.

⁶⁴ Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, “Gaza Strip: IPC acute food insecurity – November 2023–February 2024”, 21 December 2023.

⁶⁵ Security Council resolution 2720 (2023); and UN News, “Security Council adopts key resolution on Gaza crisis; Russia, US abstain”, 22 December 2023.

⁶⁶ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Reported impact snapshot: Gaza Strip”, 17 July 2024.

⁶⁷ OHCHR, “Over one hundred days into the war, Israel destroying Gaza's food system and weaponizing food”.

⁶⁸ Charlie Summers, “‘No food shortage in Gaza,’ says IDF official, dismissing UN claims to the contrary”, *The Times of Israel*, 11 January 2024; and https://x.com/i24NEWS_EN/status/1745053043945533675.

⁶⁹ Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, “Gaza Strip: acute food insecurity situation for 15 February–15 March 2024 and projection for 16 March–15 July 2024”, 18 March 2024.

⁷⁰ See <https://x.com/antonioguterres/status/1769827656940278191>.

⁷¹ *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel), Request for the Modification of the Order of 26 January 2024 Indicating Provisional Measures, I.C.J. Reports 2024*.

⁷² United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Humanitarian access: Gaza Strip – end-February”, February 2024; and United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “OCHA OPT: Gaza humanitarian access – 1–31 March 2024”, 1 April 2024.

⁷³ OHCHR, “UN experts condemn ‘flour massacre’, urge Israel to end campaign of starvation in Gaza”, 5 March 2024.

food distribution centres and convoys that had shared coordinates with the army.⁷⁴ By the end of May, 270 aid workers had been killed.⁷⁵ While commercial business imports increased in March and April, this came at the cost of humanitarian shipments.⁷⁶ Although airdrops also increased, these provided minimal supplies compared to land deliveries, and like maritime aid, could not substitute ground-based aid.⁷⁷ In May, Israel launched a deadly offensive in Rafah, including airstrikes on a designated “safe zone”, and has since kept the Rafah crossing closed, which is the main entry point for humanitarian aid. On 24 May, the Court ordered Israel to immediately open the Rafah crossing and halt its military offensive in Rafah.⁷⁸ By June, the entire Strip was classified at emergency levels of food insecurity.⁷⁹

26. In July, humanitarian operations continued to be severely restricted. Local capacity to maintain public order and safety was reportedly weakened by unlawful killings of local police and humanitarian workers.⁸⁰ Combined with ongoing hostilities, administrative hurdles, permit rejections, checkpoint delays, movement restrictions, infrastructure and road network damage,⁸¹ and continued Israeli attacks on humanitarian convoys and premises, despite deconfliction measures, this insecurity created “near-impossible” conditions⁸² for the entry and delivery of daily essentials into Gaza.

27. Meanwhile, the widespread aerial bombardment and ground operations by Israel have destroyed farmland, fisheries and essential infrastructure, including power sources, warehouses, food processing facilities, wells, greenhouses, irrigation systems, markets and bakeries. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), before the conflict, agriculture made up 40 per cent of Gaza’s land and provided about 20–30 per cent of the area’s daily food consumption.⁸³ As of mid-July, almost two thirds of cropland had been damaged, between 60 per cent and 70 per cent of meat and dairy producing livestock killed,⁸⁴ and fuel, fodder and water shortages had brought crucial local food production to a near total halt.⁸⁵ As a result, the latest the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification initiative report warned that the entire Gaza population remained at high risk of famine as long as the

⁷⁴ See [A/HRC/56/26](#).

⁷⁵ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “OCHA OPT: Gaza humanitarian access snapshot 1–31 May 2024”, 10 June 2024.

⁷⁶ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), “Protecting the right to adequate food and saving lives in the Gaza Strip: briefing note on the Occupied Palestinian Territory”, 2024.

⁷⁷ UN News, “Gaza: aid delivery via floating dock welcomed, but land routes ‘more important’”, 17 May 2024; and United Nations Office at Geneva, “Gaza floating dock – OCHA”, 17 May 2024.

⁷⁸ OHCHR, “UN experts outraged by Israeli strikes on civilians sheltering in Rafah camps”, 29 May 2024.

⁷⁹ Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, “Gaza Strip: acute food insecurity situation for 1 May–15 June and projection for 16 June–30 September 2024”, 25 June 2024.

⁸⁰ OHCHR, “Observations from Gaza by head of UN Human Rights office for the Occupied Palestinian Territory Ajith Sunghay”, 19 July 2024.

⁸¹ 65 per cent of the total road network has been destroyed as of 29 May 2024, see <https://unosat.org/products/3883>.

⁸² WFP, “‘The people want this war to end and so do we’ says WFP Deputy Executive Director from northern Gaza”, 14 June 2024.

⁸³ FAO, “FAO sounds alarm over high risk of famine across the whole Gaza Strip amidst humanitarian access constraints”, 26 June 2024.

⁸⁴ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Reported impact snapshot: Gaza Strip”; and United Nations Satellite Centre, UNOSAT Gaza Cropland Analysis database, available at www.arcgis.com/apps/dashboards/0c7cbb663b8a4b578fb055080919f8f7.

⁸⁵ FAO, “FAO sounds alarm over high risk of famine across the whole Gaza Strip”.

conflict persists and humanitarian access remains restricted.⁸⁶ In late June, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification Famine Review Committee urged immediate action, emphasizing that waiting for an official famine classification would be too late.⁸⁷

28. Throughout the reporting period, United Nations entities repeatedly warned of the “devastating and differentiated impact” of food insecurity on children and women, including pregnant and breastfeeding women, resulting in preventable deaths from starvation, including of newborns. They also continuously called for their urgent and special protection as required by international human rights and humanitarian law.⁸⁸

29. In May, the Commission of Inquiry concluded that through its “total siege”, Israel had weaponized the withholding of life-sustaining necessities, including humanitarian assistance, for strategic and political gains, which constituted collective punishment and reprisal against the civilian population, both in direct violation of international humanitarian law. According to the Commission of Inquiry, Israel’s use of starvation as a method of war would affect the entire population of the Gaza Strip for decades to come, with particularly negative consequences for children.⁸⁹ In his applications for arrest warrants, the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court concluded that through its total siege over Gaza, arbitrary restrictions of the transfer of essential supplies, alongside attacks on civilians, obstruction of aid, and attacks on and killing of humanitarian workers, Israel has used criminal means to achieve its military goals and collective punishment as part of a common plan. This included intentionally causing death, starvation, great suffering, and serious injury, using starvation as a method of warfare, and intentionally directing attacks against civilians.⁹⁰

30. In view of the above, including Israel’s non-compliance with the International Court of Justice repeated orders, the Special Committee shares the conclusion that Israel has used starvation as a method of war in Gaza.

