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An Appeal to Stop Human Rights Violations in the Occupied Territories

Foreword

The conditions under which the Palestinians live in the Occupied Territories (the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip) are grievous. Violations of their human rights by the Israeli authorities are commonplace. In describing this situation, I intend to assign top priority to the inflicting of human suffering and the possibility of its alleviation.

Accordingly, I am going to concentrate on mass-scale repression rather than on the killings, torture, administrative detentions, etc. which, although more deplorable, occur more sporadically and affect only a smaller proportion of the population. This approach also calls for describing human rights violations in terms of experiences, without recourse to legalistic classification.

The focus of this appeal regarding the daily inflicting of suffering on masses of people also precludes discussing the diverse forms of discrimination practiced by the Israeli authorities with respect to land, water and other resources and the administrative decisions affecting vital individual choices.

Both the violations of human rights and the discrimination practiced against the population of the occupied territories can be directly attributed to the absolute power vested in the military governors who control the territories. They can issue "regulations" that automatically assume the status of law. Their authority is not limited to particular areas of jurisdiction and their decisions can be redressed only by appeals to the Chief of Staff of the Israeli army. The combined legislative, executive and judicial authority of the Israeli army over the Palestinian population of the Occupied Territories is therefore unlimited.

This system has persisted without any essential alterations for more than 23 years, dating back to the occupation of the territories in 1967. For the sake of comparison, it may be recalled that the powers of the American (and other Allied) military governors in Germany and Japan were significantly reduced only a few years after the occupation of these countries commenced and that they were ultimately rescinded altogether.

The most urgent task ahead is to restrict the arbitrary powers of the Israeli military government. In the meantime, the rule of the Israeli army in the occupied territories should be subject to inspection carried out by an international body -