

Closing Remarks - Palestinian Housing Rights Conference

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Palestinian Housing Rights Conference

House demolitions and land confiscation has been the policy adopted by the Israeli Occupiers since the first days of the conquest of Palestine.

The Israelis have demolished hundreds of houses and confiscated thousands of dunums of land.

In response to the Israeli violations of the Palestinian right to housing; the Land Research Center, Arab Studies Society, organized an International Conference on the Palestinian Right to Housing that was held on May 29-30, 2011 in Ramallah.

It was held in the tenth anniversary of the death of the "prince of Jerusalem", Mr. Faisal al Huseini; and the sixteenth anniversary of the signing of the "Jerusalem Declaration", the Charter of the Palestine Housing Right Movement; approved by Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, the Human Rights Committee, The Subcommittee on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities on May 29, 2011.

The conference hosted a number of local and international experts, in the field of human rights, Palestinian political and national leaders, and a wide variety of the curious and victims of the Israeli aggressions.

The pillars of the conference were:

1. Israeli Occupation violations of the right to housing.
2. The Palestinian historical and legal right to land and adequate housing.
3. Experiences and mechanisms used to defend the Palestinian right to housing.
4. Future vision for the Palestinian right to housing.

The speakers discussed skills and experiences in the field of human rights and international conventions in addition to experiences in reconstruction and the Israeli interactions with this particular right.

Dr. Miloon Kothari, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, spoke about the efforts been taken all around the United Nations to advocate for and defend the Palestinians right to housing besides presenting techniques and mechanisms that might impose pressure of the "Israeli State" and, eventually, force it to comply with the International conventions.

While **Dr. Joseph Schechla**, coordinator of the Habitat International Coalition's Housing and Land Rights Network (HIC-HLRN), presented the evolution of the right to housing starting with the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in accordance to the right to adequate housing to the establishment of the UN Habitat and the International Habitat Coalition in 1976.

He presented the 1990 UN Declaration on the rights of indigenous people emphasizing on the Palestinian people right to self-determination guaranteed by the UN.

He also emphasized on the Palestinians right to return and compensation granted in Article 11 of the UN resolution 194 of 1949.

As for the women's role in defending the right to residency, Dr. Shivani Chaudhry, Associate Director, Housing and Land Rights Network, presented how Indian activist stood up against the government measures and violations of the right to housing.

In addition, **Dr. Muhammed Khaled**, Regional Director, Housing and Land Rights Network, presented some experiences in Latin America in providing adequate housing.

Nael Salman, Program Manager and Representative of the UN Habitat in the West Bank, spoke about the contribution of the UN Habitat in defending the Palestinian Right to land and housing; besides, he stressed on the rights of indigenous people right to adequate housing, a right granted by all the International conventions.

In regard to the Israeli measures and violations of the Palestinians right to housing, **Mr Jamal Talab**, Director, Land Research Center, presented the sequence of Israeli aggressions by impact and type while stressing on the effect of these aggressions on the Palestinians livelihoods in the West Bank, the Occupied City of Jerusalem, and Gaza Strip since the first day of the conquest of Palestine.

He also showed the various aspects of aid, especially legal, that LRC provides for the people and the attempts to find loopholes in the Israeli laws.

He called for all the local and International organizations to support the people of Jerusalem and aid them in defending their residences from the brutality of the Israeli Occupation.

Dr. Yosef Jabareen, lecturer on urban studies and planning, presented in a sequential manner the Israeli violations against the Palestinians rights in areas occupied in 1948. He presented numerous Israeli schemes, implemented or not, those were put with a purpose for uprooting Palestinians and erase their identities especially in Jerusalem.

He, in addition, spoke about the Israeli plan "2020", a plan for colonizing huge areas of Palestinian lands and attracting Jewish immigrants to reside in them.

Finally, **Mr Taiseer Meri**, General Manager, Golan for Development Society, spoke about the Israeli measures in the occupied Golan Heights; aggressions ranging from land confiscation, house demolitions, expropriating water sources, movement restrictions, etc.