31. The Special Committee notes its concerns with the situation in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, where tensions and violence surged after 7 October, through a vicious circle of revoked work permits, movement restrictions, increased settler violence and settlement expansion, demolitions and forced displacement. Food-wise, this caused a significant decline in agricultural production, as farmers were denied access to their lands, and livestock prevented from accessing grazing fields or water supplies. Crops were also stolen and agricultural infrastructure and land, such as olive groves, a crucial income source, were burned or destroyed.⁹¹ Nearly a third of businesses faced closures, over 94 per cent saw a significant drop in

⁸⁶ Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, “Gaza Strip: acute food insecurity situation for 1 May–15 June and projection for 16 June–30 September 2024”, 25 June 2024.

⁸⁷ Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, *Famine Review Committee: Gaza Strip, June 2024 – Conclusions and Recommendations* (2024).

⁸⁸ World Health Organization (WHO), “Women and newborns bearing the brunt of the conflict in Gaza, UN agencies warn”, 3 November 2023; United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), “Scarcity and fear: a gender analysis of the impact of the war in Gaza on vital services essential to women’s and girls’ health, safety, and dignity – water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)”, April 2024; and UN-Women, “Six months into the war on Gaza, over 10,000 women have been killed, among them an estimated 6,000 mothers, leaving 19,000 children orphaned”, 16 April 2024.

⁸⁹ See [A/HRC/56/26](#).

⁹⁰ International Criminal Court, “Statement of ICC Prosecutor Karim A.A. Khan KC”.

⁹¹ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “About 4,000 Palestinians displaced in the West Bank in 2023”, 21 February 2024; and United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Humanitarian situation update No. 192: West Bank”, 17 July 2024.

sales and 32 per cent of jobs were lost.⁹² As a result of these disruptions to the economy and livelihoods, vulnerability to food insecurity in the West Bank increased by an estimated 42 per cent within one month of the conflict's onset.⁹³ The Special Committee reiterates the recent findings by the International Court of Justice, that Israeli impunity for settler attacks and natural resource exploitation in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, violate international law, including Palestinians' right to sovereignty over their resources and Israel's obligation as the occupying power to ensure the adequate food supplies for the local population.⁹⁴

32. The Special Committee is also particularly concerned that the above environmental destruction and degradation severely compromises Palestinians' right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, thereby impeding their ability to produce clean, healthy and sustainable food, in both the present and in the future.⁹⁵

Right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment

33. The right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment comprises the following key elements: clean air; a safe and stable climate; access to safe water and adequate sanitation; healthy and sustainably produced food; non-toxic environments in which to live, work, study and play; healthy biodiversity and ecosystems; access to information; the right to participate in decision-making; and access to justice and effective remedies.⁹⁶ Before 7 October, there were already substantial violations of this right in Gaza owing to the blockade and occupation by Israel and decades of conflict, which have resulted in significant environmental governance constraints and environmental degradation.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, some progress in environmental management had been achieved, but after 7 October, the extensive and indiscriminate bombing campaign by Israel, coupled with the ongoing blockade, has decimated critical water, energy and agricultural infrastructure, as well as environmental management systems.⁹⁸ This has led to the collapse of water and sanitation services, risking "irreversible damage" to natural ecosystems and causing dire health impacts for Gazans.⁹⁹

34. By 10 December, the Israel Defense Forces reported conducting over 300 strikes daily, and by February 2024 they had used over 25,000 tonnes of explosives across

⁹² WFP, *State of Palestine: Annual Country Report 2023 – Country Strategic Plan 2023–2028* (2023); Food Security Information Network and Global Network against Food Crises, *Global Report on Food Crises 2024* (Rome, 2024), p. 134 (see Palestine: Gaza Strip); and United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "About 4,000 Palestinians displaced in the West Bank in 2023".

⁹³ Security Council Report, "Briefing on food security risks in Gaza", 27 February 2024; WFP, "Gaza market monitoring flash update: WFP Palestine", 10 October 2023; and FAO and WFP, *Monitoring Food Security in Palestine and the Sudan: A Joint FAO/WFP Update for the Members of the United Nations Security Council, February 2024*, Issue No. 13, Special ed. (Rome, 2024).

⁹⁴ *Legal Consequences Arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, Advisory Opinion of 19 July 2024*, paras. 124–133 and 148–154.

⁹⁵ United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), document [UNEP/EA.6/Res.12](#).

⁹⁶ David R. Boyd, *The Right to a Healthy Environment: A User's Guide* (OHCHR, 2024).

⁹⁷ United Nations, "Gaza 'unliveable', UN Special Rapporteur for the situation of human rights in the OPT tells Third Committee", GA/SHC/4242, 24 October 2018; and UNEP, *Environmental Assessment of the Gaza Strip following the Escalation of Hostilities in December 2008–January 2009* (Nairobi, 2009).

⁹⁸ UNEP, "Damage to Gaza causing new risks to human health and long-term recovery – new UNEP assessment", 18 June 2024.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, and United Nations, "Gaza polio outbreak fears: UN health agency 'extremely worried' at likely impact – WHO press briefing", 23 July 2024.

the Gaza Strip, equivalent to two nuclear bombs.¹⁰⁰ By 31 January 2024, over 70 per cent of civilian infrastructure in Gaza had been destroyed or heavily damaged.¹⁰¹ By May, the conflict had produced an estimated 39 million tonnes of debris – 13 times the total debris from all other conflicts in Gaza since 2008. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) noted that that type of debris (including from infrastructure, unexploded ordnance, munitions, white phosphorous, industrial and medical waste, and human remains)¹⁰² releases extremely high levels of carcinogenic asbestos and other hazardous substances. Those contaminants degrade air, soil and water quality, causing severe respiratory issues, and increases the risk of cancer. UNEP further documented the risk of lead leaking from destroyed solar panels into the soil and water, as well as fuel leaks from destroyed petrol facilities, adding to toxic pollution and health risks.¹⁰³ The Special Committee is deeply concerned by the immediate as well as the lasting and widespread impact of this contamination. Recent estimates project that it would take approximately 45 years to recycle just half of the debris produced, also affecting the rights of future generations.¹⁰⁴

35. The unprecedented scale of destruction has dramatically affected water, sanitation, and hygiene systems, leading to widespread contamination of soil, beaches, coastal waters and freshwater sources, with immediate and long-term risks to public health, marine life, arable land and access to clean water. Prior to the conflict, Gaza relied on potable water from three water pipelines from Israel, three seawater desalination plants, and trucked water.¹⁰⁵ Between 8 and 15 October 2023, Israel completely shut off all three water pipelines into Gaza, stopping almost three-quarters of Gaza's supply of potable water.¹⁰⁶ On 11 October, Israel cut off all electricity and fuel which rendered all three desalination plants non-operational within three days.¹⁰⁷ Despite UNRWA warning on 14 October that clean water was running out,¹⁰⁸ the World Health Organization (WHO) alerting of a surge in infectious disease outbreaks due to lack of water, sanitation, and hygiene systems, and repeated calls from United Nations experts¹⁰⁹ for water and fuel supplies, Israel only re-activated one of the three water pipelines on 15 October for a few hours per day,¹¹⁰ and the second on 29 October.¹¹¹ Between 21 October and 1 November, only 26 trucks transporting water and sanitation supplies entered Gaza.¹¹² By 31 October, water consumption had decreased by 92 per cent compared to pre-conflict levels, most sewage pumping was non-operational,¹¹³ and waste disposal began shutting down due

¹⁰⁰ Reported by Mines Advisory Group, as cited in UNEP, *Environmental Impact of the Conflict in Gaza: Preliminary Assessment of Environmental Impacts* (Nairobi, 2024), p. 38.

