



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
15 February 2024

English only

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## Human Rights Council

### Fifty-fourth session

11 September–13 October 2023

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

## **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.

[23 August 2023]

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



## **Israel's Lethal Disposal of Nuclear Waste**

### **Israel's Prolific Nuclear Weapons Programme**

The recent release of Hollywood film 'Oppenheimer', based around American scientist Robert Oppenheimer and his creation of what we know today as nuclear weapons, has put the spotlight back on to nuclear weapons, their creation, their capabilities and the destruction they bring at every stage of their existence. Israel is estimated to have a nuclear stockpile of approximately 90 warheads; while production of plutonium for weapons purposes is thought to be continuing. On the basis of unconfirmed reports, Israel could be in possession of the nuclear triad for delivery of its nuclear capability.<sup>1</sup>

### **Israel's Dimona Nuclear Reactor**

It has been widely reported that Israel's Dimona nuclear reactor may be responsible for the increase in illnesses and still-births in nearby Palestinian populations. Israel's Dimona nuclear reactor is alarmingly one of the few nuclear facilities in the world not subject to international safety inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency.<sup>2</sup>

The reactor has already been implicated in illnesses and environmental damage among the area's Israeli population. Dr Mahmoud Saadah, the head of the Palestine branch of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), holds the Dimona nuclear reactor directly responsible for the increase in deformities in the area and surrounding villages.<sup>2</sup>

Dr Khalil Thabayneh, a nuclear physics researcher at Hebron University, is the only Palestinian specialist who has conducted studies over a number of years to measure radiation levels in the West Bank, using advanced equipment to detect levels of radioactive material in water, rocks, soil and plants. Thabayneh's studies reveal levels exceeding international permitted averages in the Hebron governorate. The most commonly radioactive element in the southern West Bank, according to Thabayneh's research, is Caesium-137. Any amount of Caesium-137 in the environment is considered dangerous.<sup>2</sup>

"This isotope does not exist in nature and only occurs due to nuclear activity. When found in high concentrations, the source is either nuclear experiments, radioactive leaks or the detonation of nuclear weapons," said Thabayneh.

"The only places found to have higher concentrations than in the West Bank were after the explosion of the Chernobyl reactor in Ukraine in 1986 and in Fukushima in 2012.<sup>2</sup> These two cases had the highest recorded levels of Cesium-137 in the world, which means the southern West Bank has the highest levels of Cesium-137 in the world if we exclude areas that have witnessed nuclear disasters," added Thabayneh.

Thabayneh research categorically states the greatest danger to humans from Caesium-137 is cancer. Other elements such as uranium and polonium also pose great dangers to children, and can cause cancer and affect the reproductive system, causing infertility in both men and women, causing birth defects and repeated miscarriages.<sup>2</sup>

The town of Yatta has the highest reading of Caesium-137 in the Hebron region. This led researchers to focus on Yatta, and, in 2007, an International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War committee documented 280 cases of cancer in the town with a population of approximately 50,000. The same committee documented 200 cases of cancer in the town al-Dahiriya, 17km away from the reactor, which had a population of 35,000 at the time of the study. The committee also documented a case of heart cancer in the town, which occurs in five out of each 100,000 people and usually in patients over 50.<sup>2</sup>

## Israel's Disposal of Nuclear Waste in the South Hebron Hills

According to the accounts of villagers in the governorate, Israel buries its nuclear waste close to Palestinian towns or in areas along the green line, which Israel plans to withdraw from in return for other areas if a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were to take hold in the future.<sup>2</sup>

Villagers from Beit al-Roush told Saadah that, in 1989, they saw trucks going into the mountains followed by a cement mixing truck. The trucks would be buried whole, they said. After this time, residents noticed an increase in cancers. Furthermore a number of residents in the Bani Naim area in the governorate of Hebron, stated from eyewitness testimony, that over ten years ago, the Israeli army buried barrels in a cave in the Bani Naim desert - after which the cave was sealed with reinforced concrete. Access to the area is still restricted by the Israeli army. The residents believe the area contains dangerous nuclear waste, buried in their land.<sup>2</sup>

Israel prevents Palestinian environmental inspectors from visiting areas which residents complain are being used as nuclear dumping grounds by Israel.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, Israel does not allow for the import of equipment that could be used to measure radiation - and it prevents international and UN experts in the field from entering the Palestinian territories.<sup>2</sup>

## Conclusion

The Palestinian Return Centre Ltd (PRC) calls upon UN Human Rights Council members to demand Israel cease all nuclear activity in Hebron, and elsewhere it seeks to advance its nuclear activity in the territory, in line with the United Nations efforts to eliminate such weapons ever since their establishment.

The Palestinian Return Centre Ltd (PRC) calls on Israel to adhere to the vast number of multilateral treaties that have since been established with the aim of preventing nuclear proliferation and testing, while promoting progress in nuclear disarmament. These include the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT), the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)<sup>4</sup>, with immediate effect.

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1 House Of Commons: Israeli Nuclear Policy. Commonslibrary.parliament.uk. Available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9075/>

2 The New Arab: Is Waste From Israel's Nuclear Programme Poisoning Palestinians. Newarab.com. Available at: <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/waste-israels-nuclear-programme-poisoning-palestinians>

3 Friends of the Earth International: Visit to Palestine exposes environmental injustices and human rights abuses under the Israeli occupation. Foei.org. Available at: <https://www.foei.org/visit-to-palestine-exposes-environmental-injustices-and-human-rights-abuses-under-the-israeli-occupation/>

4 United Nations: Office for Disarmament Affairs. Disarmament.unoda.org. Available at: <https://disarmament.unoda.org/wmd/nuclear/#:~:text=The%20United%20Nations%20has%20sought,of%20atomic%20energy%20among%20others.>