



February 13, 2017

The Honorable Donald Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump,

On behalf of Amnesty International, I am writing to you to urge you to make it abundantly clear in your upcoming meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that the United States government opposes all Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. This meeting offers you a unique opportunity to press Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to immediately halt all settlement building and ensure that Israel fulfills its legal obligation to remove all settlers from the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

As you will be aware, this year marks 50 years since the start of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank (which includes East Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip. For nearly five decades, Israel has continued to build and expand its illegal settlements, and to transfer its own population into in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. At the end of December 2015 there were an estimated 621,000 Israeli settlers living in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

We are deeply concerned by a recent statement made by your administration asserting that the existing Israeli settlements are “not an impediment to peace”, but that “the construction of new settlements or the expansion of existing settlements beyond their current borders may not be helpful in achieving that goal.” Such statements appear to condone unlawful actions undertaken by Israel in violation of international law and in defiance of U.N. Security Council resolutions. We fear that they will further embolden the Israeli government to take steps to expand and legitimize illegal settlements, entrenching facts on the ground, and leading to further violations of the human rights of Palestinians.

The illegality of Israeli settlements has long been recognized by the international community and was most recently reaffirmed by U.N. Security Council resolution 2234, passed in December 2016, which reiterated its call on Israel to cease all settlement activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Israel's policy of settling civilians constitutes a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and, according to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, amounts to a war crime.

In an alarming move, since the start of the year, the Israeli authorities have announced the construction of 6,219 new housing units in Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including in East Jerusalem. Last week, the Knesset, Israel's parliament passed a law, which has retroactively legalized an Israeli grab of privately owned Palestinian land. The law could apply to up to 4,000 settler homes in 53 West Bank settlements and outposts.

Israel's policy of settling civilians in the Occupied Palestinian Territories is not only a flagrant violation of international law, but has also resulted in grave human rights violations. Over the past 50 years, Palestinian civilians have faced forcible displacement, land confiscation, extensive demolition of homes and restrictions on movement, as a direct consequence of Israel's settlement policy. Confiscation, seizure and appropriation of land for the construction of illegal settlements and "by-pass" roads, fence/wall and other related infrastructure used to support them have also had a devastating impact on Palestinians' rights to an adequate standard of living, to work, to health, and to education. These measures have had a crippling effect on the Palestinian economy.

Settlements also deprive Palestinians of access to natural resources such as water, fertile land, stone quarries and the mineral rich Dead Sea. Israel controls and restricts Palestinian access to water to a level that neither meets the Palestinian population's needs nor constitutes a fair distribution of shared water resources. Many Palestinian communities survive on barely 20 litres of water per capita a day – the minimum amount recommended by the World Health Organization.

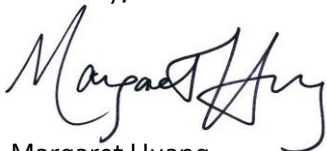
The U.S. cannot afford to stay silent in the face of such flagrant disregard for international law. We note that your administration has stated that it has yet to take a position on Israeli settlements. This is a break from long standing U.S. policy which has viewed the

establishment of civilian settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories as inconsistent with international law. This is very disturbing.

It is crucial that you send a clear message to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that the U.S. will not tolerate continuous settlement construction and expansion. Israel must immediately halt all construction of settlements and related infrastructure as a first step towards removing all settlers from the occupied territories.

I thank you in advance for your consideration to the concerns raised in this letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Margaret Huang". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Margaret" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Huang".

Margaret Huang
Executive Director
Amnesty International USA