

23 July 2014

PHROC Oral Statement - Human Rights Council 21st special session of the Council on the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.

Mr. President, Distinguished Members of the Council,

I speak today on behalf of twelve Palestinian human rights organisations¹ gravely concerned about the drastically rising number of civilian casualties in the Gaza Strip.

Over the past two weeks, Israel has killed 505 Palestinians, of whom 76 per cent are civilians. More than 100,000 thousands of Palestinians are displaced and still face the impossible decision of choosing where to flee as no one location in Gaza safe for civilians.

Testimonies from the ground describe attacks by Israel as indiscriminate and disproportionate and directly aimed at civilians. They describe Israel's offensive, "Operation Cast Lead" in 2008-2009, as a joke in comparison to the gravity of the situation today.

Mr. President, Israel is making less than little effort to ensure the safety of civilians in the Gaza Strip in these current attacks. In fact, Israel is using weaponry that increases the likelihood of civilian casualties in such a densely populated area.

In the past seven years of siege over the Gaza Strip, this Council has failed to act decisively to ensure Israel abides by international law and its duties as an Occupying Power. Israel has, therefore, conveniently continued its unlawful closure of the Gaza Strip and attacks on civilians that may amount to war crimes.

Mr. President, Distinguished Members of the Council,

Indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks by Israel will continue across the occupied territory if you fail to act promptly and effectively in this Session. An immediate cease-fire should be brokered by an unbiased party under conditions that address the root cause of the current situation, being Israel's occupation, the unlawful closure of the Gaza Strip and the Israeli policy of separation.

The culture of impunity enjoyed by the Israeli army must also be addressed, Mr. President. Accordingly, the dispatch of an urgent, independent commission of inquiry is essential to ensure that perpetrators are held to account for committing what could amount to war crimes in the Gaza Strip.

¹ The Palestinian Human Rights Organisations Council (PHROC) includes: Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, Al-Dameer Association for Human Rights, Al-Haq, Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights, Badil Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, Defence for Children International - Palestine Section, Ensan Center for Human Rights and Democracy, Hurriyat - Centre for Defense of Liberties and Civil Rights, Jerusalem Center for Legal Aid and Human Rights, The Palestinian Center for Human Rights, Ramallah Center for Human Rights Studies, Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling.