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Replies of the State of Palestine to the list of issues in relation to its initial report*

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I. General information

1. The Constitutional Court issued its ruling No. 5 of 2017, which endorsed the legal status in relation to other legislation of the international treaties and conventions to which the State of Palestine is a party. The ruling establishes a legislative hierarchy in which the Palestinian Declaration of Independence is at the top followed by the 2003 Basic Law, as amended, then by the international treaties and conventions to which the State of Palestine has acceded and, finally, by other current legislation. This means that the provisions of international treaties and conventions rank higher than domestic legislation once they have been ratified and published in the Official Gazette and have fulfilled the formal steps necessary for their promulgation in national law.
2. In its ruling, the Supreme Constitutional Court adopted a dualist system with respect to the application of international treaties in the Palestinian legal system, underscoring the fact that the provisions of such treaties – in order to be enforced at the national level – need to be incorporated into the domestic legislation of the State of Palestine, while also avoiding any inconsistency with the religious and cultural identity of the Palestinian people. The Constitutional Court also stressed the need to review relevant domestic laws with a view to ensuring their conformity with international mechanisms for the protection of human rights and dignity.
3. The State of Palestine is taking vigorous action to implement treaties at the national level by introducing domestic procedures for monitoring compliance with obligations arising from its ratification of those treaties and from the recommendations of human rights treaty bodies, as stated in the initial report. A high-level ministerial committee concluded that the basic requirement for the implementation of international treaties is to incorporate them into domestic legislation. Accordingly, it decided to establish a technical committee to review the legislation currently in force in the State of Palestine and to align it with international norms and with the conventions and protocols to which the State of Palestine has acceded. The Legislative Harmonization Committee is mandated to repeal or amend legal texts that are inconsistent with the provisions of such treaties, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to insert new articles into existing legislation, or to introduce new laws aimed at guaranteeing the implementation of treaty provisions.
4. The Constitutional Court's statement regarding the need to take account of national, religious and cultural identity does not entail restrictions on the implementation of international treaties or prevent them from taking precedence over national legislation. The Court's intention was to ensure that the national judiciary, when applying the provisions of international treaties, takes due account of fundamental values associated with national and religious identity, which are characteristics attributable to all peoples. The Court did not intend to impede the implementation of treaty provisions, to exclude them or to annul or restrict any of the fundamental rights contained therein. The State of Palestine, in fact, seeks to promote public welfare in a democratic society, in accordance with articles 4 and 5 of the Covenant.
5. With regard to the invocation of the provisions of the Covenant before domestic courts, even if they have not been incorporated into the Palestinian legal system because they have not yet been published in the Official Gazette, the provisions of human rights treaties and other international instruments to which the State of Palestine has acceded can nonetheless be invoked before judicial bodies prior to the completion of the formal stages leading to their publication in the Official Gazette. Human rights become mandatory and acquire legal status not only because they are enshrined in a legal instrument but also because they are fundamental rights guaranteed by the Palestinian Constitution. The provisions of human rights instruments have already been invoked before the domestic courts, and many Palestinian judges have issued rulings based on such instruments. In addition, the rights enshrined in the Covenant are applicable pursuant to domestic legislation and to other international instruments that have been published in the Official Gazette and that enshrine the same rights, such as those relating to labour rights and employment conditions; the right to freedom of expression; the protection of trademarks, copyright and patents; and equal access to public-sector employment. Other rulings handed down by Palestinian courts have extensively addressed the implementation of provisions concerning the rights of children and

persons with disabilities, the protection of their well-being and the promotion of their best interests. These include the Palestinian Children's Act, which is consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

6. As concerns the publication of the Covenant in the Official Gazette, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination have both been published already, and the possibility of publishing the remaining conventions is currently under examination.

II. Obstacles hindering the exercise of the rights enshrined in the Covenant in the context of occupation

7. The ongoing Israeli colonialist occupation and its associated crimes and violations constitute the greatest obstacle to the realization of the right to self-determination and national independence and of refugees' right of return. This state of affairs is a violation of the provisions of the Covenant and undermines the ability of the Palestinian Government to apply international treaties more generally. Additional factors include the policy of home demolitions, the confiscation of land and clearance revenues, the theft of water and natural resources and the settlement and annexation of Palestinian lands, as well as the illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip and the checkpoints that fragment the country. All of this has consequences on the rights of the Palestinian people wherever they may be, whether refugees or in the diaspora, and is aggravated by a significant decline in the volume of foreign aid. All these factors have an impact on the implementation of the Covenant.

1. Effects of the construction of the wall on the exercise of the rights enshrined in the Covenant

8. The construction of the wall and the colonialist system behind it, as well as the illegal racist and discriminatory policies and practices that accompany it, have the objective of expansion, the imposition of apartheid and the annexation of territories under Israeli sovereignty. The aim is to forcibly remove the Palestinian people and have colonizers take their place. According to reports issued by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics in 2021, the building of the wall entailed the appropriation 170 square kilometres that contained dozens of Palestinian villages and towns inhabited by 700,000 Palestinians, including about 330,000 Jerusalemites. The wall, in fact, affects all aspects of life for Palestinians and the exercise of their fundamental rights, including cultural, social and economic rights, as described below.

9. The wall has devoured around 46 per cent of the West Bank's 5,800 square kilometres, and it has isolated East Jerusalem from cities and villages in the West Bank thereby forcing thousands of Palestinians to seek permits from Israel, the occupying Power, to be able to continue their lives and move between their homes and their land.

10. Seventeen Palestinian villages inside the wall are no longer accessible to all the services provided by the Palestinian Government.

11. Around 37 per cent of the Palestinian villages that are dependent on agriculture and through which the wall passes have been deprived of their economic resources, because agriculture is the mainstay of livelihoods in those villages. The consequence of the illegal seizure of Palestinian land and natural resources by the occupying authorities and the imposition of restrictions and the requirement to obtain authorization before landowners can enter their own lands or bring in agricultural machinery means that any possibility of developing the land is entirely dependent upon the consent of the occupying Power.

12. The wall has almost completely deprived about 330,000 Palestinians in occupied Jerusalem of Palestinian crops and agricultural products because the occupying Power prevents traders in Jerusalem from importing agricultural goods from the West Bank.

13. According to a 2022 report from the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture, the construction of the wall will lead to a decrease in olive production over coming years as thousands of old fruit-bearing trees – that produce to 2,200 tons of oil – have been cut down. In addition, fruit production looks set to decrease by 50,000 tons per year, and vegetable production by 100,000 tons per year. Some 10,000 head of livestock will lose their grazing areas, and hundreds of greenhouses, bird farms and livestock sheds will be destroyed, causing severe damage to the Palestinian economy.

14. The construction of the wall leads to increased confiscation of lands, which in turn leads to the separation of Palestinian families and deprives Palestinian citizens of the right to family unification.

15. The wall has fundamentally altered the lines of communication connecting towns and villages to Jerusalem, with detours having to be built, mostly outside the wall. For example, the distance between Jerusalem and Abu Dis, which is not more than 5 kilometres, has become about 20 kilometres as a consequence of the wall, and the same holds true for other villages and towns around the wall. In addition to this is the impact the wall has had on Palestinian citizens' access to healthcare, education, work and other services, and its fragmentation of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including Jerusalem.

2. Effects of the crime of demolishing homes and structures owned by Palestinians

16. The Israeli policy of collective punishment through the demolition of Palestinian homes and buildings and the destruction of roads and agricultural facilities, is damaging the economy, obstructing the development programmes being run by the Palestinian Government, impeding private-sector activity and aggravating the difficulties Palestinians face in their daily lives. It also deprives people of the right to adequate accommodation where they can live in dignity, safety and privacy. This is in addition to the psychological damage they suffer when they are forcibly displaced from their homes and their lands and lose their property and livelihoods.

17. According to the Land Research Centre, between January and September 2022, Israel, the occupying Power, demolished 777 homes thereby forcibly displacing 3,493 Palestinians – among them 1,724 children – in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Israel also destroyed 22 public facilities (parks, roads, mosques and institutions) and 12 electricity grids and/or solar cell installations. In addition, notification was served on 40 public facilities serving residential neighbourhoods, as a consequence of which those neighbourhoods were deprived of certain services (electricity companies, schools, mosques, kindergartens, service institutions, roads and cemeteries).

18. Israel, the occupying Power, demolished 55 rearing sheds that housed 2,052 head of livestock, thereby harming both the beasts and the livelihoods of their owners.

19. By serving notification on 1,485 homes and other structures on the pretext that they had been built without permission or on land close to the wall, Israel, the occupying Power, caused material and psychological harm to more than 740 Palestinians, as well inducing in them feelings of insecurity.

3. Effects of restrictions imposed by the Israeli occupation on the State of Palestine in the exercise of its sovereignty and territorial integrity within the 1976 borders, especially in East Jerusalem and the so-called Area C and Area H2

20. The geographical and demographic situation in East Jerusalem has been changed and the status quo altered.

21. Ethnic cleansing and forcible displacement are followed by the entry of settlers who target Palestinians in East Jerusalem. In addition, home demolitions are ongoing, accompanied by a construction ban, while residency and family unification are denied

through the confiscation of identity cards and access to basic services, especially as concerns school buildings, is blocked. Institutions are closed while checkpoints suffocate the city and prevent millions of Palestinians from freely reaching the holy sites for their religious rituals or from going to schools, hospitals, markets and workplaces.

22. The legal and historical status quo of the city of Jerusalem is being changed as Muslims and Christians are being persecuted and attacks are carried out against their holy places in the city.

23. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) is being harried and pressured to cease its operations and to change its definition of Palestine refugees with a view to depriving them of their inherent right of return.

24. The Palestinian Government is being prevented from implementing infrastructure projects and providing services to its citizens. In addition, the private sector is prevented from rolling out agricultural, industrial, tourism and housing projects in large parts of Palestinian territory on the pretext that the areas in question, which cover around 62 per cent of the West Bank, are classified as being under the absolute control of the occupying Power.

25. Thanks to its control of crossing points and other facilities, Israel, the occupying Power, illegally deducts a monthly amount of 600 million shekels from the clearance revenues that it collects on behalf of the State of Palestine. This hinders development and hampers the ability of the Palestinian Government to provide services and pay the salaries of employees, and this has an impact on their cultural, social and economic rights.

26. Israel, the occupying Power, uses excessive and unjustified force in repeated aggressions against Palestinian people in towns and villages, which include summary executions, the targeting of women, children, journalists and doctors, and arbitrary detention, in complete disregard of its responsibilities as the occupying Power. According to United Nations reports, this has had many negative effects, among them:

(a) Between 5 and 7 August 2022, 49 Palestinians were illegally deprived of their right to life, including 17 children and 4 women. At the same time, 360 Palestinians were injured, including 151 children and 58 women, and some of them are suffering from long-term disabilities that require rehabilitation;

(b) During the Israeli attack against the Gaza Strip in May 2021, 261 Palestinians, including 67 children, were deprived of their right to life while more than 2,210 Palestinians were injured, including 685 children and 480 women, and some of them are suffering from long-term disabilities that require rehabilitation. In addition, 113,000 forcibly displaced persons sought shelter and protection, either in UNRWA schools or with host families;

(c) More than 8,250 Palestinians were denied their right to accommodation when their homes were either destroyed or suffered damage that rendered them uninhabitable.

4. The illegal Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip, the severe restrictions imposed by the occupation and their impact on the exercise of rights

27. The movement of Palestinians as well as of goods and products both into and out of the Gaza Strip is impeded.

28. Difficult living conditions are being imposed on 2 million people whose access to basic services and housing is limited, whose family lives are being disrupted and whose hopes for a safe and secure future are being undermined.

29. The health of patients referred for medical treatment in the West Bank is declining as they and their accompaniers are refused permits to leave to get treatment or attend scheduled medical appointments. In August 2022, just 42 per cent of the 2,067 requests to leave the Gaza Strip for treatment were granted, according to reports of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

30. According to the findings of a survey of socioeconomic conditions conducted by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics in October 2021, the financial situation of 65.4 per cent of Palestinian households is classified as medium, while the situation of 29.9 per cent

(13.6 per cent in the West Bank and 54.2 per cent in the Gaza Strip) is classified as one of poverty.

31. Business leaders have been prevented from conducting their operations and the access of raw materials for production has been blocked.

32. The rights of Palestinians to health, treatment, travel, movement, adequate housing and decent work have all been restricted.

5. Israeli violations against environmental rights in the State of Palestine

33. Israeli violations against the Palestinian environment are continuing as part of systematic plans and policies directed against the natural, historical, customary, cultural, social and economic rights of the Palestinian people. This is achieved through a body of legislative and administrative systems and infrastructure that aim to achieve control over Palestinian natural resources such as water, stone, soil and gas. In addition to this, air pollution is being caused by locating hazardous industrial zones in Palestinian territory where they release gases, fumes, exhaust and wastewater. Water sources and springs as well as valley streams have been appropriated for water harvesting projects, leading to desertification and drought, while the management and diversion of water from the River Jordan have accelerated drought and caused the Dead Sea to shrink.

34. The Israeli occupiers continue to control 62 per cent of the West Bank, which is rich in economic resources, as well as 85 per cent of water sources, and they continue to enforce arbitrary measures against Palestinians and their land, according to a report on developments in the Palestinian economy and the impact of the Israeli occupation, produced by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). According to the report, in the years 2000–2020, economic losses due to additional restrictions on the remnants of the so-called Area C amounted to 25.3 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) annually, while the cumulative losses for that period were estimated at about \$50 billion, which is equivalent to three times the GDP in the West Bank and 2.5 times the GDP of Palestine as a whole in 2020.

35. The State of Palestine periodically submits comprehensive documented reports and testimonies of Israeli violations against the Palestinian environment to the competent United Nations agencies and treaty bodies, as well as to the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel.

36. Israel is systematically and continuously perpetrating environmental damage in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in clear violation of environmental treaties and international humanitarian law, in particular Additional Protocol I to the Fourth Geneva Convention and international human rights treaties. The most noteworthy of these violations are mentioned below.

Impeded access to so-called Area C

37. The most significant obstacle faced in 2021 was when staff from the Environmental Quality Authority were prevented from exercising their oversight, inspection and judicial control functions in the so-called Area C. This effectively impeded them from pursuing waste smuggling operations, testing the wastewater discharged from settlements and monitoring other violations.

