



Open letter to the attention of

Mrs. Michelle Bachelet
High Commissioner for Human Rights
Rue des Pâquis 52,
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Switzerland

28th of September 2018

Women's voices in investigating the disproportionate and indiscriminate use of illegal lethal force in Gaza

The Palestinian Working Woman Society for Development in the West Bank and Gaza, and the Euromed Feminist Initiative IFE-EFI extend their warmest congratulations to you for your appointment as United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. We salute your sensitivity to the needs of the oppressed and your prominent advocacy against injustices. We echo Kenneth Roth, the executive director of Human Rights Watch, who said in a statement: "As a victim herself, she brings a unique perspective to the role on the importance of a vigorous defense of human rights," and "People worldwide will depend on her to be a public and forceful champion, especially where offenders are powerful". We sincerely hope more courageous women will look at you as an inspirational model and embrace a global perspective on justice, believing that an injustice to one is an injustice to all.

In the frame of the 39th session of the Human Rights Council, EFI and PWWSA attended the presentation of the report of the independent commission of inquiry on the occupied territory of Palestine. We would like to express our deep appreciation of the Human Rights Council's resolution to dispatch an independent, international commission of inquiry to investigate all violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, as well as in the occupied Gaza Strip, in the context of the military assaults on the civilian protests that began in March 2018.

We regret that the persistent aggressions on Gaza, the decision to move the US embassy to Jerusalem and the recent adoption of Israeli national law, sabotage prospects for peace and threaten the right of Palestinians to self-determination and a sovereign State within a two-State solution. We condemn the noncompliance of the Israeli towards the

Human Rights Council's previous recommendations as they are a prerequisite to the enjoyment of all basic human rights and fundamental freedoms grounded in justice and dignity especially when it comes to the protection of civilians. As such, the impartial investigation on the mass killing and wounding of unarmed and defenseless protesters in Gaza Strip, and on the practices of apartheid, now openly implemented by the Israeli government, are paramount to hold it accountable and to end the culture of impunity it enjoys if justice is to prevail.

For several years, Palestinian women have been facing ongoing violation of their fundamental rights and liberties, occupation, forced transfers, strengthening of illegal blockade on Gaza Strip, denying their right to return, threatening their security and preventing their well-being, imprisoning civilians and children, restricting access to services and mobility, confiscating land and water, as well as destroying live hood in favor of settlements expansion. One of the latest alarming signs of the escalation of colonial oppression is the mention posted on the five first rows in the Israeli buses: "only for Jewish people" besides bridges have been built in pass-by roads on the Palestinian confiscated lands to prevent the Israeli settlers mobility and linkages to use the same road as the Palestinians. The name of these practices is apartheid on which we urge the independent international commission of inquiry to investigate, considering that by fueling racism, violence, and hostility they are a source of insecurity not only for the region but also worldwide.

Under international law - as an occupying power- Israel has the obligation to protect civilians of the occupied territories, yet occupation forces have intentionally targeted unarmed Palestinian protesters with little regard for children, journalists, and medics who were present. According to the Ministry of Health in Gaza, the Great March of Return resulted in the death of 155 Palestinians and more than 17000 serious injuries between end of March until the end of July 2018. Also according to the same source, 23 of those killed were minors under the age of 18 and 3 were women. 3279 of the total injuries were children and 1553 women. Two medics were killed and another 360 injured with live bullets and tear-gas suffocation and 69 ambulances were damaged. The excessive and disproportionate unlawful use of force by the Israeli occupying forces against Palestinian civilians is once more breaching international human rights and international humanitarian law, given the fact that the right to protest peacefully is a fundamental human right.

Beyond all these figures are horrendous sufferings of families and destruction of youth perspectives for a better future.

The Palestinian Working Woman Society for Development in the West Bank and Gaza, and the Euromed Feminist Initiative IFE-EFI stand up against injustices as fierce advocates for women's rights and demand that women's voices are heard. We urge the commission to engender its findings, to shed light on women's issues in Gaza, highlighting the immense impact the 11-years blockade, as well as the recent escalations, have on the lives of women in Gaza who represent 49.5% of the population, nonetheless the problems they face are not given the attention they deserve.

Therefore, we urge the international commission of inquiry to echo women's voices in Gaza and make clear that gender-based violence and discrimination will not be tolerated, neither from Israel nor from any other entity, provide support to all women in Gaza suffering from the prolonged siege and increase the female participation in social, economic and political fields, in Gaza and all across the Occupied Palestinian Territories. As feminists we are anti imperialist, anti militarist and pacifist and stay besides Palestinian women in their fight for an independent and free Palestine. It is not only matter of social justice but also a condition for sustainable peace and security in the whole Euro-Med region.

The conflict in Palestine is a conflict between the people and the occupying power between the oppressed and the oppressor, between the Israeli colonial project-illegal under the UN Resolution 2334 – (23.12.16) and the Palestinian right for self determination . How can international institutions ignore it when calling the 2 parts to « moderation » or asking the two parties to show restraint, while continuing like EU to have upgraded relations with the Israeli government , or like the UN failing in providing minimal protection to the population of Palestine.

We are strongly united in Euromed Feminist Initiative, women from here, South and the North to demand Justice for the Palestinian people.

We urge the government to stop to provide arms to Israel.

We urge the EU to annul the enhanced association status with Israeli government, in respect of article 2 of the European neighborhood policies, as long as Israel will violate the institutional law.

We urge UN to take immediate steps towards ending Israeli occupation and protection of Palestinian people.

With our gratitude and support to the commission, in seeking the truth behind the brutal crimes committed against the Palestinian people.

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