



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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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.

[25 May 2025]

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



## **Escalating Ethnic Cleansing in the Northern West Bank: A Call for Immediate International Intervention**

The Palestinian Return Centre submits this statement with the utmost urgency in regard to the rapidly deteriorating human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in the northern West Bank, where recent months have seen an alarming acceleration of what can only be described as ethnic cleansing against the Palestinian population. The systematic displacement of tens of thousands of Palestinians demands urgent intervention from the international community.

Since January 2025, Israeli forces have launched large-scale military assaults on several refugee camps and civilian areas in the northern West Bank, most notably Jenin, Tulkarm, and Nur Shams. According to reports from the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied, over 40,000 Palestinians have been forcibly displaced.<sup>(1)</sup> This figure marks the most significant wave of displacement in the West Bank since the 1967 war.

These operations have involved the use of tanks, drones, and airstrikes, as well as coordinated incursions by Israeli military and settler militias. At least 70 Palestinians, including children and medical workers, have been killed during these operations. The affected areas now face near-total destruction of homes, medical clinics, roads, and water infrastructure, leaving them uninhabitable and effectively sealing off the return of their original residents.

Israeli officials have increasingly suggested applying the same strategies used in Gaza to the West Bank. Since October 2023, Israeli forces have killed over 800 people in the West Bank and detained record numbers without trial.<sup>(2)</sup> These actions coincide with increased settlement construction, home demolitions, movement restrictions, and reports of ill-treatment and torture of detainees.

### **The Crime of Ethnic Cleansing Under International Law:**

While the term ‘ethnic cleansing’ is not formally defined in international law, it refers to the deliberate and systematic removal of a particular ethnic or religious group from a geographic area through force or intimidation. The evidence in the northern West Bank such as deliberate destruction of homes, forced displacement, denial of return, and policies designed to make repopulation impossible, matches the core characteristics of ethnic cleansing.

These acts may constitute grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention, war crimes under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), and crimes against humanity, including forcible transfer, persecution, and inhumane acts intentionally causing great suffering. Furthermore, the use of military tactics initially developed and deployed in Gaza, now applied in densely populated West Bank areas, demonstrates a pattern of conduct that violates the principles of proportionality and distinction under international humanitarian law.

### **The Role of Settler Violence and State Policy:**

Settler militias, often operating with the protection or cooperation of the Israeli military, have played a significant role in terrorizing Palestinian communities. Armed settlers have attacked homes, agricultural lands, and vehicles with impunity, leading to additional waves of displacement.

Far from being isolated incidents, these attacks are increasingly perceived as extensions of state policy, designed to depopulate Palestinian areas and expand de facto annexation. Statements by Israeli officials – including the Defense Minister’s declaration that those displaced “will not return” – underscore the intentional and permanent nature of these operations.<sup>(3)</sup> Such declarations must be scrutinized for evidence of the intent required to establish accountability for international crimes.

The Israeli actions as part of a broader strategy to impose a new status quo in the West Bank. This includes the systematic destruction of homes and infrastructure, deployment of heavy military equipment, and the establishment of military sites within civilian areas. These measures aim to make the return of displaced Palestinians impossible and may signify steps toward the annexation of the West Bank.<sup>(4)</sup>

The Israeli occupation's operations have resulted in significant civilian casualties and the destruction of vital infrastructure, including water, electricity, and sanitation facilities. These actions constitute violations of international law and call on the international community to take immediate action to halt the military campaign, ensure the protection of Palestinian civilians, and facilitate the return of displaced individuals to their homes.

### **Complicity Through Inaction and Global Double Standards:**

The muted response of the international community to these developments is not only disappointing, but also enabling. Selective application of international law, geopolitical calculations, and a failure to act decisively have allowed such violations to proceed with impunity. This inaction reflects broader trends of normalizing Palestinian displacement. Meanwhile, arms transfers, diplomatic cover, and continued trade with Israeli colonies persist despite widespread documentation of abuses.

This inaction stands in stark contrast to the prompt measures taken in response to comparable violations elsewhere, such as the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine. The credibility of this Council and the international human rights framework more broadly are at stake. The ongoing displacement, destruction of infrastructure, and denial of basic services in the northern West Bank constitute a direct violation of the right to development, which falls under Item 3 of this Council's agenda. These actions erode not only the economic foundations of Palestinian life but also the cultural, social, and political fields of the Palestinian people. Children are being denied access to education. Families are deprived of housing. Communities are fragmented. Such realities are incompatible with the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the principles of dignity and equality this Council is mandated to uphold.

To conclude, the ethnic cleansing unfolding in the northern West Bank is not merely a humanitarian tragedy, but it is a calculated political policy rooted in decades of settler colonial occupation, impunity, and the denial of a people's right to self-determination. The Palestinian Return Centre urges the international community and the Human Rights Council to take immediate action to prevent further atrocities. Action should include imposing targeted sanctions on individuals implicated in abuses, suspending arms transfers to Israel, banning trade with illegal settlements, and supporting the International Criminal Court's investigations.

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(1) <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/03/tragedy-foretold-and-stain-our-collective-humanity-special-rapporteur-warns>

(2) <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/02/26/israel-imports-gaza-abuses-west-bank>

(3) <https://mondoweiss.net/2025/02/israel-says-40000-displaced-palestinians-in-northern-west-bank-will-not-be-allowed-to-return/>

(4) <https://euromedmonitor.org/en/article/6616/In-its-latest-ethnic-cleansing-efforts,-Israel-forcibly-uproots-thousands-of-Palestinians-in-the-West-Bank>