¹⁰¹ United Nations, "International community must not waver in its commitment to two-State solution, Secretary-General tells Palestinian Rights Committee", SG/SM/22122, 31 January 2024.

¹⁰² UNEP, "Damage to Gaza causing new risks to human health and long-term recovery".

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., and UN-Women, "Scarcity and fear".

¹⁰⁶ A/HRC/55/28, para. 22.

¹⁰⁷ A/HRC/56/26, para. 51.

¹⁰⁸ UNRWA, "A matter of life and death: water runs out for 2 million people in Gaza", 14 October 2023.

¹⁰⁹ OHCHR, "Gaza is 'running out of time' UN experts warn, demanding a ceasefire to prevent genocide", 2 November 2023; OHCHR, "Gaza: UN experts call on international community to prevent genocide against the Palestinian people"; and United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel: flash update No. 33", 8 November 2023.

¹¹⁰ UNRWA, "UNRWA situation report No. 7 on the Gaza Strip and the West Bank", 17 October 2023.

¹¹¹ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel: flash update No. 23", 29 October 2023.

¹¹² Norwegian Refugee Council, "Palestine: not enough water to survive", 3 November 2023.

¹¹³ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel: reported impact", 31 October 2023.

to fuel and movement restrictions.¹¹⁴ At that point, 1,200 tonnes of rubbish were accumulating daily around camps and shelters and by mid-November, 70 per cent of Gazans were drinking contaminated water. The Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation urged Israel to stop using water as a weapon of war.¹¹⁵ By the end of 2023, the bombardment by Israel of vital water and sanitation facilities, combined with its restrictions to power supplies, nearly destroyed all access to these essential services.¹¹⁶

36. With access to clean water being a matter of life and death, WHO and UNICEF warned of a toxic mix of disease, hunger, and lack of hygiene and sanitation in Gaza.¹¹⁷ By January, 57 per cent of Gaza's water infrastructure was destroyed or damaged and five wastewater treatment plants were shutdown.¹¹⁸ By March, 81 per cent of Gaza households lacked access to safe and clean water.¹¹⁹ Following international pressure, Israel reopened the last water pipeline in April.¹²⁰ By 24 July, all three pipelines were only partially operational, two out of the three water desalination plants intermittently operational, and around 340,000 tons of solid waste had accumulated across the Strip.¹²¹ As UNICEF had warned earlier, the desperate lack of water; faecal matter strewn across densely packed settlements; unacceptable lack of latrines; and severe constraints on handwashing, personal hygiene and cleaning created a perfect storm for tragedy.¹²² Communicable diseases surged, with WHO recording over 1.8 million cases of acute respiratory infections, hepatitis A outbreaks, and other preventable diseases, including confirmed polio circulation.¹²³

37. As documented earlier in this report, as well as by UNEP, WFP and FAO, food security has also been severely impacted by marine and agricultural contamination in Gaza. Owing to destroyed wastewater infrastructure and resulting sewage pollution, UNEP warned that marine pollution and restrictions to Gaza's fishing zone are likely to have reduced both the quantity and food safety levels of fish. In addition, the destruction, soil contamination and presence of explosives are likely to have decreased soil fertility and increased the risk of desertification, severely damaging agricultural production and food systems.

38. The Special Committee is also concerned about the impact of Israel's policies and practices on Palestinians' right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. During the reporting period, OCHA reported that Israeli authorities demolished approximately 1,336 Palestinian-

¹¹⁴ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel: flash update No. 39", 14 November 2023.

¹¹⁵ OHCHR, "Israel must stop using water as a weapon of war: UN expert", 17 November 2023.

¹¹⁶ OHCHR, "Occupied Palestinian territory and Israel: UN experts call for permanent ceasefire to protect rights and futures of women and girls", 14 December 2023.

¹¹⁷ UNICEF, "'Barely a drop to drink': children in the Gaza Strip do not access 90 per cent of their normal water use", 20 December 2023; <https://x.com/DrTedros/status/1737549701728092481>; and WHO, "Lethal combination of hunger and disease to lead to more deaths in Gaza", 21 December 2023.

¹¹⁸ World Bank, European Union and United Nations, "Gaza Strip interim damage assessment: summary note", 29 March 2024.

¹¹⁹ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel: flash update No. 133", 6 March 2024.

¹²⁰ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Statement by the Humanitarian Coordinator for the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Mr. Jamie McGoldrick", 6 April 2024.

¹²¹ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Reported impact snapshot: Gaza Strip", 24 July 2024.

¹²² UNICEF, "Gaza: water shortages spark disease alarm", 22 November 2023.

¹²³ WHO, "Variant type 2 poliovirus isolated from sewage samples in Gaza", 21 July 2024; and WHO, "OPT emergency situation update No. 38: 7 October–29 July 2024", 29 July 2024.

owned structures, displacing roughly 3,016 Palestinians.¹²⁴ Aside from the likely environmental degradation from this destruction, the International Court of Justice recently highlighted that the expansion of settlements and of industrial zones has contributed to the pollution of freshwater and groundwater. In addition, dwindling supplies of water and associated environmental degradation have severely undermined the Palestinian agricultural sector.¹²⁵ The Special Committee is alarmed that ongoing demolitions, settlement expansion and diversion of natural resources to Israel's own population, including settlers, will likely continue to degrade the environment in the occupied territory and severely restrict access to food and clean water, violating Israel's obligations under international humanitarian law.¹²⁶ Furthermore, governance restrictions imposed by Israel on the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, hinder environmental management, worsening these environmental harms. The Special Committee is alarmed that the discriminatory measures prevent Palestinians from exercising their human rights on an "equal footing".¹²⁷ It reiterates its deep concern¹²⁸ that Israel's discriminatory legislation and measures impose and serve to maintain a near-complete separation of Palestinians from Israeli settlers, which breach article 3 on racial segregation and apartheid under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, as recently confirmed by the International Court of Justice.¹²⁹