Inaccessibility of areas behind the wall

38. The occupying authorities prevent citizens and official institutions from accessing zones behind the wall where natural areas are located and practices that pollute the environment are carried out. These include the creation of a landfill for the municipality of “Jit” on parts of land belonging to the town of Zeita, which is located on the other side of the wall. A rubbish disposal unit has been erected on the landfill, which provokes noise disturbance for local inhabitants, causes dust to disperse in the direction of the town and blocks rainwater drainage streams, diverting them from their normal course. Moreover, activities are carried out that deplete natural resources, such as a crushing facility set up by

an Israeli-European company on land belonging to the village of Zawiya, which is behind the wall, and the use of the quarried stone to build settlements. At the same time, the Israeli authorities carry out tourism projects for the benefit of settlers and collect fees and charges.

Waste smuggling and the establishment of Israeli landfills

39. Israel continues to smuggle hazardous waste from its settlements and from within the Green Line, which it then dumps inside Palestinian territory. There it incinerates the waste or places it in landfills, or recycles, separates and sorts it, returning the materials that can be used to the Israeli side and disposing of the rest in Palestinian territory. This constitutes a flagrant violation of international law and shows a clear disregard for any environmental or health standards.

40. Certain Palestinian roads in the Hebron governorate, which have been closed since 2000, have been converted into unofficial landfills. At the same time, settlers have created arbitrary landfills along unfinished roads leading to the settlements where they dump their rubbish, particularly at the entrance to Palestinian villages and towns. Palestinian vehicles are forbidden from using those roads and only Israeli trucks and lorries can carry rubbish from inside Israel and the settlements into the Occupied Palestinian Territory, particularly the border areas, and establish landfills for Israeli waste, including hazardous waste.

41. During 2021, nine cases involving the smuggling of solid, liquid and hazardous waste were discovered in the northern governorates, and the perpetrators were duly held accountable before the law. The international mechanism envisaged in the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal has been used to report violations to the Convention secretariat with a view to returning the waste to its source, in accordance with the Convention.

Discharge of wastewater from settlements into the Occupied Palestinian Territory

42. The Israeli occupation authorities continue to discharge untreated wastewater from illegal settlements towards agricultural lands belonging to citizens in Palestinian villages and towns. This causes soil pollution, gives rise to foul odours, causes insects and reptiles to flourish and leads to the spread of invasive and harmful weeds. There is, in fact, a treatment plant for water from the settlements; nonetheless, throughout the year, wastewater is deliberately discharged into agricultural lands belonging to Palestinian citizens. For example, wastewater from residential, industrial and agricultural sites in Jerusalem and the surrounding settlements is discharged into the agricultural areas of Bethlehem where it causes health hazards and high-risk environmental pollution. The cost of dealing with this wastewater must then be met from the Palestinian budget, even though it comes from the sewers of the illegal settlements.

Nature reserves

43. The Israeli occupation authorities target nature reserves by bulldozing Palestinian land in order to build roads to the settlements; they also bulldoze and destroy agricultural areas and uproot or cut down trees in Palestinian cities and villages. In addition to this, Palestinian institutions are prevented from engaging in developmental and administrative activities in a number of nature reserves located in the Jordan Valley, such as those of Ein Gedi, Wadi Qelt, Al-Auja and Dead Sea. The occupiers have taken control of these areas and set up tourist facilities there for the benefit of settlers.

44. The occupation authorities practice a policy of racial discrimination in favour of settlers in the use of nature reserves such as Wadi Qana. In their turn, the settlers then expand their settlements at the expense of the protected areas and are allowed to use the reserves for leisure activities and for agricultural work. At the same time, they harass Palestinians and prevent Palestinian institutions from carrying out any activities related to the management, protection and preservation of the reserves.

Violations against springs and water sources

45. The Israeli occupation authorities continue to illegally impose control over water sources in the so-called Area C, denying access to Palestinians and preventing Palestinian

institutions from carrying out any activities related to the preservation or development of those sources. For example, they have taken control of the spring they call “Ain Bubin” in the area of Ras Karkar where they have erected a surrounding wall to stop Palestinian citizens from reaching the spring and to prevent the Palestinian Government from carrying out any projects of its own, converting the site into a tourist venue that is reserved for settlers and is under their control.

Infrastructural obstacles

46. The Maniya landfill is used illegally and through the use of force to dispose of waste from Israeli settlements in the area, while the Abu Dis-Ayzariyah landfill also continues to be used to dispose of waste from the settlements. At the same time, Palestinians and local government bodies are forbidden from using those sites and their vehicles are confiscated. Moreover, the construction of Palestinian waste-processing facilities is obstructed in some areas through delays in the issuance of approvals and licenses for landfill sites and the withholding of approval for a wastewater treatment plant.

47. Using security-related pretexts, Palestinians are prevented from importing the acids required for primary treatment plants in tanneries. This disrupts the operation of plants that treat the industrial water from tanneries and leads to the production of hazardous waste. As a result, the owners of the business concerned have to transfer the waste to Israeli facilities at their own considerable expense.

48. The policy of closing landfill sites belonging to certain local government bodies and joint service councils in the Palestinian territories continues, while stoppages and fines continue to be imposed on the use of vehicles and waste collection equipment. The Israeli Government also prevents Palestinians from drilling groundwater wells, particularly in the water-rich Salfit area, which citizens cannot access due to Israeli restrictions. This has an impact on the natural and healthy life of the Palestinian community, on agricultural activities and on natural vegetation cover, causing an increased risk of desertification and a decrease in biodiversity.

III. Progress in addressing the negative impact of political and geographical divisions

49. Any progress in ending the division depends primarily on national reconciliation and the election of a legislative body for the State of Palestine. A great deal of effort has been expended on reconciliation, with a view to restoring national unity. This, in fact, is a national priority, set forth in numerous decrees of the National Council and the Central Council and enunciated by the President on many different national occasions as well as in international fora and before United Nations bodies. All this has produced a national consensus to hold new presidential and legislative elections, as the President announced in 2019. However, Israel, the occupying Power, strives to obstruct national reconciliation and to prevent elections from being held. In fact, it does not allow elections to take place in Jerusalem and refuses to lift the blockade on the Gaza Strip. Its purpose in doing so is to perpetuate the geographical division between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in furtherance of its own colonialist interests.

50. A national dialogue was held in Algeria in October 2022, in which 12 Palestinian organizations and parties participated, under the umbrella of the Palestine Liberation Organization. The aim was to take practical steps towards achieving national reconciliation and ending the division, and to resolve inter-Palestinian differences by adopting a language of dialogue and consultation.

51. Decree-laws issued by the President are applicable throughout the country, including the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, without discrimination.

IV. Parliamentary and presidential elections

52. On 15 January 2021, the President issued a decree calling general elections, with the legislative elections to take place on 21 May 2021 in line with article 3 of Decree-Law No. 1 of 2021 amending Decree-Law No. 1 of 2007 concerning general elections, and the presidential election on 31 July 2021. Subsequently Decree No. 8 of 2021 was enacted, concerning the formation of a court to oversee electoral matters, as well as Decree No. 6, concerning the number of seats on the Legislative Council to be allocated to Christians. However, since Israel, the occupying Power, prevented the ballot from being held in Jerusalem, the elections were postponed under Decree No. 12 of 2021, article 1 of which stipulates: “General elections – legislative and presidential elections as well as elections to the National Council – are to be postponed until the right conditions exist for them to be held throughout the territory of Palestine, including the governorate of Jerusalem, the capital.”

