

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

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# ISRAEL/OPT: AMNESTY WELCOMES UN HRC SPECIAL SESSION TO ADDRESS CRISIS

In the context of the alarming, and rapidly deteriorating, situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel, Amnesty International welcomes today's news that the UN Human Rights Council will hold a Special Session on 27 May 2021.

Over the past week Amnesty International has documented numerous violations and issued numerous calls. On 10 May, Amnesty International [documented](#) a chilling pattern of Israeli forces using abusive and wanton force against largely peaceful Palestinian protesters in recent days, including in al-Aqsa Mosque and Sheikh Jarrah in occupied East Jerusalem. On 12 May, Amnesty International [condemned](#) war crimes and other violations of international humanitarian law by both Israeli forces and Palestinian armed groups – including indiscriminate rocket fire by Palestinian armed groups and deliberate targeting of civilian objects and extensive unjustified destruction of property by Israeli forces. Expressing fear of a further spike in civilian bloodshed and destruction homes and infrastructure, Amnesty International called for urgent action by the UN Security Council, including a comprehensive arms embargo on Israel, Hamas, and other Palestinian groups.

Amnesty International pressed for Israel to address the root causes of the latest flare up in violence, including longstanding impunity for war crimes and other serious violations of international law as well as Israel's ongoing illegal settlement expansion, the blockade of Gaza, and the forcible eviction and dispossession of Palestinians such as those in Sheikh Jarrah. On 17 May, Amnesty International [condemned](#) a pattern of Israeli attacks against residential buildings, killing entire families and causing wanton destruction of civilian property that may amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity, asked the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate these attacks as a matter of urgency in addition to the indiscriminate rocket fire by Palestinian armed groups towards civilian areas of Israel, and urged states to consider exercising universal jurisdiction over those who commit war crimes.

Independent human rights experts have also been sounding the alarm as well, both regarding recent events and the climate of impunity that pervades Israel's actions. In mid-April, a group of Special Procedures mandate holders [warned](#) of rising levels of Israeli settler violence in a climate of impunity, calling for an end to its settlement enterprise and for Palestinians to be protected from settler violence, with perpetrators being held to account for their actions. On 11 May, two Special Procedures mandate holders also [deplored](#) the brutal police response to protests in East Jerusalem and urged Israeli authorities to remove the threat of eviction of Palestinian families, have their property rights respected and legally regularized, and annul all discriminatory legislation from its laws. On 18 May, a group of Special Procedures [called](#) for an end to the violence and noted the failures of the international community to act with more unity and success to bring an immediate end to the violence, including the paralysis of the UN Security Council.

In his most recent report to the UN General Assembly, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 concluded that a "constant theme" of four major reports commissioned by the Human Rights Council has been "the serious violations of human rights and humanitarian laws by Israel, the necessity to ensure Israeli accountability and the prevailing culture of exceptionalism." (A/74/507, Para 66.)

A notable aspect of the current crisis is its simultaneous manifestation in all areas of Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including the forced evictions in Sheikh Jarrah and Israeli forces' attack on worshipers and protesters in Al-Aqsa mosque, the armed conflict between Israel, Hamas and Palestinian groups in Gaza, excessive force by Israeli forces against protesters and violence by settlers against Palestinians in the West Bank, and the intercommunal violence between Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel. This crisis also has deep roots, occurring in a context institutionalized discrimination against Palestinians living under Israeli rule in both Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and chronic impunity. The Human Rights Council is equipped to look broadly at all the human rights issues which are central

to the current crisis.

This week the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, after detailing the threats of forced eviction in Sheikh Jarrah, the violence by Israeli forces around al Aqsa mosque during Ramadan, the severe escalation of attacks from and on Gaza, the shocking race-based incitement in Israel, and the sharp deterioration of the situation over the past weeks, [called](#) for independent thorough investigations into all allegations of violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

As of yet the Security Council has failed to launch a credible response, even a statement, due to the opposition of a single permanent member -- the United States. While there is an initiative by France for a Security Council resolution that amongst other things calls for an immediate ceasefire, it is unlikely to introduce any further measures under Chapter VII, such as a comprehensive arms embargo, or any concrete support for investigations and accountability. There is no confirmed indication of whether the US might support or veto this resolution.

In this context, urgent action by the Human Rights Council in the form of a Special Session is even more needed. At this extraordinary session, it will be essential for the Human Rights Council to do its part to break the cycle of impunity that pervades this crisis. The Human Rights Council should respond to the High Commissioner's call for independent thorough investigations, in parallel to and complementing the ongoing independent investigation by the ICC. Such an investigative mechanism to be set up by the Human Rights Council must be mandated to conduct immediate collection and preservation of evidence as critical to ensure accountability, for potential use by the ICC and other possible international justice processes, including at the national level. It should have the ability to cooperate with the ICC, as well as future investigations or proceedings by national, regional or other possible international justice processes.