39. In view of the information presented above, the Special Committee is deeply concerned that Palestinians' right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment has been violated owing to the destruction, pollution and blockade, preventing Palestinians from enjoying a non-toxic environment, clean air, safe and sufficient water, healthy and sustainably produced food, and healthy ecosystems and biodiversity. Furthermore, the Special Committee is concerned that Palestinians' right to permanent sovereignty has been violated due to Israel's exploitation of natural resources in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, as found by the International Court of Justice.¹³⁰ The Special Committee also recalls the lasting and cross-border impacts of environmental damage already documented before the current escalation, alongside United Nations reports on conflict-related pollution from Israeli operations in 2008 and 2014.¹³¹ It also notes that the United Nations issued continuous warnings on the unprecedented scale, intensity and impact of the current conflict, and that the General Assembly asked Israel to cease the exploitation, damage, cause of loss or depletion and endangerment of the natural resources in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.¹³² As a result, the Special Committee considers Israeli authorities to have been aware of the war's impact on Palestinians' right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. The Special Committee is further deeply troubled that Israeli authorities did not use all means at their disposal to avoid activities under their jurisdiction from causing significant environmental harm, but rather weakened environmental protection, and failed to take special measures to

¹²⁴ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, West Bank Demolition and Displacement database, available at www.ochaopt.org/data/demolition.

¹²⁵ *Legal Consequences Arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, Advisory Opinion of 19 July 2024*, para. 130.

¹²⁶ A/77/10, chap. V, sect. E (text of the draft principles on protection of the environment in relation to armed conflict, principles 9–11 and 13).

¹²⁷ International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, art. 1.

¹²⁸ United Nations, "End-of-mission statement of the UN Special Committee to investigate Israeli practices", 25 June 2024.

¹²⁹ *Legal Consequences Arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, Advisory Opinion of 19 July 2024*, paras. 225–229.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 201.

¹³¹ World Bank, *West Bank and Gaza: World Bank Group Country Climate and Development Report* (Washington, D.C., 2023).

¹³² General Assembly resolution 78/170, para. 2.

avoid exacerbating environmental harms on marginalized groups, including women, children and refugees.

Impact on Palestinian women

40. Since 7 October, United Nations entities¹³³ and experts have consistently warned that women, children and newborns have disproportionately borne the brunt of the war in Gaza as victims of military operations, severely diminished access to healthcare, and food shortages. As experts have highlighted, the assault on Palestinian women's dignity and rights has escalated to new and terrifying dimensions.¹³⁴

41. During the reporting period, a large majority of recorded deaths were women and children, with up to two mothers killed per hour.¹³⁵ Israel's widespread bombardment, including on health facilities,¹³⁶ prolonged border closures, extended cuts to Gazans' main source of clean water, and restrictions on essential items and humanitarian aid¹³⁷ have also critically impacted women and girls' access to essential health services. Pregnant women, in particular, have been prevented from obtaining necessary nutrition, care and emergency obstetric services. With an estimated 180 women giving birth every day in Gaza,¹³⁸ many face childbirth under horrific and unsanitary conditions, increasing medical complications and maternal deaths. The war's psychological impact has also caused a rise in stress-induced miscarriages, stillbirths, and premature births.¹³⁹ In addition, pre-existing malnutrition among pregnant women significantly worsened due to catastrophic levels of food insecurity, heightening the risks of disease and death.

42. On 20 November, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences warned of Israel's relentless and grave assault on the reproductive rights, physical integrity and dignity of Palestinian women and their children and newborns, noting that it could constitute genocidal measures intended to prevent births within a group.¹⁴⁰ Throughout the reporting period, Israel conducted extensive attacks on healthcare facilities and ambulances, with 200 documented by 30 October, 318 by 18 January, 410 by 12 March and 500 by 30 July.¹⁴¹ By February 2024, less than a third of Gaza's hospitals were partially operational, with caesarean sections and amputations on children being performed without anaesthesia.¹⁴² In May, United Nations experts again highlighted the appalling treatment and dreadful conditions of pregnant and lactating women, noting that bombings of hospitals, deliberate denial of healthcare access by Israeli snipers, and shortages of beds and medical supplies, put around 50,000 pregnant women and 20,000 newborn babies at unimaginable risk. Miscarriages also increased by 300 per cent, and nearly all

¹³³ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), "Women and newborns bearing the brunt of the conflict in Gaza, UN agencies warn", 3 November 2023.

¹³⁴ OHCHR, "Women bearing the brunt of Israel-Gaza conflict: UN expert", 20 November 2023.

¹³⁵ UN-Women, "Press release: two mothers are killed in Gaza every hour as fighting exceeds 100 days", 19 January 2024.

¹³⁶ WHO, "Impact of attacks on health care in the Gaza Strip: 7 October 2023 until 30 July 2024", 2024.

¹³⁷ International Criminal Court, "Statement of ICC Prosecutor Karim A.A. Khan KC".

¹³⁸ UNFPA, "Crisis in Palestine: UNFPA Palestine situation report No. 3", 13 November 2023.

¹³⁹ United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), "Women and newborns bearing the brunt of the conflict".

¹⁴⁰ OHCHR, "Women bearing the brunt of Israel-Gaza conflict".

¹⁴¹ See WHO infographics on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, available at www.emro.who.int/opt/information-resources/infographics.html.

¹⁴² OHCHR, "Gaza: UN experts call for prioritization of gender-responsive humanitarian interventions", 21 February 2024.

pregnant and breastfeeding women faced severe food poverty.¹⁴³ By July 2024, the healthcare sector was beyond crisis levels and doctors reported alarming trends of rising cases of pre-term and low-birth weight babies and developmental delays in children, common signs of severe malnourishment in pregnant women, worsened by stress, fear and exhaustion.¹⁴⁴

43. During the reporting period, Israeli military and security forces also subjected hundreds of Palestinian women and girls to sexual and gender-based violence, according to numerous reports and/or allegations received by the Special Committee and other United Nations entities and experts, including OHCHR,¹⁴⁵ United Nations experts¹⁴⁶ and the Commission of Inquiry.¹⁴⁷ The reports included cases of being targeted, arbitrarily detained and subjected to forced nudity; inappropriate touching; sexual violence, including rape; sexualized torture; threats of rape; psychological violence; and online sexual harassment, including through the posting of degrading photos on social media platforms. The Commission of Inquiry stressed that cultural sensitivities related to privacy and the significance of the veil worsened the impact of the gender-based crimes, leading to severe and long-term social repercussions for victims due to the pervasive and lasting presence of online content. It further concluded that Israeli military personnel either ordered or condoned the abuses, which were intended to humiliate and degrade the victims and the Palestinian community, reinforcing gender stereotypes and contributing to broader violence and ill-treatment of Palestinians.¹⁴⁸

44. United Nations experts have also documented credible allegations of deliberate targeting and extrajudicial executions of women and children in places of refuge or while fleeing. In February, alarms were also raised about the enforced disappearance of Palestinian women and children by the Israeli military, including children separated from their parents and at least one female infant forcibly transferred to Israel.¹⁴⁹ On 6 May, several experts warned again of the continued and systematic onslaught of violence, noting that most victims had been women and children. They reported new findings of mass graves at hospitals, including women and children showing signs of torture and summary executions.¹⁵⁰ The experts also highlighted the destruction by Israel of the largest fertility clinic in Gaza, which reportedly stored 3,000 embryos.

