

Minister Pekka Haavisto  
Ministry for Foreign Affairs  
P.O.Box 176, FI-00023 Government, Finland

4 March 2022

Dear H.E. Minister Haavisto,

**Re: Support for Palestinian human rights and international law at the 49<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the UN Human Rights Council**

The undersigned organisations present the following key messages and recommendations on the situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt)/Israel to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, in light of the 49<sup>th</sup> session of the Human Rights Council (HRC). The letter takes note of the [EU Priorities in UN Human Rights Fora in 2022](#), namely the EU's commitment to respect, protect and fulfil human rights and the rule of law "consistently and coherently in all areas of its external action".

**We urge Finland to support the three resolutions under agenda items 2 and 7, presented by Pakistan on behalf of the Organisation of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC) at HRC 49.** The resolutions, covering accountability, human rights, illegal Israeli settlements, and the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people, provide an opportunity for Finland to meaningfully reiterate its longstanding commitment to international law and human rights standards, universally and away from exceptionalism.

**Supporting accountability at the 49<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Human Rights Council**

During HRC 49, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the oPt will present his final report to the Council. **We strongly encourage Finland to acknowledge, welcome and engage with the content of the Special Rapporteur's timely report, which is anticipated to address root causes of Israel's ongoing apparent crimes against the Palestinian people, namely Israel's apartheid against the Palestinian people, which drive the continuously worsening human rights situation in the oPt/Israel.**

In recent years, there has been mounting recognition that Israel is committing the crime of apartheid by UN treaty bodies, UN Special Procedures, and UN Member States. A growing number of civil society actors, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have highlighted Israel's institutional discrimination against the Palestinian people as amounting to the crime of apartheid. Civil society organisations in Finland such as Amnesty Finland [have endorsed](#) these findings. **We urge Finland to recognise this reality, including in its statements during HRC 49 and to call on Israel to abolish all discriminatory laws, policies and practices.**

The ongoing grave violations of international law against the Palestinian people are enabled by the continued failure of the international community, including the EU and its Member States, to hold Israel accountable. In May 2021, all European states members of the HRC abstained from voting on a historical resolution establishing an ongoing Commission of Inquiry (CoI) to investigate violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in the oPt and Israel from April 2021.

It is incumbent upon UN Member States to ensure that all HRC-mandated mechanisms are implemented without political interference or obstruction and that these mechanisms are allocated the required resources to fulfil their mandates. **We therefore call on Finland to express support for the Col during HRC 49, and to support the annual updating of the UN database of businesses involved in Israel's illegal settlements** as originally mandated by HRC resolution 31/36 of 2016. Such mechanisms, founded on international law, are necessary to dismantle the ongoing systemic oppression in the oPt/Israel and to ensure accountability and justice.

### **Support for Palestinian civil society organisations**

Noting [the priorities](#) during Finland's current term at the HRC, namely the protection of human rights defenders and journalists, and following Israel's most recent unsubstantiated designation of six prominent Palestinian human rights and humanitarian organisations as "terrorist" and "unlawful", **we urge Finland to voice support for Palestinian civil society by calling on Israel to immediately revoke the designations**, as [France](#) recently did.

These designations are the culmination of a years-long, aggressive Israeli campaign seeking to defame, delegitimize, silence and demobilize civil society and UN bodies working to promote human rights for the Palestinian people and pursuing international accountability. Such attacks, targeting [world-renowned](#) civil society actors, amount to political persecution that must be unequivocally rejected by Finland. **It is imperative that Finland echo [the call of Finnish parliamentarians](#) and reject these politically motivated designations without further delay to ensure the continuity and protection of Palestinian civil society and human rights defenders.**

### **Opposing settlements, administrative detention, and the closure of Gaza**

Israeli annexation of Palestinian lands has accelerated dramatically, allowing for unlawful settlement expansion. Meanwhile, Palestinians – especially in Area C and Jerusalem – have been subjected to increased house demolitions, evictions, forcible transfer and displacement. This unlawful conduct is accompanied by an increase in the scale and gravity of settler violence and harassment targeting Palestinians, which is facilitated and encouraged by the State of Israel and its military. In July 2021, the Israeli government [made public its plan](#) to thwart any attempt by the Palestinian Authority, civil society and the international community to maintain Palestinian presence in Area C, further entrenching its annexation of the occupied West Bank.

In line with the international consensus on the illegality of Israeli settlements, associated violations and grave breaches, **we urge Finland to call on Israel to take all necessary measures to immediately stop its annexation and illegal settlement enterprise, dismantle existing settlements, cease the forcible transfer and displacement of protected persons from occupied territory, and afford protection and access to effective remedy against settler violence and attacks.** It is worth recalling that in December 2021, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the oPt, together with civil society, [addressed](#) the Finnish Parliament with a focus on products originating from settlements in occupied territory. It is also important to note the [European Citizen's Initiative](#) calling for a law at a European level to end trade with illegal settlements in occupied territories such as the oPt.

Since January 2022, the 500 Palestinian prisoners held in Israel's administrative detention – without charge or trial – have boycotted Israel's military courts in protest of the use of administrative detention to suppress Palestinian human rights defenders, students, political activists and children, and to restrict their exercise of the rights to freedom of expression and association. During HRC 49, **we urge Finland to demand that Israel end its policy of administrative detention and release all political prisoners and human rights defenders in its custody**, including Ms. Shatha Odeh Director of the Health Work Committees (HWC). [Amal Nakhleh](#) is yet another case that further demonstrates that no one is exempt from Israel's arbitrary policy of administrative detention and deliberate medical neglect for those with grave health conditions. In this regard, Israel must respect international human rights and humanitarian law.

Lastly, we call on Finland **to urge Israel to immediately, fully and unconditionally lift its prolonged illegal closure and blockade of the Gaza Strip**, and end all associated unlawful restrictions imposed on the movement of people and goods, which have denied the basic rights of over two million Palestinians, including the rights to life, water, food, and health.

**On behalf of the undersigned, we wish to request a meeting with your office to further discuss the aforementioned issues pertaining to the human rights situation in the oPt/Israel at your earliest convenience.**

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

- **Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association**
- **Al Mezan Center for Human Rights**
- **Al-Haq, Law in the Service of Man**
- **Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)**
- **Defense for Children International – Palestine (DCI-Palestine)**
- **ICAHD Finland**
- **The Palestine Institute for Public Diplomacy (PIPD)**