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February 9, 2021

To:  
Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus  
WHO Director-General  
[mediainquiries@who.int](mailto:mediainquiries@who.int)

**Subject: The State of Israel renunciation of its obligations under international law to ensure the Covid-19 vaccination of the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza Strip**

Greetings,

1. This appeal is sent to you in the name of "Combatants for Peace", an Israeli-Palestinian NGO, which is committed to promoting peace and the ending of the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. The NGO's actions are based on building partnerships for a bi-national activity based on non-violence and activism.
2. Unfortunately, the State of Israel renounces its obligations under international law to ensure the Covid-19 vaccination of the Palestinian population in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.
3. Despite Israel's successful roll-out of its vaccination program against COVID-19, which in the recent days began to include any Israeli citizen above the age of 16 – including Israeli settlers that lives illegally in the West Bank – until now the Israeli government agreed to transfer to the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank only a few thousand vaccines, predominantly for health workers.
4. As a result of this shameful and discriminating policy, the Israeli activists in "Combatants for Peace" were already able to vaccinate, while the Palestinian activists will have to wait for an unknown period of time.

5. As was clarified in a statement by UN human rights experts published on January 14, 2021<sup>1</sup>, as the occupying power of both the West Bank and the Gaza strip, Israel is required under the Fourth Geneva Convention, **“to the fullest extent of the means available to it”**, to maintain health services in the occupied territory. Article 56 requires Israel to adopt and apply **“the prophylactic and preventive measures necessary to combat the spread of contagious diseases and epidemics”** in cooperation with national and local authorities. If the protected population is inadequately supplied, the occupying power is required under the Convention to facilitate relief schemes **“by all means at its disposal”**. Even if some relief consignments, including ‘medical supplies’, are provided by others, Article 60 states that such consignments **“shall in no way relieve the occupying power of any of its responsibilities”** for health care to the protected population.
  
6. Since Israel lowered the bar of vaccination to age 16, and the Israeli government admitted that there is a significant slowdown in the Israeli public's desire to be vaccinated<sup>2</sup>, there's no doubt that the State of Israel has the means at its disposal to vaccinate at least the populations most at risk in the West Bank and the Gaza strip according to the WHO guidelines and recommendations.
  
7. Also, it is absolutely clear that the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank or the Hamas organization in the Gaza Strip do not have the political and economic bargaining power to compete in the global vaccine market. As is well known, there are even EU countries that complain about the rate of vaccines delivery to their own citizens.
  
8. The reasons for the Israeli government's policy appear to be purely political: The State of Israel is in the midst of an election campaign, and there is strong opposition in the electorate of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the right-wing parties to any minimal humanitarian and human gesture to the Palestinians.
  
9. In January, the Israeli Government showcased its appetite to take politically motivated decisions on the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines at the expense of human rights, when Interior-Minister Amir Ohana caused a significant delay in vaccines for prisoners, while ignoring both Israeli and International law<sup>3</sup>.
  
10. Just yesterday the state of Israel rejected the ICC's decision regarding the scope of its territorial jurisdiction on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26655&LangID=E>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.haaretz.co.il/health/corona/1.9506936>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.timesofisrael.com/ag-slams-ohana-says-he-wont-defend-order-in-court-to-not-vaccinate-prisoners/>

In a statement published by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs<sup>4</sup>, it was written that no sovereign Palestinian state exists nor does any territory belonging to such an entity, and that the State of Israel is a democracy committed to the rule of law and the international law. If this statement is true, then the State of Israel must morally and legally fulfill its obligations under the international law and ensure the health of the Palestinian population living in the territories occupied by it.

11. For all of the above, we seek the clear position of the WHO regarding the discriminatory, illegal and immoral policies of the State of Israel. Just as the WHO called for the provision of vaccines to citizens of poor countries<sup>5</sup>, so it is expected to call for vaccinations of populations under occupation, like the Palestinian people.

12. We therefore urge and encourage you to speak out against Israel's inaction to protect Palestinian lives, and to help influence the vaccine companies to require Israel the same.



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<sup>4</sup> <https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2021/Pages/Israel-rejects-the-ICC-s-decision-regarding-the-scope-of-its-territorial-jurisdiction-on-the-Israeli-Palestinian-conflict-7.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.voanews.com/science-health/who-poor-countries-missing-out-life-saving-covid-19-vaccines>