45. In the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, UNFPA, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and United Nations experts repeatedly warned that since 7 October, women and girls have experienced intense fear and insecurity¹⁵¹ owing to Israel's lethal open-fire policy¹⁵² and increased discrimination, harassment, sexual assault and attacks by Israeli authorities and settlers.¹⁵³ Movement restrictions, closures and attacks on healthcare, also obstructed mobile clinics, health facilities, ambulance services and humanitarian

¹⁴³ OHCHR, "Onslaught of violence against women and children in Gaza unacceptable: UN experts", 6 May 2024.

¹⁴⁴ UNFPA, "Crisis in Palestine: UNFPA Palestine situation report No. 9", 3 July 2024.

¹⁴⁵ OHCHR, "Detention in the context of the escalation of hostilities in Gaza", 31 July 2024.

¹⁴⁶ OHCHR, "Israel/oPt: UN experts appalled by reported human rights violations against Palestinian women and girls", 19 February 2024.

¹⁴⁷ [A/HRC/56/26](#), paras. 65–69.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, para. 103.

¹⁴⁹ OHCHR, "Israel/oPt: UN experts appalled by reported human rights violations".

¹⁵⁰ OHCHR, "Onslaught of violence against women and children in Gaza unacceptable".

¹⁵¹ United Nations, "Reasonable grounds to believe conflict-related sexual violence occurred in Israel during 7 October attacks, senior UN official tells Security Council", SC/15621, 11 March 2024.

¹⁵² UNFPA, "Crisis in Palestine: UNFPA Palestine situation report No. 8", 22 May 2024.

¹⁵³ OHCHR, "Occupied Palestinian territory and Israel".

aid delivery,¹⁵⁴ severely limiting women and girls' access to essential services and increasing the risk of gender-based violence.¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, women in remote areas had little to no access to essential healthcare services, with pregnant women facing a higher risk of giving birth at home or at checkpoints.¹⁵⁶ The visit by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General also revealed allegations of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment and sexual violence by Israeli security forces during detention (see para. 49 below) and reports of sexual harassment and rape threats during house raids and at checkpoints.¹⁵⁷

46. The Special Committee is deeply concerned that Israel has not provided the special protection to women and children required by international humanitarian and human rights law. Furthermore, the Special Committee is deeply concerned that the systematic targeting of women and children¹⁵⁸ and measures imposed are effectively preventing births among Palestinian women in Gaza; causing serious bodily and mental harm to Palestinian women and children; and inflicting conditions of life inimical to bring about their physical destruction.

Places of detention, including the use of torture, cruel or inhuman or degrading treatment, including sexual and gender-based violence

47. From the beginning of the war on Gaza, and throughout the reporting period, there have been consistent reports across the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel of alleged acts of torture and other systematic cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment¹⁵⁹ – including sexual and gender-based violence – by Israeli forces and in Israeli places of detention. This includes information received by the Special Committee during its meetings in Geneva and Amman, consistent with the United Nations reports and reports from other entities.

48. On 12 December, WHO condemned the unacceptable and unconscionable arrests, incommunicado detention, and alleged ill-treatment of healthcare workers, citing several cases involving staff of the Palestine Red Crescent Society and the Ministry of Health.¹⁶⁰ In the following weeks, OHCHR expressed concern over reports of mass detentions, ill-treatment and enforced disappearance of possibly thousands of Palestinians from the North of Gaza.¹⁶¹ According to information received, detainees were subjected to serious ill-treatment, including being stripped to their underwear, blindfolded, tightly handcuffed, filmed or photographed in deliberately humiliating positions, with no access to their families, lawyers or effective judicial protection.

49. During her visit to the occupied West Bank,¹⁶² the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict was also informed of alleged cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment, including increased instances of sexual violence

¹⁵⁴ UNFPA, “Crisis in Palestine: UNFPA Palestine situation report No. 1”, 13 October 2023.

¹⁵⁵ UNFPA, “Crisis in Palestine: UNFPA Palestine situation report No. 9”.

¹⁵⁶ UNFPA, “Crisis in Palestine: UNFPA Palestine situation report No. 4”, 11 December 2023.

¹⁵⁷ Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, “Mission report: official visit of the Office of the SRSR-SVC to Israel and the occupied West Bank – 29 January–14 February 2024”, 4 March 2024, paras. 79–83.

¹⁵⁸ United Nations, “End-of-mission statement of the UN Special Committee to investigate Israeli practices”.

¹⁵⁹ OHCHR, “UN Special Committee on Israeli practices in occupied territories concludes field mission”.

¹⁶⁰ WHO, “WHO calls for protection of humanitarian space in Gaza following serious incidents in high-risk mission to transfer patients, deliver health supplies”, 12 December 2023.

¹⁶¹ OHCHR, “Disturbing reports from the north of Gaza of mass detentions, ill-treatment and enforced disappearances of possibly thousands of Palestinians”, 16 December 2023; and OHCHR, “Gaza: report from the ground”, 19 January 2024.

¹⁶² The mission’s scope did not extend to verification.

during detention, against both men and women.¹⁶³ These included prolonged forced nudity of detainees; invasive body searches, including unwanted touching of intimate areas; beatings, including in the genital areas; women being forced to unveil and/or threatened with rape. In addition, there were reports of soldiers and investigators circulating photos of detained women on their phones, reports of women being deprived of menstruation products, and reports of detainees being threatened with rape if they reported their detention conditions once released.