53. As was the case in previous elections, the State of Palestine sent letters to Israel, the occupying Power, in accordance with protocols (final phase accord) agreed between the Palestine Liberation Organization and the occupying Power. In all, 63,000 people were to cast their votes at six post offices in East Jerusalem, which required Israeli approval because the post offices are located in areas controlled by the occupying Power. Other eligible voters in Jerusalem – some 150,000 persons – would cast their votes in the suburbs of the city, which they could do without authorization. In that connection, the Central Elections Commission set up 11 polling stations in the suburbs of Jerusalem where electors in the city could vote without prior registration, and it trained technical teams to assist in this task. Around 60 Jerusalemites stood as candidates. However, the occupying Power did not respond to the requests made by Palestine or the international community and, as a consequence, the general elections could not be held within the legal deadlines. The elections in Jerusalem are not merely technical but are political in nature and part of the Palestinian people’s inherent right to hold elections.

Elections to the Chambers of Commerce

54. The State of Palestine does hold ballots; in fact, it has been able to hold elections for parties, unions, federations, universities and municipalities. On 1 December 2022, it also held elections for chambers of commerce, in line with a schedule that covers 18 chambers of commerce in all governorates of the country, including southern governorates. Following due rules and process of law, the process began on the aforementioned date in the governorates of Jericho and Dayr al-Balah. The elections help to improve the operation of the chambers of commerce and their effectiveness in developing the national economy.

Consulting and involving civil society organizations in law- and policy-making processes

55. The Palestinian Government coordinates, consults and cooperates with civil society institutions in all matters that affect public life and the rights of individuals in Palestinian society. Thus, the State works to establish lasting partnerships and cooperation at all levels, seeking to reinforce channels of communication with civil society institutions and, to the extent possible, contributing to their advancement in the light of the essential role they play in promoting human rights. Thanks to national consultations on various topics that the Palestinian Government is wont to hold with civil society institutions, those bodies are able to act as partners in the formulation of national policies and plans. Moreover, such institutions have a place on numerous national committees and teams, either as full members or as experts whose observations and proposals are periodically sought.

56. In addition to this, various government institutions hold consultations with the relevant civil society groups regarding proposed draft legislation. This includes, inter alia, a bill on the protection of the family from violence, a bill on the rights of persons with disabilities, a bill on the rights of older persons and a bill on human trafficking. For its part, the Legislative Harmonization Committee – when reviewing current or draft legislation in

order to ensure its compatibility with international standards and treaties – also partners with relevant civil society institutions and takes account of the recommendations they make.

57. When drafting strategy, policy or legislation, the Ministry of the National Economy has involved private-sector bodies and civil society institutions, including women's organizations. For example, it involved the Bar Association in the drafting of the new Companies Act, which was endorsed by the President at the end of 2021.

58. However, Israel, the occupying Power, has attacked Palestinian civil society organizations because of the leading role they play in demanding accountability for Israeli actions, and has placed a number of those organizations on lists of terror groups, attacking and closing down their offices in an attempt to stop them from operating. It has, moreover, provided no evidence of its accusations, which have been rejected by international institutions and States, including the European Union.

Reviewing laws to ensure compatibility with the Covenant

59. Since being formed in 2017, the Legislative Harmonization Committee has reviewed numerous pieces of existing or draft legislation that directly or indirectly relate to the Covenant. The most important of these are: Decree-Law No. 10 of 2018 regarding cybercrime; the Labour Code (Act No. 7 of 2000); the draft decree-law on the protection of the family from violence; Decree-Law No. 21 of 2019 to amend certain pieces of personal status legislation that fix marriageable age; revision of provisions concerning “detention by order of the governor” in the Jordanian Crime Prevention Act of 1954, in force in the West Bank, and in the Crime Prevention Act No. 33 of 1948, in force in the Gaza Strip; Decree-Law No. 43 of 2022 amending Child Act No. 7 of 2004 and its amendments regarding the exploitation of children in pornography; review of the compatibility of article 11 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which states that no one is to be imprisoned merely on the ground of inability to fulfil a contractual obligation, with the provisions of the Palestinian Enforcement Act No. 23 of 2005; review of proposed amendments to the system of criminal legislation in force in the State of Palestine vis-à-vis crimes of money laundering, terrorist financing, piracy and human trafficking; a draft decree-law of 2022 to combat money laundering and terrorist financing; and a draft decree-law that criminalizes companies that operate in the settlements and plunder the natural resources of the State of Palestine.

V. Adapting to climate change at the social and economic levels

60. Following its 2016 accession to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the State of Palestine duly rolled out a body of measures with a view to fulfilling the obligations it had incurred to adapt to the negative effects of climate change, while promoting sustainable national development and enhancing water and food security. To achieve those goals, all of which are closely related to basic human rights, the following significant steps have been taken:

- A plan for nationally determined contributions was drafted in 2021 and submitted to the Convention secretariat. The plan aims to tackle climate change by reducing emissions and adapting to its negative effects;
- A national plan for adapting to climate change has been drafted, which includes adaptation plans for the 12 most severely affected sectors. The plan envisages a body of measures that are consistent with the fundamental human right to live in a safe, balanced and clean environment, in line with the Covenant and other international treaties;
- Fourteen operational plans have been drafted in six different sectors, namely agriculture, health care, water, local governance, energy, transport and communications. The plans include proposals for projects to achieve the nationally determined contributions, at a cost of around \$6 billion dollars up to 2040;

- A project concerning water availability and climate-change adaptation in the agricultural sector has been signed off for the northern Gaza Strip; the project, which was launched two years ago and aims to reuse treated wastewater in agriculture, benefits 25,000 farmers;
- A project has been rolled out that aims to enhance water security by using nature-based solutions;
- A project has been agreed that aims to create an enabling environment for climate-smart agriculture. The project is currently being implemented in partnership between the Ministry of Agriculture, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Bureau of Meteorology;
- A low-carbon olive production project has been agreed, which is being run in partnership between the Ministry of Agriculture and FAO;
- Economic incentives are being provided to encourage a move towards a green economy, renewable energy and clean production, which all contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal 9 which concerns infrastructure, industrial modernization and innovation, and Goal 8 which focuses on economic growth and decent work. One example of this is a package of incentives to encourage renewable energy; another is the “Moustadama” programme, which seeks to develop Palestinian industry by using sustainable energy to enhance competitiveness in the industrial sector in Palestine. This is to be achieved by developing and applying the solutions provided by sustainable energy, particularly in small and medium-sized enterprises, thereby helping them to increase their capacity and improve their energy efficiency and their use of renewable energy. This will contribute to overcoming the energy deficit and high electricity costs in Palestine, to protecting the environment and to reducing climate change.

VI.

61. The Environmental Quality Authority assesses the environmental impact of various activities on Palestinian territory, at the national level, as follows:

(a) It conducts environmental impact assessments on activities, projects and facilities that are to be run or established, before a licence can be obtained from the competent authorities. This process is regulated by the “Palestinian environmental assessment policy”, which was approved by the Council of Ministers in 2000 under Environment Act No. 7 of 1999, as amended. The assessment is governed by a comprehensive national system for monitoring the environmental impact of various activities and for implementing mitigation measures to reduce environmental pollution in various fields, so that Palestinian citizens can live in a safe, healthy and clean environment and enjoy their social, economic and cultural rights. A national committee made up of 11 government institutions studies the environmental impact report for each activity then submits its recommendations to the head of the Environmental Quality Authority. The Authority has processed 71 applications for development activities that are expected to have environmental impacts in the future.

