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HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN THE TERRITORIES OCCUPIED BY ISRAEL SINCE 1967

ISSUE

Human rights violations in the territories occupied (OT) by Israel since 1967 continue to be of major concern to the international community. Canada, a party to the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in the Time of War (the Geneva Convention of 1949), strongly advocates that Israel, the occupying power, respect the *de jure* applicability of the Convention. Despite the Israeli/PLO Declaration of Principles (DOP) of September 13, there has been a resurgence of serious human rights violations in recent months amid uncertainties surrounding the implementation of the DOP. On a positive note, Israel has allowed the remaining 200 Islamist militants, expelled in December 1992, to return to the OT.

BACKGROUND

Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister, Dr. Yossi Beilin, is reported to have said that "there is no such thing as a benign occupation." Regrettably, major breaches of the Convention by the occupation authorities continue despite appeals made by the UN Commission on Human Rights, and the International Committee on the Red Cross (ICRC). These include the Israeli demolitions of the houses of alleged insurgents; the execution of wanted activists by military personnel; reports of land confiscation; the imprisonment of large numbers of Palestinians; the expulsion of militants without due process; collective punishment, such as limitations on freedom of movement; unacceptable levels of force in quelling disturbances, including the use of live ammunition, and harsh methods of interrogation.

Although the signing of the DOP gave rise to expectations of rapid change in the nature of the occupation, circumstances proved otherwise. Violent clashes recently have erupted involving Israeli settlers and Palestinian extremists, fuelling tensions and undermining the peace process. They often result in the loss of innocent lives. However, the successful implementation of the DOP should improve the climate if, as expected, it is followed by a phased withdrawal of the IDF from populated areas in the OT, to be accompanied by a quick deployment of Palestinian police.

Given Israel's parliamentary régime and democratic traditions, human rights issues are better documented and followed up in the OT than in many neighbouring states. Both Israeli and international NGOs have widespread access to monitor human rights abuses. Several international organizations have authority to require respect for human rights when violations occur, specifically the UN Commission on Human Rights, ICRC and UNWRA (the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees in the Near East).

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