50. In April, a UNRWA summary report documented testimonies from Palestinian detainees released by Israel into Gaza through the Kerem Shalom crossing, and information from other sources. The conditions and treatment described included constant exposure of detainees to bright lights; cold air from fans despite the cold weather; insults and humiliations, such as being forced to act like animals or being urinated on; and being made to sit on their knees for 12 to 16 hours a day. Detainees also reported the use of loud music and noise; deprivation of water, food, sleep and toilets; denial of the right to pray; and the prolonged use of tightly locked handcuffs, causing friction injuries and open wounds. The report further included accounts of sexual violence and harassment, including beatings on genitals and psychological abuse. In addition, “both men and women reported being made to strip naked in front of male soldiers during searches and being photographed and filmed while naked”.¹⁶⁴

51. In a July report covering the period from October 2023 to June 2024,¹⁶⁵ OHCHR examined the arbitrary, prolonged and incommunicado detention by Israeli authorities of Palestinians from Gaza and the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The report raised serious concerns about the arbitrary and punitive nature of these arrests and detentions, noting that thousands were detained without charge or trial under deliberately harshened conditions¹⁶⁶ and subjected to various forms of torture and ill-treatment. This included reports of confinement in cage-like facilities, prolonged nakedness, forced diaper use, stress positions, electrocution of the genitals and anus, sexual slurs, threats of rape and anal rape with an object by Israeli security personnel.¹⁶⁷ During the reporting period, throughout which Israel suspended the access by the International Committee of the Red Cross to Palestinian detainees, at least 53 Palestinian detainees died in Israeli custody.

52. The Special Committee is further alarmed that elected Israeli officials supported protests in favour of soldiers detained in late July over their suspected involvement in the brutal rape of a Palestinian detainee at Sde Teiman military facility.¹⁶⁸ The Special Committee is appalled by this support and the allegations and reports mentioned above; and calls for effective and independent investigations, accountability for the perpetrators and justice for the victims.

Rights of children and future generations

53. The Special Committee is also deeply concerned about the long-term effects of the 7 October attacks, the ongoing war on Gaza, and Israel’s “forever occupation” on children and future generations.¹⁶⁹ These conditions have created an “unchildling environment”, stripping children “of the normalcy, lightness and innocence of

¹⁶³ Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, “Mission report: official visit of the Office of the SRSG-SVC”, paras. 79–83.

¹⁶⁴ UNRWA, “Detention and alleged ill-treatment of detainees from Gaza during Israel-Hamas war”, 2024.

¹⁶⁵ OHCHR, “Detention in the context of the escalation of hostilities in Gaza”.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, para. 33.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, para. 41.

¹⁶⁸ Emanuel Fabian, “IDF court extends arrest of 8 soldiers accused of abusing Palestinian detainee”, *The Times of Israel*, 31 July 2024.

¹⁶⁹ Maastricht Principles on The Human Rights of Future Generations (2023).

childhood”, and creating significant intergenerational trauma.¹⁷⁰ This concern is heightened by a WHO review, in 2022, of nearly 130 studies across 39 countries, which found that one in five persons affected by war or conflict in the previous 10 years suffered from depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, bipolar disorder or schizophrenia.¹⁷¹

54. Before the war, Gaza – home to 2.3 million residents,¹⁷² half of whom were children – already had over 800,000 children in need of mental health and psychosocial support.¹⁷³ Since the war began, Gaza has become a “graveyard for thousands of children”,¹⁷⁴ with at least 70 children injured daily.¹⁷⁵ In just the first 10 weeks of the escalation, over 1,000 children lost one or both legs,¹⁷⁶ with new injuries and amputations rising daily. The Special Committee is deeply concerned about these devastating impacts on children, noting that “armed conflict harms children first and foremost and has lifelong effects on their physical and mental health, their development and ultimately the enjoyment of all their rights”.¹⁷⁷ As the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child further highlighted, while some children in Gaza have lost their lives, their limbs, their parents, siblings and friends, all children have lost their childhood. They are traumatized and will forever live with a permanent impact on their mental health.¹⁷⁸ During its visit to Jordan, the Special Committee heard first-hand accounts from children about these impacts as well as their frustration with the international community’s failure to prevent such atrocities and the lack of accountability. As noted by the International Court of Justice, the conflict’s repercussions will also have a cumulative, multi-layered and intergenerational impact on the Palestinian society, economy and environment owing to the deterioration of living conditions, forced displacement, “de-development”, entrenchment of the Palestinian economy’s asymmetric dependence on Israel, and exacerbation of Palestinian institutional dependence on foreign aid.¹⁷⁹

55. Aside from trauma and “grievous harm”,¹⁸⁰ malnutrition among children and pregnant and lactating women also poses a grave threat to their health and the health of newborns and future generations, all the more so as they face appalling treatment conditions.¹⁸¹ Tragically, at least 31 people, including 28 children, were believed to have starved to death in Gaza in early April¹⁸² with another three children dying in May and June.¹⁸³ The catastrophic level of hunger that has prevailed for months will have a lifetime impact on survivors. “Malnutrition makes people more vulnerable to getting severely ill, experiencing slow recovery, or dying when they are infected with

¹⁷⁰ See [A/78/545](#).

¹⁷¹ WHO, “Shock, grief and the challenge of healing: Israel’s health system responds to the October attacks”, 23 October 2023.

¹⁷² OHCHR, “Gaza is a massive human rights crisis and a humanitarian disaster”, 30 January 2024.

¹⁷³ Catherine Russell, “Gaza and Israel: the cost of war will be counted in children’s lives”, *The Atlantic*, 26 October 2023.

¹⁷⁴ UNICEF, “Gaza has become a graveyard for thousands of children”, 31 October 2023.

¹⁷⁵ UNICEF, “Children disproportionately wearing the scars of the war in Gaza – Geneva Palais briefing note”, 16 April 2024.

¹⁷⁶ United Nations, “‘Ten weeks of hell’ for children in Gaza: UNICEF”, 20 December 2023.

¹⁷⁷ OHCHR, “UN Child Rights Committee condemns killing of children in Gaza Strip”, 1 November 2023.

¹⁷⁸ OHCHR, “Child Rights Committee statement on children in Gaza”, 8 February 2024.

¹⁷⁹ *Legal Consequences Arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, Advisory Opinion of 19 July 2024*, para. 242.

¹⁸⁰ OHCHR, “Gaza: When mothers have to bury at least 7,700 children, very basic principles are challenged, UN women’s rights committee says”, 16 February 2024.

¹⁸¹ OHCHR, “Onslaught of violence against women and children in Gaza unacceptable”.

¹⁸² United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “OCHA tells Security Council the six-month devastating war in Gaza must end”, 5 April 2024.

¹⁸³ OHCHR, “UN experts declare famine has spread throughout Gaza strip”, 9 July 2024.

a disease. The long-term effects of malnutrition, low consumption of nutrient-rich foods, repeated infections, and lack of hygiene and sanitation services slow children’s overall growth. This compromises the health and well-being of an entire future generation.”¹⁸⁴ Furthermore, the long-term consequences of environmental degradation mentioned above will further hinder recovery and exacerbate the challenges children and future generations face and will face in realising their rights to food; a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment; health; and other crucial rights for decades to come.