(b) All activities that may have negative environmental impacts are monitored and inspected as a matter of course. The process involves carrying out measurements, conducting tests and taking samples then drafting technical reports on the environmental impact of those activities and proposing the measures to be taken to ensure that the impact remains within acceptable limits. Since the beginning of 2022, at least 3,000 environmental monitoring and inspection visits have been carried out by inspectors from the Environmental Quality Authority and partners.

(c) Since the beginning of 2022, with a view to ensuring that Palestinian citizens have remedies against environmental damage, the Environmental Quality Authority has pursued 333 environment-related cases in various governorates across the country. The cases involve all kinds of environmental impact, be it environmental inconvenience; sewage discharge; waste disposal; violation of nature reserves, biodiversity and flora or fauna; and

issues related to air pollution. In all cases, technical and legal measures were taken, in accordance with the relevant legislation.

62. As concerns remedies available to individuals who claim to have suffered a violation of their rights, they may turn to the national courts, which have the jurisdiction to consider any and all human rights violations, among them violations of economic, social and cultural rights, including those related to business activities, as explained in the initial report.

63. The right to compensation for human rights violations in the State of Palestine, including violations of economic, social and cultural rights, is enshrined in the Constitution. In addition, the Code of Criminal Procedure allows persons affected by a violation to file a civil claim to obtain fair compensation for the damage they suffered as a consequence. Under the Civil Torts Act No. 36 of 1944, which is in force in the State of Palestine, anyone who suffers harm or damage as the result of a civil offense committed in Palestine has the right to claim compensation against the perpetrator. National laws, each one in its own field, also include provision for fair compensation for any violation of fundamental rights. For example, the Labour Code (Act No. 7 of 2000) envisages compensation for workers in the event of a violation of any of the rights guaranteed under the Code, such as for unfair dismissal, etc. Civil Service Act No. 4 of 1998 guarantees appropriate compensation for public officials as do other pieces of legislation, each in its own field.

Issues relating to the general provisions of the Covenant (arts. 1–5)

Right to freely dispose of natural wealth and resources (art. 1 (2))

VII.

64. With a view to preserving the natural resources in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Council of Ministers has approved a national plan for the protection of natural resources in Palestine. Under the plan, Palestinian land is classified into high-value agricultural lands; medium-value agricultural lands; woodland and forest; nature reserves and areas of biodiversity and natural beauty; historical, cultural and religious sites; areas fed by springs; and irrigated agricultural lands. The plan also identifies what activities and projects can be carried out in the areas thus designated, in accordance with legal procedures set forth in environmental legislation. For its part, the Natural Resources Act specifies the rules that must be followed when implementing a concession to explore, drill, extract or exploit natural resources, as well as the permits and licences that the companies concerned need to obtain and respect.

65. Several measures have been taken to protect the right to dispose of natural resources freely, including agricultural land, water sources, irrigation facilities and marine resources. Those measures include the following:

- An agricultural survey covering the period between October and September 2021 was conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture in cooperation with the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. The survey covered a number of basic themes, including cultivated areas, livestock and agricultural holders and holdings. Persons with agricultural holdings numbered 110,104 in 2010 and 137,985 in 2021;
- Settlement works have been carried out in 79 towns and villages, covering an area of 775.433 dunams across all governorates of the West Bank, with the number of male owners standing at 129,510 and of female owners at 59,698;
- The courts of settlement, created in 2021, have been expanded so as to alleviate the pressure caused by the large number of cases they have to review;
- Water networks, water tanks and water pumping stations have been set up, rehabilitated or expanded in several governorates of the country;
- Lines of transport have been established for communities that are marginalized or that suffer fierce and systematic attacks by the Israeli occupiers. This includes the provision of a bus service and public transport for vulnerable communities (such as

Khan al-Ahmar, Hadithah and Rayhan) and the reordering of lines so as to reflect administrative divisions, especially for the villages of Susya/Masafer Yatta;

- With a view to making agriculture a sustainable profession, plans for agricultural clusters have been approved as part of the national development plan 2021–2023. There are five such plans and \$133,926,625 has been allocated for their implementation. The purpose of the cluster development plans is to increase the area available for agriculture by about 43,000 dunams, increase the amount of water for irrigation by about 18 million cubic meters, augment the value of crop production, provide 14,000 job openings and support fishery projects;
- Fiscal policies have been adopted that aim to incentivize male and female agricultural workers in rural areas. In this connection, a decree has been issued stipulating that, in December of each tax year, the Ministry of Finance is to devolve 30 per cent of the tax it recovers on plant products into the account of the Agricultural Risk Prevention and Insurance Fund. Likewise, it is to transfer 25 per cent of the revenue arising from tax refunds (16 per cent on livestock production revenue) into the Fund. Fifty per cent of the tax refunds are devolved for the benefit of farms or companies, and agricultural production is exempt from value added tax;
- The granting of loans for small-scale projects has been facilitated through the “Isnad” emergency lending programme, which aims to support projects that are not eligible for funding from banks. At the same time, the “Istadama” programme has been developed with the provision of \$300 million for facilitated loans for small and medium-sized enterprises. A number of agricultural projects have been launched in rural areas for persons of both sexes aged under 40, with funding of up to 100,000 shekels, the aim being to promote the employment of young men and women in rural areas;
- Wastewater and desalinated water in rural areas is being treated in a new wastewater treatment plant that has opened recently in the city of Khan Younis. Construction work has been completed on a line carrying treated wastewater, which operates an irrigation network that serves around 5,000 dunams of agricultural land in northern Gaza. A wastewater treatment plant in Rafah has undergone maintenance and development, and work on a central desalination plant in the Gaza Strip has been completed. Sterilization tests have been carried out on 90 water sources belonging to local authorities, and 597 tankers have been inspected and habilitated for water distribution;
- Several projects that target rural areas have been rolled out and financed. For example, 300 agricultural projects – involving sheep, greenhouses, domestic market gardens and hydroponics – have been made available to poor and marginalized families. In addition, 11,400 dunams have been reclaimed, 3.5 cubic metres of water from conventional and non-conventional sources have been provided for agricultural use, 436 km of agricultural roads have been laid down and 56 projects have been implemented in the water and sanitation sector, at an estimated cost of \$507 million;
- Policies that support rural women have been adopted as part of the overarching policies of the Agricultural Credit Institute, notably a “policy of financing programmes to empower women who do not own land, who are entering business or who have recently graduated”, which aims to build women’s industrial administration capacities in small and medium-sized enterprises;
- Three hundred agricultural projects – involving sheep, greenhouses, domestic market gardens and hydroponics – have been made available to poor and marginalized families;
- Eleven thousand four hundred dunams of land have been reclaimed, 3.5 cubic metres of water from conventional and non-conventional sources have been provided for agricultural use and 436 km of agricultural roads have been laid down;
- A report on the pernicious health and environmental effects caused by the waste management apparatus established by Israel, the occupying Power in the State of Palestine, since 1967 has been sent to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the

implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes;

- The Ministry of Local Government has rolled out a mechanism to assess the impact on human rights of structural plans in the so-called Area C.

VIII.

(a) Proportion of the population living in poverty:

Please see tables 1 and 2 in annex 1.

(b) The proportion of public revenue that is generated through taxes, according to 2021 data, is 91 per cent.

(c) Fiscal policy is governed by regulations and laws, notably Decree-Law No. 8 of 2011 regarding income tax, which is applicable to the income of individuals, companies and institutions in Palestine. Numerous grants and fiscal incentives are available, particularly on research and development activities, to improve product quality or to meet the expenses incurred in accessing foreign markets.

