

Statement by

Francesca Albanese, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of Human Rights in the

Palestinian territories occupied since 1967,

delivered at

the 78th Session of the General Assembly

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

1. I am honored to present my second report to the General Assembly, and third as Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967. The report delves into the situation of children living under Israel's occupation, in the West Bank including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip.

2. As harrowing as the circumstances have been since the beginning of my tenure, never could I have fathomed speaking to you under the present circumstances, when thousands of innocents have been killed and injured on both sides of the Green Line, amidst unspeakable trauma, destruction, and many more are at risk of being killed, injured and further traumatized. I extend my deepest condolences to all affected by the war.

3. The events of 7 October have marked a major tragic turn in the history of the occupied Palestinian territory and Israel. About 1,400 Israelis and foreign nationals have been killed in Israel, with thousands more injured following brutal attacks by Palestinian paramilitary forces emanating from the occupied Gaza Strip. Much of what these militants have done against civilians in Israel are war crimes and must be accounted for. In response, Israeli occupation forces have yet again indiscriminately bombarded the Gaza Strip, hitting entire residential areas, schools,

hospitals, mosques and churches and killing around 5,000 people. Israel has further tightened the unlawful siege of the Gaza Strip, depriving the population of indispensable items of survival at such a critical time, including food, water, energy and medicines. Starvation as a tool of war is now being waged on the civilian population of Gaza, exposing those who have survived the incessant bombardment to further risk of death or disease.

4. These events are but the latest symptom of the epic failure of the international community to address decades of Israel's illegality, impunity and end its 'forever occupation'.

5. Though my report does not deal with the current crisis, it sheds light on the complex system of violence, unaddressed root causes, and unsustainable conditions of life that generations of Palestinian children have endured under Israel's military and ever-expanding colonial presence in the occupied Palestinian territory. This is necessary to understand how we have arrived at this point.

6. Palestinian children, constituting half of the population under occupation, are the prime victims of this system, living in constant dread, fear and despair. One of the most troubling requests I heard from the children I interviewed for this report, was to "ask the world" why it continues to neglect them. "Are Palestinian children less worthy?" "Are we less human?".

7. For any Palestinian child, living under Israeli occupation is a deeply traumatic experience. It is the struggle of parents who, after protracted legal battles to reclaim confiscated land, watch it cultivated by settlers. It is the imposing 8-meter-high wall separating families and communities, and curtailing livelihoods. It's a father's heartbreak as he is compelled to demolish his unfinished home, unable to secure permits from the Israeli military. It's a depleted school, denied building permits, perpetually at risk of destruction by the Israeli military. It's empty classrooms, once filled

with eager students now resting in cemeteries. It is carrying will and farewell letters in their pocket, constantly aware that they can die at any moment.

8. As a State Party to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Israel is obliged to safeguard and promote the best interests of every child within its jurisdiction, ensuring all their rights without discrimination. Instead, Israel deliberately deprives Palestinian children of their fundamental human rights, as part of its drive to impede the development of Palestinian society while permanently frustrating Palestinian self-determination.

9. Lethal attacks on Palestinians by Israeli soldiers and armed settlers in West Bank and east Jerusalem, and methodical military assaults against Gaza, epitomize the daily hardships and injustices endured by generations of Palestinian children. From 2008 until October 6, 1,434 Palestinian children had been killed, with an additional 32,175 sustaining injuries primarily at the hands of Israeli occupation forces. Of these, 1,025 children were killed in Gaza alone since the unlawful blockade began in 2007. During the same timeframe, 25 Israeli children were killed, mostly by Palestinian assailants, and 524 were injured.

10. The plight of Palestinian children is amplified by their frequent encounters with Israel's so-called 'juvenile military justice system', a legal oxymoron in itself. An average of 500-700 Palestinian children, as young as 12, are arbitrarily detained by Israeli occupation forces each year. Palestinian children are often arrested in the middle of the night during violent raids, interrogated without a lawyer or a family member, and subjected to brutal practice and solitary confinement before being charged, sentenced and imprisoned. Documented mistreatment inflicted upon children often amount to torture.

11. Israel's rhetoric and practices, framing Palestinian children as 'human shields' or 'terrorists' to justify the violence against them and their parents – often amplified in western discourse – profoundly dehumanize Palestinian children.

12. Palestinian children grow with ever-shrinking opportunities for education and leisure. Educational facilities are intentionally underdeveloped, targeted during violent incursions by soldiers, and curricula manipulated to obscure Palestinian culture and history, while Israeli curricula systematically dehumanizes Palestinians.

13. Whether in the densely-populated besieged Gaza Strip, the impoverished West Bank enclaves or annexed east Jerusalem, generations of Palestinian children have seen their lives reduced to the bare minimum and cut short. The oppressive, coercive, and persecutory environment Israel subjects them to violates the right to a safe and dignified upbringing, hindering their physical, mental, cultural and social development. This coercive environment leads to the “unchilding” of Palestinian children, robbing them of the lightness of childhood and debilitating them from generational development as a people.

14. I underscore that many of the Israeli occupation forces' violations detailed in this report may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity.

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Distinguished delegates,

15. Lack of respect for international law and accountability lies at the heart of the violence in the occupied Palestinian territory. I urge the international community, including the International Criminal Court, to end the cycle of impunity, bring to justice the perpetrators of all alleged crimes

committed there, and use all tools available including under the UN Charter to ensure Israel's compliance with international law.

16. All people in that tormented land deserve justice and peace and it is the international community's collective responsibility to contribute to a future free from the tyranny of foreign military rule, which allows all children to live to their fullest potential. This can only be secured by realizing equal rights and dignity of Palestinian children.

17. As I conclude my remarks, children in the occupied Palestinian territory are awaiting your responses. Will this Assembly live up to its commitment to leave no one behind, or, as the Israeli apartheid system does, will it forsake Palestinian children as the wretched of the earth?

18. I look forward to your questions and comments.

I thank you.