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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:
Priority Theme: “Fostering social development and social justice through social policies to accelerate progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to achieve the overarching goal of poverty eradication”

Joint Statement submitted by, “Institute of Sustainable Development and International Foundation Witness Ashoora” non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.
Statement

The siege of Gaza and extreme poverty

Since June 2007, the people of Gaza have been confined to the 365 square kilometers enclave of the Strip and subject to a land, air, and sea embargo. The entry of goods has been reduced to a minimum, while external trade and exports have been stopped. Meanwhile, the population has very limited access to safe water and lacks a regular electricity supply or even a proper sewage system. The Israel-led blockade of the Gaza Strip cost the Palestinian enclave more than $16bn and pushed more than one million people below the poverty line in just more than 10 years, according to a new United Nations report.

Largely due to the blockade, poverty, high unemployment rates, and other factors, nearly 80 percent of Gazans now rely on humanitarian assistance. More than half of Gaza’s just over 2 million people live in poverty, and nearly 80 percent of the youth are unemployed. According to the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, 63% of Gaza’s population is dependent on international aid. UNRWA claims the blockade has devastated Gaza’s economy, estimating that more than 80% of the population is living in poverty. Since 2007, most of the food, water, and medicine that comes into Gaza has first passed through Israel. However, after Hamas’s surprise attack last week, all supplies have been blocked from entering the region. Unless Palestinians in the Strip get access to the outside world, it is difficult to see anything but underdevelopment being the fate of the Gaza Palestinian society. It is really shocking that in the 21st century, two million people can be left in that kind of condition.

The latest report by UNCTAD on its assistance to the Palestinian people shows that the economy of the Occupied Palestinian Territory grew by 7.1% in 2021, following an 11.3% contraction in 2020 in the aftermath of the COVID-19 shock. Palestinian GDP in 2021 remained 5.1% below its pre-pandemic level, the report states. And its limited recovery was unevenly concentrated in the West Bank, while Gaza lagged, and the divergence between these two Palestinian regions widened.

Based on this report, the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic in the Occupied Palestinian Territory has not been unique, but the systematic barriers imposed under occupation and the lack of fiscal and monetary policy space have deprived the Palestinian government of the policy tools available in other countries to mitigate the fallout and accelerate recovery. The impact of the pandemic has reached beyond the poor; 72 percent of households in the West Bank reported income losses, compared with 57 percent of households in Gaza. Meanwhile, food insecurity increased from 9 to 23 percent in the West Bank and from 50 to 53 percent in Gaza.

In 2021, unemployment remained high, at 26%, in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, while in Gaza over half the workforce was unemployed, and 83% of workers received less than the minimum wage. The brutal siege has left at least 80% of families in Gaza reliant on international aid to meet their basic needs. The unemployment rate is over 40% which means the people in Gaza are struggling to make ends meet.

Families fraught with poverty are dealing with many difficulties such as food insecurity, cramped housing, unable to pay for education, medicines, and lifesaving treatments. With a poor economy, the opportunity to earn a living is severely limited. The decades-long siege has impacted industries and labour work. Unemployment levels in Gaza are amongst the highest in the world: The Q1 jobless rate in 2022 was 46.6%, compared with an average of 34.8% in 2006. Youth unemployment for the same period (age 15-29) stands at 62.5%.
More than two weeks after Israel imposed a “complete siege” and cut off entry of supplies to Gaza, people in the territory are facing an unprecedented crisis. Hundreds of thousands in the north of the Gaza Strip have fled their homes after Israel issued an evacuation order in preparation for an expected ground invasion – but they have nowhere safe to go to. For more than a week, Israeli airstrikes have pummeled Gaza in retaliation for an attack by Hamas militants that killed 1,300 people. According to the UN, 1 million Palestinians have been driven from their homes in Gaza, and the Palestinian health ministry says 2,329 Palestinians have been killed since hostilities began. The only crossing between Egypt and Gaza has been bombed, and Cairo and Hamas have not let people out. Power is off, clean water is scarce, and the last fuel for hospital emergency generators could expire, leaving Gaza facing a humanitarian crisis.

We are deeply concerned that extreme poverty continues to spread in Palestine, regardless of their economic, social and cultural situation, and seriously affects the most vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals, families and groups, who are thus hindered in the exercise of their human rights and their fundamental freedoms.

We believe that the grave suffering of the vast majority of human beings who live in conditions of extreme poverty requires the immediate attention of the international community and the adoption of specific measures to eliminate extreme poverty and exclusion from society.

Recommendation

We draw the world's attention to the fact that the ongoing conflicts are currently disrupting the access of vulnerable populations in Gaza to daily necessities such as food, causing severe energy shortages and preventing people from working, which deprives people of their livelihoods and can lead to extreme poverty, and we call on the Commission to:

• the restoration of the basic human rights of people in Gaza, their right to free movement, healthcare, study and work
• to lift the blockade of Gaza and to continue to give priority to the eradication of poverty in Palestine.
• to give the highest priority to its consideration of the item on poverty eradication in countries involved in war such as Gaza in its agenda, and in that regard, as a contribution to the Third United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty.

Also, we urge UN Secretary-General António Guterres and senior UN leadership to make an emergency visit to the oPt in an attempt to ensure respect for international law and demonstrate solidarity with affected persons and humanitarians. We plead with world leaders and actors on the ground to prioritize the preservation of human life above all else. Anything less will forever be a stain on our collective conscience.