66. Taxable income is calculated after due account has been taken of the deductions listed below:

- A sum of 36,000 shekels for resident taxpayers;
- The amount effectively paid for transportation as a fixed allowance to public-sector employees;
- The amount effectively paid for transportation or 10 per cent of total annual salary for private-sector employees;
- An exemption of 6,000 shekels annually for university students, except those who receive a grant or bursary;
- A one-time exemption to the value of 30,000 shekels for the purchase or construction of a home, or exemption from the actual interest paid on a loan from a bank or a credit or housing institution for the purchase or construction of a home, up to a maximum of 4,000 shekels, provided that it does not exceed a maximum of 10 years and that supporting documentation is submitted.

Tax exemptions for individuals

- Capital gains from the sale of property are tax-free;
- Capital gains from the sale of investments in securities are tax-free;
- Taxes on workers' income must be withheld by the employer and transferred to the tax authorities.

Corporate income tax

- A company is considered to be resident if it is listed, administered or controlled in Palestine;
- Taxable income is between 15 and 20 per cent, depending upon the type of company and its net profits.

Deductions on corporate income tax

- Expenses incurred in searching for new markets, which are not to exceed 2 per cent of gross income and a maximum of 500,000 shekels;

- Expenses incurred in internal research and development, in scientific research and in development partnerships with scientific institutions;
- Employee training expenses;
- Expenses incurred in adopting Palestinian specifications and standards and in optimal institutional management, including the development of electronic accounting systems and the adoption of international accounting standards;
- Hospitality expenses.

Taxes on local goods and services

(a) Value added tax (VAT) is levied at a rate of 16 per cent on all locally produced goods and services (following deductions for the purchase of intermediate goods); VAT is zero for exported goods, tourism services, fruit and vegetables;

(b) Purchase tax is levied on goods at varying percentages in line with the selling (retail) price and is borne by the final consumer of the product at the moment of purchase. It is an indirect tax and can be imposed on goods without distinction (comprehensive sales tax) or on specific goods such as luxury items;

(c) Public expenditure as a percentage of gross domestic product and, within total public expenditure, the proportion of the public budget that is allocated to social spending (social security, food, water and sanitation, housing, health and education), disaggregated by region.

Please see tables 4 and 5 in annex 1.

IX. Laws to combat corruption in Palestine

67. The Palestinian legal system addresses crimes of corruption in the Anti-Corruption Act, as amended. The Act identifies the persons who are accountable and defines crimes that are deemed to constitute corruption, including all criminal activities that affect, obstruct or abuse public assets or the public interest. It is applicable to all persons who perpetrate such acts, particularly those occupying a public office or position, and no persons are excluded or granted immunity on account of their official or political status.

68. The Anti-Corruption Act entrusts the anti-corruption office of the Public Prosecution Service with the authority to investigate, file charges and institute public prosecutions. Trials are conducted by a court specializing in corruption crimes, established pursuant to a decree of the Supreme Judicial Council. The court, which ensures speedy adjudication, is composed of regular judges and conducts legal proceedings, examining cases on the basis of special procedural rules that serve to ensure a balance between the right to defence and the right to a fair trial. The Act envisages shorter periods than those generally envisaged for criminal proceedings and special procedures that facilitate the conduct of proceedings and the provision of evidence. It prescribes penalties, identifies crimes entailing harsher penalties and specifies cases in which funds may be confiscated and perpetrators may be required to return the proceeds of their crimes.

69. A total of 683 cases were recorded between 2010 (when the anti-corruption office of the Public Prosecution Service was established) and 2021.

70. Between 2010 (when the anti-corruption court was established) and the end of 2021, 283 cases were referred to the court, which handed down a ruling in 208 of them. The court considered 75 cases in the course of 2021.

71. A total of 366 defendants were convicted and sentenced by the anti-corruption court between 2010 and the end of 2021, distributed by gender and sentence as follows:

- A total of 233 defendants – 216 men, 15 women and 2 legal persons – were convicted;
- A total of 92 defendants – 79 males, 12 women and 1 legal person – were acquitted;

- A total of 38 defendants – 36 males and 2 women – were referred elsewhere as the anti-corruption court lacked the necessary jurisdiction;
- The cases of 3 male defendants were dropped due to their death.

72. In all cases where a conviction was secured, the persons concerned were required to return the proceeds of their crime to the public coffers; this included the confiscation of seized funds and the seizure of monies and other assets that may have been transferred to other persons.

73. Charges were also levelled against persons in the public sphere who occupy leading positions in the apparatus of the State, including ministers and heads of public institutions and of state agencies. The cases involving such personages were tried before the anti-corruption court just like any other case.

74. Anti-corruption activists are covered by the provisions of a Council of Ministers decree of 2009 concerning the protection of informers, witnesses and experts in corruption cases as well as their relatives and persons close to them. In that regard, 71 requests for protection were submitted to the Anti-Corruption Commission between 2019 and the end of 2021. They are listed, according to the type of protection requested, in table 8.

75. The General Budget Directorate in the Ministry of Finance also plays a role in anti-corruption efforts. Its job is to deliver governmental services through detailed plans approved under the annual budget law. Steps are taken to monitor compliance with annual budget planning and to ensure that annual allocations are not exceeded, particularly with regard to public procurement.

76. The Ministry of the Economy also plays a part in combating corruption and reducing nepotism and abuse of power. Notably in that regard, it undertakes the following:

(a) It strives to reduce exploitation, fraud, price gouging and speculation on food products, especially on basic consumer goods. The Ministry of the National Economy referred 280 traders to the courts and recorded violations in 2,141 commercial premises during 2021.

(b) The Ministry is working to improve its services by moving towards online registration. On the one hand, this will improve the business environment and, on the other, help to reduce corruption and nepotism in service delivery. This is to be achieved through the electronic registration of companies under a new law.

(c) The Ministry is seeking to adopt a policy of job rotation, particularly for officials who provide services to the general public at Ministry directorates in the governorates.

Non-discrimination (art. 2)

Definition of discrimination and legal framework

77. A definition of discrimination, in line with human rights treaties, has been included in the draft decree-law on the protection of the family from violence. A definition of discrimination in the area of employment has also been included among the recommendations of the Legislative Harmonization Committee in its review of the 2000 Palestinian Labour Code, which is being amended to bring it into line with international standards and the recommendations of the treaty bodies. A policy paper has been prepared on aspects of existing labour legislation that need to be amended with a view to incorporating a definition of discrimination, specifying evidentiary and litigation procedures, eliminating all exceptions, providing equal employment opportunities, ensuring equal pay for work of equal value and criminalizing sexual violence. Steps are being taken to amend the Civil Service Code so as to include a provision that prohibits and criminalizes discrimination in the workplace.

78. Work is underway on a draft decree-law regulating trade union activity, which envisages the active participation of women in unions without any gender-based discrimination. Another decree-law is also in the process of being drafted that aims to raise women's participation in general and local elections to not less than 30 per cent. In this way,

the draft decree-law will help to implement the relevant decrees of the National Council and the Central Council of the Palestine Liberation Organization.

79. In 2019, the Council of Ministers issued a decree for the formation of a national team to review the draft Palestinian criminal code of 2011 and ensure that it was consistent with the international standards and treaties to which the State of Palestine has acceded. The team was also to review the consistency of the code with recommendations of human rights treaty bodies, particularly recommendations to criminalize discrimination in all aspects of life. Likewise, it was to come up with a comprehensive definition of discrimination, in line with human rights treaties. The members of the team are to submit their recommendations and comments to the Council of Ministers during the current year.

