WEST BANK: DEMOLITIONS AND ATTACKS AGAINST PALESTINIANS MUST STOP – UN EXPERTS

GENEVA – Three United Nations independent experts* called for an immediate end to the demolitions of Palestinian-owned houses and other structures in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, which have seen a dramatic increase since the beginning of the year. They also urged the Israeli authorities to prevent attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinians and Palestinian property.

“The impact and discriminatory nature of these demolitions and evictions is completely unacceptable. These actions by the Israeli authorities violate human rights and humanitarian law and must end immediately,” said the three Special Rapporteurs working on the rights to adequate housing, water and sanitation, and food.

Palestinian property is not only destroyed by the Israeli Civil Administration authorities and military but also by Israeli settlers. “In some places, there are nearly weekly burnings of Palestinian villagers’ land, trees and crops by Israeli settlers,” the independent experts said. “With no effective action by the police and security forces, there is neither accountability for nor effective protection against these serious crimes, which further encourages the perpetrators to continue committing them.”

“Israeli authorities must take all necessary measures to prevent attacks by Israeli settlers against Palestinians and Palestinian property in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and investigate and prosecute criminal acts committed by settlers in an independent, impartial, effective, thorough and timely manner,” they stressed.

Since January 2011, at least 387 structures including 140 residential structures and 79 agricultural/livelihoods structures have been demolished leading to the forced displacement of 755 people and detrimental impacts on the livelihoods of another 1,500. The number of people displaced as of August 2011 already exceeds the number of people displaced during the entire year of 2010. These demolitions are taking place as a result of discriminatory and restrictive zoning and planning policies applied by the Government of Israel to Palestinians in East Jerusalem and Area C of the West Bank.

“The preferential treatment of Israeli settlers over Palestinians is blatantly discriminatory,” noted the experts drawing attention to the fact that illegal Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank are expanding while Palestinian applications for permits are denied, and their homes and properties are destroyed.

Housing

“The situation is clearly escalating and resulting in increasing human rights violations,” said the Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing, Raquel Rolnik. “Not only are these families, some of whom have been living there for decades, forcibly evicted from their homes but they are not provided with compensation or relocation, and are even forced to pay for the demolition itself and fines for having constructed ‘illegally.’ The Special Rapporteur also
expressed concern about the displacement of Palestinians due to persistence violence and harassment by Israeli settlers which have gone unaddressed by Israeli authorities, citing the recent example of an entire community of 127 people that was displaced.

Water
“The destruction of water infrastructure in Area C of the West Bank is especially alarming. At least 20 cisterns and 12 wells have been demolished since the beginning of 2011, affecting access to drinking water for tens of thousands of Palestinians,” underscored the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, Catarina de Albuquerque. “As a result, these people have to pay exorbitant prices to get safe drinking water from tankers. Add to this the reality of water scarcity, and the situation easily becomes desperate.”

Food
“The ongoing demolition of agricultural and livelihood structures has exacerbated food insecurity amongst Palestinians in the West Bank,” said the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier De Schutter. “Herder communities have lost access to water for their animals, farmers have been evicted from their land, and Bedouin communities have been especially affected by these demolitions – sometimes having had their property destroyed on repeated occasions.” In addition, the Special Rapporteur expressed concern about the loss of livelihoods due to unchecked attacks by Israeli settlers on Palestinian-owned productive land and natural resources.

Humanitarian Law
Article 54 of the 1977 Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), prohibits not only starvation as a method of warfare, but also the destruction of objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as foodstuffs, agricultural areas for the production of foodstuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies and irrigation works, for the specific purpose of denying them for their sustenance value to the civilian population or to the adverse Party.

The three UN experts called “for an immediate end to the demolition of Palestinian-owned structures and forced eviction of Palestinians, and for the immediate cancellation of all existing stop-work and demolition orders applying to Palestinian territories, until Palestinians are ensured a fair and non-discriminatory planning and zoning regime consistent with the principles and standards of international human rights and humanitarian law.”

The Special Rapporteurs also reminded Israel of its obligation under international law to ensure access to an effective remedy for Palestinians who have lost homes, land, assets and livelihoods due to demolitions and forced evictions as well as to stop all settlement activities in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

ENDS

(*) Special Rapporter on the right to adequate housing, Ms. Raquel Rolnik; Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Olivier De Schutter; Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, Catarina de Albuquerque.

Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council:
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OHCHR Country Page – Occupied Palestinian Territory:
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