56. The Special Committee welcomes the recent report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (A/78/842-S/2024/384), which for the first-time lists Israel’s armed and security forces as engaging in grave violations against children, namely the killing and maiming of children and attacks on schools and hospitals.¹⁸⁵

57. The Special Committee also notes with concern the impact of the war on Israelis, who are still grappling with the trauma of survivors and the “collective psychological burden” brought on by the hostage crisis.¹⁸⁶ In particular, the Special Committee is deeply worried about the psychological impact on young Israeli soldiers who are carrying out military orders and will have to live with the consequences of their actions long after the current conflict ends.¹⁸⁷

VII. United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

58. Given the “backbone” role of UNRWA¹⁸⁸ in providing desperately needed humanitarian aid in Gaza, the Special Committee is deeply troubled by the unprecedented attacks against UNRWA throughout the reporting period. During its field visit to an UNRWA refugee camp in Jordan, the Special Committee met with UNRWA staff, educators and medical personnel, as well as refugees, children and Gazan families. These meetings along with others in Geneva and New York underscored the indispensable role played by UNRWA in the protection of Palestinian refugees and the impact of the conflict on its operations.

59. In January, after Israeli authorities alleged that several UNRWA staff were involved in the 7 October attacks, UNRWA immediately terminated the contracts of the staff members allegedly involved in the attacks and the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) launched an investigation into 12 cases, later expanding to 19.¹⁸⁹ As at 31 July, the investigation was ongoing. While fully acknowledging the gravity of the allegations, the Special Committee notes that UNRWA employs over 30,000 staff across the region, including 13,000 in Gaza.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁴ United Nations, “Famine in Gaza is imminent, with immediate and long-term health consequences – WHO”, 18 March 2024.

¹⁸⁵ A/78/842-S/2024/384, paras. 94–117 and annex 1.

¹⁸⁶ UN News, “Israel-Palestine: blockade puts Gaza aid on the line, WHO spotlights soaring mental health needs in Israel”, October 2023.

¹⁸⁷ United Nations, “End-of-mission statement of the UN Special Committee to investigate Israeli practices”.

¹⁸⁸ United Nations Office at Geneva, “‘Insidious campaign’ by Israel is denying lifesaving aid to Gaza says UNRWA chief”, 17 April 2024.

¹⁸⁹ Philippe Lazzarini, “Serious allegations against UNRWA staff in the Gaza Strip”, UNRWA, 26 January 2024; and UN News, “UN updates on probe into allegations of staff collusion during 7 October attacks”, April 2024.

¹⁹⁰ UNRWA, “UNRWA: claims versus facts”, May 2024.

60. Days after the allegations, the Secretary-General also commissioned an independent review.¹⁹¹ In April, the review found that UNRWA rules, mechanisms and procedures for upholding neutrality were the “most elaborate” in the United Nations system. The review nonetheless recommended additional measures across critical areas.¹⁹² UNRWA has since developed a time-bound, budgeted action plan to ensure that those recommendations are effectively implemented.

61. In response to the allegations, 16 countries – including two major donors – suspended or paused contributions to UNRWA, while others imposed conditions that severely jeopardized UNRWA’s “lifeline” role in humanitarian operations.¹⁹³ The Special Committee appreciates the countries that maintained or increased their support and notes that by end of July, most countries had resumed funding to UNRWA, although its financial stability remained precarious.

62. Military operations by Israel in Gaza have also severely impacted UNRWA premises and the people inside them, with 458 incidents reported from October to mid-July. Among these, at least 74 involved military use and/or interference at UNRWA premises, while 189 UNRWA installations had been damaged.¹⁹⁴ In addition, as at 31 July, UNRWA had lost 202 staff members in Gaza,¹⁹⁵ the highest number of United Nations staff casualties in any recent conflict.

63. In East Jerusalem, UNRWA was also forced to temporarily close its headquarters in May after Israeli residents set it on fire, following weeks of protests against the Agency. A crowd, accompanied by armed men, was witnessed outside the compound chanting “burn down the United Nations”. The Commissioner-General of UNRWA highlighted this “outrageous development” as one of several incidents, noting that on various occasions Israeli extremists had threatened staff with guns.¹⁹⁶

64. Amid the escalating attacks, the Special Committee also noted disinformation campaigns and widespread personal attacks and vilification – including from Israeli officials – targeting not only UNRWA, but also independent United Nations human rights experts.¹⁹⁷ In the Knesset, repeated calls and steps have been taken to designate UNRWA as a “terrorist organization”.¹⁹⁸ The Special Committee is gravely concerned that such deliberate misrepresentation and vilification not only incites violence but also undermines the credibility and work of the United Nations and its human rights ecosystem as a whole.

65. The Special Committee condemns the ongoing smear campaign directed at UNRWA and the United Nations at large and the destruction of UNRWA premises, as well as the killing of its staff and of all humanitarian workers. It reiterates its condolences to the families and colleagues of the deceased.

¹⁹¹ United Nations, “Allegations against UNRWA staff”, April 2024; www.un.org/unispal/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/unrwa_independent_review_on_neutrality.pdf.

¹⁹² UN News, “UN completes investigation on UNRWA staff”, August 2024.

¹⁹³ UNRWA, “The independent review on UNRWA adherence to the humanitarian principle of neutrality from Philippe Lazzarini, UNRWA Commissioner General”, 22 April 2024.

¹⁹⁴ UNRWA, “UNRWA situation and response to the escalation in the Gaza Strip”, 16 July 2024.

¹⁹⁵ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Reported impact snapshot: Gaza Strip”, 31 July 2024.

¹⁹⁶ UN News, “‘Outrageous’ arson attack forces UNRWA to temporarily shutter East Jerusalem compound”, May 2024.

¹⁹⁷ OHCHR, “Attacks against UN human rights experts must cease: Coordination Committee of Special Procedures”, 16 May 2024.

¹⁹⁸ UNRWA, “UNRWA: stop Israel’s violent campaign against us”, 30 June 2024.