There was a unanimous agreement on the fact that it is impossible for Palestinians to gain their just rights while living under the shadows of Occupation; the Israeli Occupation that demolishes houses, confiscates lands, restrict movement, etc.

It was agreed that a Palestinian colonies-free state on the borders of 1967 and with Jerusalem as its capital is the least of the just rights for the Palestinians, needless to say Palestinian refugees whether in Palestine or not.

Soon after the end of the dialogues and discussions, the conference was crowned by the launching of the Palestinian Right to Housing Movement in Participation with Palestinian NGO's concerned with the right to housing (Al Haq, Civic coalition for Defending the Palestinians' Rights in Jerusalem, Applied Research Institute – Jerusalem, Jerusalem Legal Aid Center, Jerusalem Development and Welfare Society, Palestinian Housing Council, the National Committee for Limiting the Wall Damage, the Popular Campaign against the Wall, Democracy and Workers Rights Center, Nidal Center, the Arab Thought Forum, and Al Maqdesee for society Development).

A number of recommendations have been put in place as the result of the contribution of participants, national and international:

1. All of the documents, presentations, and papers presented in the conference are the conference property and are part of it.
2. Urging LRC and the participants in the establishment of the core of the Palestinian Housing Right Movement to continue their meetings and preparations in order to formulate the movement and make it surface on national and international levels within 6 months and starting from June 1, 2011.
3. Calling all participants, representatives of their esteemed national and international organizations to support the inscription of a new Charter for the Palestinian Right to Housing while taking into consideration the emerging legal, social, and political challenges.
4. Urging the Palestinian leadership to support reunification and to stand up as a whole body against the Israelis and to rebuild what was demolished by the viciousness of the Occupation.
5. Urging all parties to keep track with all the international charters, coalitions, and conventions in regard to the right to housing and use them as a tool to preserve our rights.
6. Urging the Palestinian Legislative Council to agree on new laws that preserve the Palestinians, families and individuals, right to adequate housing.
7. Urging the Arab League, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Jerusalem Fund, and representatives of all Islamic and Arabic funds to preserve funds needed to rebuild Palestinian houses, to build new residential compounds, providing legal aid for Palestinians, and assisting Jerusalemites in paying the penalties imposed on them by the Israelis.
8. Urging all the Palestinian Organizations operating in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, areas occupied in 1948, and Golan to cooperate and coordinate their efforts in order to preserve the Palestinian right to adequate housing while preserving the right to return.
9. Urging all parties to combine efforts in an attempt to surface the Israeli violations and spread the word all around the world. In addition, preparing legal complaints to be presented to the International Courts.
10. Urging concerned Palestinian Governmental, non-Governmental, and private sector organizations to join efforts in order to present a report to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations in response to the Israeli report. Palestinians shall expose Israel and show the whole the injustice and brutality it is imposing on the Palestinians.
11. Advising all members of the Palestinian society, especially the youth, to form youth cooperatives to defend the right to housing and establish residential communities in the threatened area, as a mean for resistance.
12. Urging all the donors, which support the Palestinian rights, to give house demolitions priority, in the mean time, when Israel is defying all the international conventions and the UN resolutions.
13. Calling all educational institutions to make lectures to make the students familiar with such an important right.
14. Urging all the Palestinian artists and Journalists to document the Israeli violations.
15. Calling all the Israeli and Jewish parties, organizations, and individuals who believe in the human rights to stand up for the Palestinians and condemn the Israeli discriminatory actions.

16. Urging the United Nations and its Agencies to condemn the Israeli measures while labeling it as an occupying, brutal, and racist power and impose sanctions on it till it comply with the International laws.

The Participants have valued the efforts of the organizers of the Conference, mainly the Land Research Center, Arab Studies Society.

The Palestinians who have been living under Occupation have been deprived of their basic rights, mainly the right to land and housing because of the Israeli discriminatory and systematic measures apparent in land confiscations, house demolitions, destruction of property, arbitrary evictions, separating families, discriminatory planning, etc.

The right to housing is a right granted by all the international conventions, however, in Palestine, there is no one to preserve this right knowing that the international community is unable to stop Israel from destroying houses and confiscating Palestinian lands.