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## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S STATEMENT TO THE UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE ON THE OCCASION OF THE REVIEW OF ISRAEL

Honourable Committee members,

I thank you for the opportunity to brief the Committee, and today, I will focus on our concerns related to Israel's compliance with the Covenant and our conclusion that successive Israeli governments have built and maintained a system of apartheid over Palestinians across Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) and against Palestinian refugees and their descendants outside the territory. In our written submission<sup>1</sup>, we have enumerated at least 15 relevant provisions in the Covenant and referenced an in-depth report we published earlier this month which is the result of four years of investigations.<sup>2</sup>

Amnesty International understands **apartheid** as condemned by the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination to constitute the creation and maintenance of a system or regime of oppression and domination by one racial group over another.

Amnesty International has evidenced Israel's **intent** to oppress and dominate Palestinians. That intent is partly manifested in the statements of Israeli officials in successive administrations that they act to ensure Jewish demographic hegemony. In Jerusalem, for example, the targets are explicit in government planning documents: 60% Jews to 40% Palestinians.

We have also in our investigation, analysed **four strategies** Israel has employed to oppress and dominate Palestinians, tracing back the laws, policies and practices of which they are composed.

**Firstly, the territorial fragmentation of the Palestinian population between Israel, East Jerusalem, the rest of the West Bank, Gaza and the Palestinian refugee diaspora.** We of course recognize that Palestinian citizens of Israel enjoy the right to vote and run for election in Israel. There is currently even a Palestinian party in the governing coalition. However, even though Israel controls major aspects of the daily lives of Palestinians, only 25% of Palestinians have the right to vote. Consequently, Palestinians have been unable to meaningfully influence Israel's laws, policies and practices.

**Secondly, Israel's segregation of Palestinians.** In Israel itself, the state has granted Palestinian citizens a citizenship inferior to that of Jewish Israelis. For instance, it gives them no right to family reunification. In annexed East Jerusalem, it has granted Palestinians permanent residence instead of citizenship – though this status is permanent in name only. In the rest of the West Bank, it subjects Palestinians to draconian military orders restricting movement. In the Gaza Strip, it has cut off Palestinians, under an official "separation" policy, from the rest of the occupied territories - as well as the rest of the world. Israel also denies millions of Palestinian refugees the right of return.

**Thirdly, Israel's dispossession of Palestinians' land and property.** In Israel itself, the state has excluded Palestinians from accessing the overwhelming majority of public land for development or purchasing or leasing property on it, even though this land was largely expropriated from Palestinians. In the Negev/Naqab, its zoning plans have left the Bedouin villages there "off the map" such that they are invisible in Israel's development policies. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, it systematically denies building permits to Palestinians, and expands illegal settlements, resulting in repeated home demolitions and forced evictions. In Gaza, it denies Palestinians access to 35% of its agricultural land and 85% of coastal fishing waters.

**Fourthly, Israel's deprivation of Palestinians' social and economic rights.** In Israel and East Jerusalem, the state is responsible for chronic and discriminatory underinvestment in Palestinian communities. In Jerusalem, even though Palestinian residents comprise 38% of the population of the city, it allocates them less than 10% of Jerusalem Municipality's budget. In the rest of the West Bank, it deprives Palestinians of the opportunity to benefit from their own resources: they can't access the most fertile agricultural land or their oil. In Gaza, Israel's illegal blockade has debilitated the health system and other essential services, as well as devastating the economy.

So, while we acknowledge differences in laws and practices controlling Palestinians' lives in different territories, we believe the oppression and domination of Palestinians can only be properly understood when looking **holistically** at the situation across Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

We conclude that Israel operates a **system of apartheid** against Palestinians wherever it exercises control over their lives - in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories and with respect to Palestinian refugees.

Amnesty International has documented how, to further its system of apartheid, Israel has committed widespread, as well as systematic, patterns of human rights violations against Palestinians. They include **forcible transfer**, through home demolitions and forced evictions; widespread **administrative detention and torture**; widespread **excessive and lethal force** against protesters, many of whom are on the streets because, without a vote, they have no other way of influencing the state that controls their lives; and the the denial of the rights of both **Palestinian refugees** and Palestinian citizens of Israel to reclaim their homes, land and property. We acknowledge that many of these patterns are currently most severe in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Nevertheless, our investigation shows how the Israeli authorities are also committing them inside Israel. NGO partners are today providing additional information on these patterns of violations.

Our formal submission presents a list of **recommendations** to the Israeli authorities to address these violations and, more broadly, dismantle their system of apartheid. We kindly invite the Committee to consider the relevance of our analysis and recommendations as part of its dialogue with the Israeli government.

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International, *Israel's apartheid against Palestinians: Cruel system of domination and crime against humanity- Submission to the UN Human Rights Committee*, 134th session, 28 February 2022 – 25 March 2022 (Index: MDE 15/5234/2022), February 2022, [amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE15/5234/2022/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE15/5234/2022/en/)

<sup>2</sup> Amnesty International, *Israel's Apartheid against Palestinians: Cruel System of Domination and Crime against Humanity* (Index: MDE 15/5141/2022), February 2022, [amnesty.org/en/documents/mde15/5141/2022/en](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde15/5141/2022/en)