80. Recent pieces of legislation intended to eliminate discriminatory practices against women include the Decree-Law of 2019 concerning the rights of women to open bank accounts for their minor children, on an equal footing with the fathers. The Decree-Law gives effect to a decision taken by the Council of Ministers in March 2018. Other relevant pieces of legislation include the Council of Ministers Decree of 2018 granting women the right to take their children to and from school, and the Council of Ministers Decree of 2018 granting women the right to obtain a passport for their minor children.

Role played by the Ministry of the National Economy in reducing discrimination

81. Operating under the applicable regulations and laws, the Ministry of the Economy seeks to guarantee equality, to advance non-discrimination and to pursue justice for disadvantaged groups (women, young persons and persons with disabilities). The new Companies Act includes a number of novel provisions intended to develop the legal system in Palestine, in line with international best practices, most notably:

- (a) Removing minimum capital requirements for companies, with the exception of public companies;
- (b) Allowing companies of certain kinds to be established by a single individual and allowing companies to operate and practice their activities from a domestic address;
- (c) Granting persons the right to bring suits directly before the competent court to defend their rights and interests, and granting the right to file subsidiary suits on behalf of a company in order to protect the rights of that company, thereby providing protection for small shareholders;
- (d) Ensuring that both sexes are represented on companies' boards of directors, with at least one-third of members being women, if possible.

82. Between January and July 2022, the Ministry of the Economy registered around 1,810 new companies, with a total capital value of \$568 million.

Equal rights of men and women (art. 3)

Paragraph 11

83. Efforts made in this connection to address the harmful effects of the armed conflict and the ongoing Israeli occupation:

- The crimes the Israeli occupiers commit against the Palestinian people, widely systematically and on a daily basis, constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. They include murder, the confiscation and illegal annexation of Palestinian lands, the demolition of homes and facilities, the blockade of the Gaza Strip and restrictions on freedom of movement. In addition to this are the divisions that have been imposed by force and the resulting categorization of the land of Palestine into the so-called Areas A, B, C, H1 and H2, the hegemony over natural resources, the imposition of customs duties and taxes and the theft of clearance revenues. All these are colonialist crimes and practices that circumscribe individuals in the exercise of their legal rights under the Covenant, particularly in refugee camps and rural areas, and that particularly affect refugee, rural and Bedouin women.

- The State of Palestine requested an advisory opinion and legal ruling from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the legality of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and on the legal consequences of that occupation and of settlement and annexation, including measures aimed at changing the demographic composition and status of Jerusalem.
- The Council of Ministers issued a decree in 2018 to form a national legal committee to address Israeli racist legislation. The committee works to monitor such legislation and to identify the violations and infringements it contains against international law and treaties and United Nations resolutions. It then submits recommendations on how to counteract that legislation in order to protect the legitimate and inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. The committee also prepares documents and gathers data with a view to contrasting racist legislation, and it consults with Arab and international human rights organizations and institutions to ensure that all racist legislation is rejected, condemned and criminalized at the international level.
- The State of Palestine has taken several measures to promote the economic and social empowerment of Palestinian women. In that connection, 45 women who work in the settlements and are exposed to violence, in several governorates in the so-called Area C, have been the subject of economic empowerment projects. At the same time, 112 business projects have been awarded to women who work in the settlements and reside in locations close to the wall. In 2021, psychological support and counselling services were provided to 69 women and 93 children who had suffered violence and economic exploitation, including 30 children working in settlements and inside the Green Line.
- Health insurance services have been provided to 132 Palestinian prisoners, and the insurance is regularly renewed on an annual basis for persons who remain in detention for more than a year. Scholarships are also provided to detainees of both sexes, and 714 prisoners are continuing their university education, 75 of them in a master's programmes. In 2020, 461 prisoners took the high school exam and 400 prisoners enrolled in the bachelor's programme.
- Lawyers have been made available to represent female prisoners before the occupying Power with regard to violations those prisoners suffered while in detention. The violations include denial of treatment, poor conduct of investigations, violence while under interrogation, denial of visits, strip searches and more. Cases are also pursued in defence of persons whose land has been confiscated or whose homes have been demolished by the Israeli occupation authorities, while other cases revolve around the so-called "unification" proceedings.
- Scholarships have been provided to 25 educational counsellors who have been nominated to enrol in a diploma to become counsellor supervisors. Moreover, 404.13 students have been trained in the skills necessary to form student parliaments, and 627 educational counsellors and counsellor supervisors have received training in psychological support skills, clinical treatment and psychological release techniques. At the same time, 12,000 students in all directorates have received training on the psychosocial support programme in Jerusalem and the West Bank, which will equip them to interact with students who have suffered attacks at the hands of the Israeli occupation forces.
- Emergency cash assistance amounting to 350,295 shekels has been provided to 1,238 families, while the emergency in-kind assistance programme has benefited 12,132 families, with a total amount of 1,819,800 shekels. Free health insurance has been made available at a cost of 2,587,150 shekels while fees have been reduced on 1,238 health services worth 95,525 shekels, and discounts have been applied to health insurance premiums worth 91,625 shekels.
- Cash assistance worth \$5,543,000 has been provided to 3,566 affected families, while food vouchers and purchase coupons worth \$2,196,000 have been distributed to 10,899 poor families and health parcels worth \$517,000 have been provided to 197.27 families.

- Shelter, care, protection and rehabilitation services have been provided to 1,000 persons with disabilities in specialized centres. Particular account is taken of the needs of female victims of violence who have disabilities. The second payment of seven loans for persons with disabilities was duly disbursed.
- Individual citizens have provided care and shelter to 500 persons with disabilities and to 290 older persons, while 100 persons with disabilities have also received vocational habilitation services. Exemptions from customs duties were applied in 369 cases. Furthermore, protection, care and psychosocial support have been provided to 1,077 children who have suffered domestic abuse and 15 girls who have been subjected to violence were enrolled in university.
- Several projects that target rural areas have been rolled out and financed. For example, 300 agricultural projects – involving sheep, greenhouses, domestic market gardens and hydroponics – have been made available to poor and marginalized families. In addition, 11,400 dunams have been reclaimed, 3.5 cubic metres of water from conventional and non-conventional sources have been provided for agricultural use, 436 km of agricultural roads have been laid down and 56 projects have been implemented in the water and sanitation sector.
- The Council of Ministers issued a decree to regulate bazaars for the sale of products produced by women's charitable associations, female entrepreneurial projects and women's cooperatives. An award for excellence in projects run by women in the crafts and handicrafts sector has been launched. Lending programmes at a 5 per cent decreasable interest rate have been rolled out and 74 zero-interest loans previously granted to person with disabilities have been extended. A fund to support and empower women has been set up with capital of \$50,000, which will be used to purchase products from farmers and provide them to women. The Council of Ministers has also issued a decree intended to create sustainable jobs for women working in settlements, with financing of 30 million shekels.
- With a view to enhancing the gender-sensitivity of providers of services in the security and justice sector, a unified gender training programme has been adopted by the Ministry of the Interior and the security establishment.

84. Three reconstruction teams for the Gaza Strip were formed in June 2021, as follows:

- (a) A team comprising the Minister of Public Works and Housing (Rapporteur), the Minister of Local Government, the Minister of the National Economy, the Minister of Agriculture, the Minister of Labour, the President of the Water Authority and the President of the Energy and Natural Resources Authority;
- (b) An advisory group composed of representatives of civil society and the private sector;
- (c) A technical reconstruction team.

