

United Nations report declares “perpetual occupation” as “the underlying root cause” of Israeli-Palestinian conflict

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A report commissioned by the United Nations’ Human Rights Council states that Israel’s “perpetual occupation” of Palestinian areas and its refusal to end it underpin the tensions between Palestinians and Israelis.

The authors insist that ending of the occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza since their capture by Israel in the 1967 Arab Israeli war in full conformity with the UN’s Security Council resolutions is essential to end “the persistent cycle of violence.”

The report, published June 7, is the first by a Commission of Inquiry headed by former UN human rights chief Navi Pillay and two other experts from India and Australia, set up last year following an 11-day war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. That war killed at least 261 people, including 67 children, in Gaza, and 14 people, including two children, in Israel.

The Commission is the first to have an “ongoing” mandate from the UN human rights agency. This includes alleged human rights abuses before and after the war and the investigation of the “root causes” of the tensions.

The report states, “What has become a situation of perpetual occupation was cited by Palestinian and Israeli stakeholders to the commission as the one common issue” that amounts to the “underlying root cause” of recurrent tensions, instability and protracted conflict. The evidence convincingly indicates that Israel has no intention of ending the occupation. Instead, it is pursuing “clear policies for ensuring complete control” over the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including East Jerusalem, and is taking steps to alter the demography through its creation of a repressive environment for the Palestinians and a favourable one for Israeli settlers.

The Commission says that Israel has failed to uphold international law and conventions relating to war and human rights and carry the UN’s previous

recommendations. These include ending the occupation, ceasing settlement expansion, ending forced evictions, ceasing the policy of administrative detention, particularly of children, lifting the restriction of freedom of movement that fragment Palestinian society, including by lifting the blockade on Gaza, allowing Palestinians access to their natural resources, and eliminating laws and practices that discriminate against Palestinians, including road segregation for the exclusive use of the Israeli population.

The commission accuses Israel of affording “different civil status, rights and legal protection” for Palestinians living in Israel, noting that Israel operates a three-tier system of laws granting different rights to Jewish Israeli citizens, Palestinian citizens of Israel and East Jerusalem’s Palestinian residents. It cites Israel’s Nation-State of the Jewish People Law (2018) as effectively constituting racial discrimination by granting nationality rights only to its Jewish as opposed to Palestinian citizens and the recent renewal of a law that denies citizenship to Palestinians married to Israelis, calling for action to ensure equal human rights.

Last week, Prime Minister Naftali Bennett’s fragile coalition lost its razor-thin majority and was unable to secure the first reading of a bill renewing civilian legal rights for Jewish settlers in the West Bank. Opposition leader and former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s political bloc had opposed it trying to bring down the government. If the bill does not pass by the end of this month, Israeli settlers will be formally placed, like the Palestinians, under military law and denied entry into Israel.

The report warns that “impunity” for perpetrators of violence is feeding resentment among Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. This is an implicit indictment of Washington and the major European powers

that have built up Israel's military and provided political and diplomatic support, particularly at the UN Security Council where the US has vetoed scores of resolutions condemning Israel's actions. The commission will, it concludes, examine the responsibilities of "third States in ensuring respect for and full compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, in Israel and in the occupied Syrian Golan."

The report will be discussed at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva next week, which has no power to make legally binding decisions.

Israel predictably dismissed the report. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs called it "a waste of money and effort" that amounted to a witch-hunt. Israel had boycotted the inquiry, accusing it of bias, and barred entry to its investigators.

State Department spokesperson Ned Price cynically reiterated the US's opposition to the inquiry, saying the report does nothing to alleviate US concerns over "a one-sided, biased approach that does nothing to advance the prospects for peace." The Trump administration pulled out of the UN Human Rights Council in 2018 over what it described as its "chronic bias" against Israel, with the Biden administration only fully rejoining this year.

The world's mainstream press has not seen fit to comment on the UN's report, including those champions of human rights imperialist intervention the *New York Times* and the *Guardian*. Their silence underlines the hypocrisy of US/NATO claims to be defending "democracy" in Ukraine while they provide support for an apartheid and militarist regime in Israel.

The commission's report comes as Bennett's coalition government, made up of parties across the political spectrum including those ostensibly supporting a Palestinian statelet, is unleashing a torrent of repression against the Palestinians in the West Bank, including deliberate killings and injuries, arbitrary arrests, torture, persecution and collective punishment. Last Wednesday and Thursday, Israeli forces killed four Palestinians across the West Bank in just 24 hours, bringing the total number of Palestinians killed this year to 62. Riot police and mounted units have injured hundreds of protesters and arrested hundreds more as they crack down on those protesting Israeli brutality and unbearable social conditions.

As far as Israel is concerned, no one is immune from its murderous activities. Last month, the Israeli military deliberately shot and killed Shireen Abu Akleh, the

widely respected veteran *Al Jazeera Arabic* reporter, who was clearly visible and wearing a press identifier. According to Reporters Without Borders, this brings to 35 the number of journalists killed while working in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories since 2000. Abu Akleh's murder and the police's attack on her funeral procession make clear that Israel will not tolerate the reporting of its brutal suppression of the Palestinians.

Bennett has issued orders to shoot Palestinians who pose no immediate threat and called for the formation of armed vigilante groups, based in part on civilian volunteers, including from the "New Hashomer" (The New Guardian), a far-right militia.

The silence of the imperialist powers confirms the cynicism of their use of "human rights" rhetoric to justify wars, military interventions, coups, regime change operations, referral to the International Criminal Court and sanctions against those who threaten their predatory interests.

The US and NATO have denounced Russia for "war crimes" in Ukraine and China for committing "crimes against humanity and genocide against Muslim Uyghurs" based on unconfirmed or non-existent evidence. Washington's support for Israel is bound up with Tel Aviv's role as its attack dog against its rivals in the region and its own policy of normalising wars of conquest, occupation and repression. It signifies that the brutal methods used by Israel in suppressing the Palestinians will be used against the working class and youth that revolt against the ruling elites' dictates putting the pursuit of corporate profit before human need.



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