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Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance: follow-up to and implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action

Written statement* submitted by The Palestinian Return Centre Ltd, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[21 August 2022]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



The Impact of Israel's Securitization Narrative on West Bank's Refugee Camps

Overview

Since the start of 2022, Israeli military escalations on Palestinian refugee camps have been at their highest levels. Home raids, arbitrary arrests, and random gunshooting have claimed the lives of dozens of Palestinians and left scores of others with severe wounds.

Tension continues to prevail in West Bank refugee camps where rounds of violence take place daily amid an Israeli threat of large-scale military operations.

In April, the Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett claimed that the flashpoint refugee camp of Jenin represents a threat to Israel's security and gave the army greenlight for extrajudicial killings of Palestinians under the guise of self-defense and anti-terrorism.

Under the self-defense and security guises, Israeli forces have significantly escalated the killing and repression of Palestinians in West Bank refugee camps and villages. Israeli officials have been granting a mandate to the Israeli army to wage an unrelenting war on Palestinians who resist occupation. The authorization of the Israeli politicians for the army and security to operate with "full freedom to defeat terrorism" have paved the way for the unjustified excuse to kill and abuse Palestinian civilians at military checkpoints, demolish homes, arrest anti-occupation activists, and boost state-backed settler terrorism.

Israel's securitization narrative, which transforms anti-occupation drives into security-related issues and matters of life or death for Israeli State, seeks to classify Palestinians as terrorists in order to legitimize occupation and delegitimize all forms of resistance.

The Israeli politicians bear full responsibility for the killings of Palestinians, especially those unarmed women and children killed in cold blood without posing any threat to the lives of Israeli soldiers.

Israeli Attacks on West Bank Refugee Camps

Israeli military violence in the West Bank has gone unabated and fueled by the scramble for power and the fear of power loss by Israeli occupation figures.

News reports revealed that Israeli raids and violence in West Bank refugee camps reached their peak in July, just one month before the deadly airstrikes on the besieged coastal enclave of Gaza.

In July, 44 Palestinians were arrested and seven injured, some of them with live ammunition. 37 raids were also recorded, some of them targeting ten Palestinian refugee camps in the West Bank: Askar AlJadid, Askar AlKadim, Arroub, Nour Shams, Jenin, Jalazone, Shu'fat, Ayeda, Duheisheh, and Ezzeh.

Just one day before Israel launched its ferocious air strikes on the Gaza Strip amid rising tensions across the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Israeli soldiers detained 62-year-old Bassam al-Saadi, a senior leader of the Islamic Jihad group, in a raid in the West Bank refugee camp of Jenin after they subjected him to aggressive beating.

On August 17, three Palestinians were injured after Israeli military troops raided Balata refugee camp, east of Nablus, and attacked protesters with bullet fire and teargas grenades.

In a news report, a resident of Jalazone refugee camp quoted as saying: "The increasing Israeli attacks on Palestinian refugees camps in the West Bank come as part of a preplanned scheme to impose a new fait accompli and entrench the occupation of the State of Palestine by force, excessive force. Israel is waging a psychological war against the Palestinians by forcing them to internalize the daily military operations in an attempt to curb anti-occupation drives".

Refugee camps in Gaza, a narrow strip of land where some 2.3 million Palestinians live on a patch of 365 square kilometres (140 square miles), have not, themselves, been safe from

Israel's securitization discourse. The Israeli army has imposed restrictions on the Gaza Strip, including the closure of border crossings with the Palestinian territories.

Manifestations of Israel's Securitization of West Bank Refugee Camps

In tangible terms, Israel's securitization discourse is materialized on the ground by the establishment of military towers on thoroughfares and hills leading to or overseeing the main entrances to West Bank refugee camps and cities in order to monitor Palestinians and crack down on their freedom of movement. Two such towers are installed near the access roads of the Fawar and Arroub refugee camps, in the southern occupied West Bank city of AlKhalil.

Large-scale arrest sweeps also dovetail Israel's securitization narrative. Palestinians are rounded up daily as Israeli soldiers raid West Bank homes and refugee camps under the pretext of searching for terrorists and wanted persons.

Israel views West Bank refugee camps not only as "doubly dangerous" and "suspicious" areas but also as safe havens and hotbeds for resistance fighters.

The Israeli narrative is that Israel has always sought out peace with all its neighbors, Arab and Palestinian, but these neighbors have continuously spurned peace and chosen violence against the Israelis instead. Israel's military operations are, therefore, portrayed as "wars of self-defense".

Israel's relentless attacks on Palestinian refugee camps are also another face of its plan to erase Palestinian refugees' inalienable rights, most notably the right to return to their homeland. These camps carry a historically significant value as they are witnesses to Palestinian refugees' plight following the 1948 Nakbah which turned millions of Palestinians into refugees inside and outside Palestine. From this lens, Israel's illegal settlement activity, ethnic cleansing campaigns, home demolitions, and land dispossession aim to render the possibility of return meaningless.

The most dangerous aspect of Israel's securitization discourse is the systematic dehumanization of the Palestinians and insensitivity to their suffering. Dehumanization of Palestinian society at large, and Palestinians as individuals, allows Israel to justify its oppressive treatment of the Palestinians who are under its control.

Dehumanization denigrates Palestinian morality and basic character, charging that Palestinians do not react violently on occasion because of the oppression and violence of the Israeli occupation, rather they do so out of a deep-seated hatred of the Jews that is inseparable from their identity.¹

Conclusion

Israel's securitization narrative promoted under the guise of self-defense and anti-terrorism gives Israel greenlight to ethnically cleanse Palestinian refugee communities across the occupied West Bank.

Israel perpetrates its narrative by means of state-sponsored force by the Israeli military or non-state actors such as Israeli settlers.

Israeli violence across West Bank refugee camps includes demolition of the houses of family members of individuals involved in protests against the Israeli occupation, imprisonment of children for extended periods with neither charge nor trial, use of excessive and, often, deadly force and live ammunition against stone-throwers, and extrajudicial executions of Palestinians by Israeli forces.

Israel has always opted for dehumanization as a critical element of maintaining an occupation that by all standards of international law, humanity and justice should be sanctioned and condemned.

Present-day Israel views securitization as an important tool to maintain Jewish sovereignty over Palestinian territories and thwart any hope for an independent and decolonized the State of Palestine.

1 <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/israels-dehumanization-palestinians-enables-oppressive-occupation>