

**Members of the Geneva NGOs Middle East Working Group
with Focus on Palestine**

statement for

International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

(November 29)

Presented to the United Nations special meeting

on November 24, 2008

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We, the undersigned Non-Governmental Organisations, remain gravely concerned about the situation of Palestinians whose suffering increases daily under the occupation. There is no evidence of an end to this. On the contrary, collective punishment, land grab, the construction of the apartheid wall, extension of Israeli settlements, closures and other oppressive and restrictive measures and human rights violations by Israel against Palestinians continue. There is hardly a day when we do not hear or read of targeted killings, military incursions into Gaza and of other destructive actions.

Palestinians have suffered gross human rights violations for more 60 years. In recent months a crippling blockade against the Gaza strip is causing the population severe hunger, in fact, near starvation.

With the border controls preventing the crossing of emergency food and medical supplies on one hand, and on the other hand the restricted mobility of persons, lack of food, pharmaceutical and medical supplies and the restrictions on fuel, electricity and water affecting the sanitary conditions threaten the very survival of the population.

As the world celebrates 60 years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the undeniable rights of Palestinians continue to be violated. On 18 November, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Ms. Navanethem Pillay, called for an immediate end to the Israeli blockade of Gaza, stating that "By function of this blockade, 1.5 million Palestinian men, women and children have been forcibly deprived of their most basic human rights for months. This is in direct contravention of international human rights and humanitarian law."

We want to draw attention to the report of August 25 2008 by the Special Rapporteur on the situation in the occupied territories, especially to his recommendation that the "United Nations should explore its own responsibility with respect to the wellbeing of the Palestinians living under unlawful condition of occupation particularly bearing on abuses of border control, freedom of independence of journalists, and the general crisis in the health care, especially in Gaza."

The serious nature of the daily human rights violations that arise as a result of the siege in Gaza has tremendous impact particularly on women, children and the sick who need services that are unavailable or inaccessible. The situation worsens from

day to day and if nothing is done to stop it, it will lead to the total breakdown of public institutions that will severely undermine national capacity and the Palestinian economy.

The UNRWA operation director in Gaza, Mr. Jon Ging, has stated that the crushing collective sanction imposed on the Gaza strip has contributed to truly appalling living conditions and that 750,000 Palestinian children are on the edge of dying due to suffering from anemia, malnutrition, malformation and undergrowth because of no food even milk and no drugs. How can this be allowed to continue?

UNRWA distributions of emergency food rations will soon come to a halt because its stores are empty and the Agency's fund can provide no more than one nutrient biscuit to 200,000 children in UN schools.

We are shocked and cannot understand the silence of the world community in the face of this catastrophe. It turns its face while knowing that thousands of families go hungry and are not able to have even a loaf of bread for their children.

In light of these concerns

We call on the Government of Israel:

1. To immediately end the siege in the Gaza Strip and reopen border crossings to allow humanitarian aid to reach the people
2. To respect its legal obligations under the UN resolutions and humanitarian law, and observe the right of the Palestinians for self-determination.

We call on the United Nations:

1. To take urgent, firm and practical measures to end the crisis situation in the Gaza Strip and to contribute to alleviating the humanitarian crisis
2. To put a rapid halt to military occupation and enforce the withdrawal of Israeli troops from all areas under the Palestinian territories
3. To ensure that women's voices, perspectives and needs are integrated in peace negotiations in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, war and peace
4. To provide immediate and effective protection to children under the occupation in order to safeguard their rights to health, nutrition and education according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child
5. To take note and act on the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories

Thank you.

Signatories:

Members of the Geneva NGOs Middle East Working Group with Focus on Palestine:

- » BADIL Resource Centre for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights
- » General Federation of Arab Women (GFAW)
- » Women International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
- » World Alliance of YMCAs
- » World Young Women's Christian Association (World YWCA)