VIII. Human rights situation in the occupied Syrian Golan

66. Settlement expansion in the occupied Syrian Golan persisted with the support of the Government of Israel, contravening the obligations of Israel under international humanitarian law and international human rights law. This expansion included an increase in both the number of Israeli settlements and the Israeli settler population, along with the advancement of commercial activities, such as the development of a wind farm.¹⁹⁹ These efforts are part of Israel's plan to double the settler population in the occupied Syrian Golan by 2027.²⁰⁰ Currently, Israeli settlers in the occupied Syrian Golan are spread across 35 different settlements.²⁰¹

67. On 20 June 2023, Israel commenced a wind turbine project near Majdal Shams and Masada in the occupied Syrian Golan. The Israeli company Energix carried out the work under Israeli police protection, leading to clashes between Syrian protesters and police that left three protesters and three officers with minor injuries.²⁰² Although construction was paused during the reporting period, Israeli media reported its resumption in August 2023.²⁰³ The project is being built on a significant portion of agricultural land belonging to Syrians from various surrounding villages, who depend on this land for their livelihood; the project is also creating environmental risks.²⁰⁴

68. The Special Committee notes that farmers' livelihoods, in particular, may be threatened as they could lose their ability to cultivate the land. In addition, the project could limit the Syrian population's access to land and water,²⁰⁵ restrict village expansion, and force residents into densely populated areas.²⁰⁶ This could affect a wide range of human rights, including the rights to adequate food, work, health, housing and a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. Moreover, it could result in further displacement of the Syrian population from areas to which they have traditionally been tied, facilitating the annexation of the occupied territory in violation of international law.

IX. Conclusions

69. The developments in this report lead the Special Committee to conclude that the policies and practices of Israel during the reporting period are consistent with the characteristics of genocide. The targeting of Palestinians as a group; the life-threatening conditions imposed on Palestinians in Gaza through warfare and restrictions on humanitarian aid – resulting in physical destruction, increased miscarriages and stillbirths – and the killing of and serious bodily or mental harm caused to Palestinians in Gaza and the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, are violations under international law. Civilians have been indiscriminately and disproportionately killed en masse in Gaza, while in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Israeli colonial settlers, military and security personnel have continued to violate human rights and humanitarian law with impunity. Senior Israeli

¹⁹⁹ See [A/HRC/55/72](#).

²⁰⁰ Israel, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Cabinet approves special plan to develop the Golan Heights", 26 December 2021.

²⁰¹ [A/78/127-E/2023/95](#), para. 113.

²⁰² See [A/HRC/55/72](#).

²⁰³ Mark Weiss, "Why do Israel's Druze oppose wind turbines being built in the Golan?", *The Jerusalem Post*, 3 October 2023.

²⁰⁴ See [A/HRC/55/71](#); and [A/HRC/55/72](#).

²⁰⁵ See [A/HRC/55/72](#).

²⁰⁶ See [A/HRC/55/71](#).

government and military officials must be held accountable, including for using dehumanizing language and inciting violence.

70. The multiple violations of international law by Israel in its war on Gaza; its apartheid system of injustice in the occupied West Bank, within the broader context of its decades-long occupation-cum-annexation of Palestinian and Syrian Golan territories; and its ongoing defiance of binding Security Council resolutions and orders of the International Court of Justice, gravely weaken the international rules-based system. Obligations established under international law to limit the barbarity of war and protect human rights, including the right to self-determination, are under threat by Israel's violations and by the fact that other States are unwilling to hold Israel accountable and continue to provide it with military and other support.

X. Recommendations

71. **The General Assembly and/or Member States should urgently:**

(a) Implement their erga omnes obligations, including as they relate to the prevention and prohibition of genocide, torture, racial segregation and apartheid, and refrain from aiding or abetting the commission of all violations of peremptory norms of international law;

(b) Leverage their influence to ensure Israel ceases its policies and practices negatively affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs of the occupied territories;

(c) Halt all offensive arms transfers, including weapons, explosives, guns and/or ammunition, to Israel;

(d) Hold nationals, including those with dual Israeli citizenship, involved in settler violence or violations in Gaza, accountable for violations of international law;

(e) Review financial transfer policies that allow religious and charitable organizations to fund activities in Israel, which enable the further sustenance of an apartheid system;

(f) Support UNRWA politically and financially, including by increasing funding through the United Nations regular budget;

(g) Protect and ensure respect for human rights in economic activities, including by setting out clear expectations for businesses in terms of responsible conduct consistent with the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and exercising heightened due diligence when supporting business enterprises;

(h) Hold business entities fully accountable for complicity in violations of international law, whether through their supply of arms, provision of digital products and services and/or engagement in technology transfer and facilitation (including artificial intelligence) or links to value chains (including algorithmic-based decision-making systems) that enable Israel's ongoing onslaught in Gaza and apartheid system of injustice in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem;

(i) Give full effect to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice of 19 July, by adhering to the legal obligations outlined by the Court, and considering specific measures or further measures required to put an end to the illegal presence of Israel in the occupied territories;

(j) Fully cooperate with the International Criminal Court.

72. The State of Israel should immediately:

- (a) Work, in good faith, with all parties towards an immediate and lasting ceasefire;
- (b) Implement the three International Court of Justice orders of provisional measures on 26 January, 28 March and 24 May, which are binding on Israel;
- (c) Prepare to bring an end to its illegal presence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory as rapidly as possible, as recently clarified by the International Court of Justice, as well as its occupation of the Syrian Golan, in compliance with Security Council resolutions [242 \(1967\)](#) and [497 \(1981\)](#);
- (d) Launch an immediate review of military procedures and ensure soldiers are not effectively ordered to commit human rights violations;
- (e) Allow unrestricted access to the International Committee of the Red Cross, United Nations agencies, and lawyers to all Palestinian detainees as relevant;
- (f) Release all Palestinian detainees arbitrarily detained, including children;
- (g) Investigate all allegations of torture, cruel or inhuman treatment, including sexual and gender-based violence, through an independent, transparent process;
- (h) Cease its campaign to undermine UNRWA and the rules-based system, including stopping and reversing any process to designate UNRWA, or any United Nations agency, as a “terrorist” organization;
- (i) Allow international fact-finding missions into Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Gaza, as well as the occupied Syrian Golan;
- (j) Cooperate fully with the United Nations;
- (k) Implement all recommendations from previous reports of the Special Committee.

73. In addition, the Special Committee recommends that:

- (a) Businesses operating with Israel that, in any way, assist in maintaining the unlawful situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including settlements, divest from these operations, implement heightened human rights due diligence policies in line with the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights; and work towards ending any business activities that contribute to Israel’s unlawful occupation of Palestinian territory;
- (b) Investors implement policies requiring heightened human rights due diligence in conflict-affected areas and ensure that their investments in Israel do not prolong the occupation of Palestinian land;
- (c) Businesses refrain from implementing reprisal policies that dismiss or silence employees who disagree with the businesses’ commercial activities involving the Israeli military;
- (d) Social media companies (including Meta, TikTok and X) increase transparency about government requests for voluntary content removal without court orders, conduct thorough due diligence on the human rights impact of their content moderation and recommendation algorithms, and align their policies with the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights to protect free speech while preventing incitement to hatred and violence by ensuring that individuals are not mislabelled as anti-Semitic for disapproving of the killing of civilians and attacks on protected populations and humanitarian workers.