85. The Ministry of Public Works and Housing has been tasked with supervising reconstruction, improving (both socially and structurally) housing conditions for persons who are poor or in situations of social neglect and collecting the necessary data and information in order to support gender-sensitive emergency response and early recovery operations. In 2020, the Ministry took the following steps:

1. Recording the number of housing units that have been completely demolished;
2. Compiling an inventory of damage caused to housing units and conducting audits following the attack against the Gaza Strip. A total of 61,010 housing units were completely or partially destroyed: 1,671 units were completely destroyed, 959 units suffered severe damage such as to render them uninhabitable and 58,380 housing units suffered slight or moderate damage;
3. Removal of more than 95 per cent of the estimated amount of rubble from some 32,000 destroyed buildings and housing units; work to remove the rest is still ongoing;
4. A total of \$12 million has been provided in compensation to 35,000 citizens, while \$20 million in compensation is in the process of being disbursed to 16,000 citizens.

86. The reconstruction portion of the second national plan for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) focuses on the following:

(a) Integrating gender issues into emergency plans and economic recovery plans for women and girls who directly suffer the violations inflicted by the occupiers, such as forced displacement, house demolitions and repeated aggression;

(b) Promoting the leadership of women and girls and their role in relief and recovery operations, especially in the areas most affected by the occupation policies, such as the Gaza Strip, the so-called Area C and the Jordan Valley;

(c) Enabling women to benefit from humanitarian aid and emergency services, including during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

87. The Ministry of the National Economy seeks to promote the economic empowerment of women and marginalized groups via the following actions:

1. Involving women and young persons in the projects run by the Ministry. In that connection, training has been provided to around 5,000 trainees in areas such as entrepreneurship, start-ups, administration and finance, renewable energy, information technology and agribusiness, while around 130 grants have been provided for entrepreneurship projects and cooperatives;

2. Establishing the Economic Empowerment Fund to support entrepreneurial projects being run by women that were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In that regard, in-kind grants in the form of production inputs have been provided to 90 women's entrepreneurial projects;

3. Organizing bazaars for women's products, particularly traditional handicrafts and food products, in which more than 75 female owners of small and medium-sized enterprises participated;

4. Launching an award for excellence in women's traditional handicrafts and food products, with a particular focus on products produced by rural women;

5. Preparing for the launch of the E-SOUQ e-marketing platform to promote and support the commercialization of products produced by micro and small enterprises, especially those run by women.

Paragraph 12: Steps taken to address the gender wage gap

88. The Council of Ministers issued a decree in 2021 to raise the monthly minimum wage in Palestine from 1,452 shekels to 1,880 shekels, which is applicable to both sexes. In March 2022, the Council of Ministers issued a further decree instructing the Minister of Labour to take measures to tighten controls to ensure equal pay between the sexes for work of equal value.

89. In October 2022, a national committee was formed to promote wage equality and to ensure equal pay for work of equal value. The committee is headed by the Ministry of Women's Affairs and has members drawn from the Ministry of Labour and from a number of governmental and non-governmental agencies, as well as academics. They study and analyse literature and data on the subject of wage equality with a view to identifying gender gaps. The committee also proposes gender-responsive policies on wage equality; monitors and assesses international labour indicators so as to put those policies into effect with the competent authorities; coordinates awareness-raising and educational campaigns on these issues; runs the campaigns alongside relevant partners; undertakes research, studies and analyses on relevant data; develops internal rules to regulate its own operations; drafts plans of action; and forms technical committees with a view to achieving its objectives.

90. Palestinian women occupy 29 per cent of managerial positions. Women account for 49 per cent of workers in the public sector where they receive the same wages as men, and 14 per cent of them hold the position of general manager or higher.

91. The involvement of women in decision-making and in public life in general, and their participation in leadership positions, is an essential aspect of gender equality. Women account for around 25 per cent of members of the Central Council, 11 per cent of members

of the National Council, 12.5 per cent of members of the Council of Ministers, and 11 per cent of ambassadors in the Palestinian diplomatic corps. In 2014, women counted for 54 per cent of persons working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants. One woman holds the position of governor.

92. As concerns the measures taken by the Palestinian Government to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on citizens, including women and children, and to address violence against them during that crisis, please refer to the follow-up report submitted by the State of Palestine to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 2020, particularly annex 2 which gives that information in a summary form.

Right to work (art. 6) paragraph 13

93. *Workforce*: The total population stands at 5.227 million, 62 per cent of whom are of working age (15 years or more). In 2021, the number of persons who were effectively part of the workforce (i.e., who were working or looking for work) stood at 1,408,000, or 43 per cent of persons aged 15 or more (69 per cent of males and 17 per cent of females).

94. *Unemployment*: In 2021, the number of persons aged over 15 who were unemployed in Palestine stands at 372,000, or 26 per cent of persons aged 15 or more. The unemployment rate for males is 22 per cent compared with 43 per cent for females. The largest unemployment gap by region is 15 per cent in the West Bank and 47 per cent in the Gaza Strip.

95. The highest unemployment rate exists in the 20–24 age group where it is 42 per cent for both sexes, including among recent graduates, with the highest rates of all being among women who have completed 13 or more years of education, at 49 per cent. Among unemployed jobseekers, 52 per cent look for work by direct application to employers while 28 per cent use the Internet; 14 per cent ask friends and relatives and just 2 per cent are registered with labour bureaux.

96. According to data from the Central Bureau of Statistics, the unemployment rate among persons with disabilities is 37 per cent. Only 2 per cent of Palestinian women with disabilities participate in the labour force, as compared to 23 per cent of men with disabilities. This gives some indication of the large gap that exists between the real situation that persons with disabilities in Palestine have to face and their rights under international and national laws.

97. Significant steps have been taken by the State of Palestine to reduce rates of unemployment and poverty. These include income-generating projects with facilitated loans or non-refundable grants, which are part of an economic empowerment programme that is aimed especially at persons with disabilities. In that connection, the Ministry of Social Development has worked in partnership with the National Economic Empowerment Institution on an empowerment initiative involving facilitated loans for persons with disabilities, which involves 90 projects and has a funding ceiling of \$10,000.

98. *Employment*: The number of employed persons aged 15 or over stands at 1,036,000, or 74 per cent. The percentage is higher in the West Bank than in the Gaza Strip, at 85 per cent. In all, 78 per cent of males are in employment and 57 per cent of females. Disaggregated by age group, the employment rate among persons aged 15–24 is 72 per cent while, for persons aged 25–34, it is 83 per cent.

99. Seventy-two per cent of workers are wage earners, 17 per cent are self-employed, and 4 per cent work for their families without pay.

100. A total of 19 per cent of Palestinian workers from the West Bank work inside the Green Line and in the illegal Israeli settlements. No worker from the Gaza Strip has been able to work inside the Green Line since 2007.

101. *Informal Sector*: Four out of every 10 workers (43 per cent) work in the informal sector in the Palestinian local market. Half of all males and a quarter of all females work in that sector. It should also be noted that around one third of workers in the formal sector

(48 per cent in the West Bank and 30 per cent in the Gaza Strip) are classified as informal workers because they do not receive labour-related privileges.

102. Employees in the informal sector in the Palestinian local market receive a wage that is 76 per cent of the wage in the formal sector: 83 shekels as opposed to 109 shekels.

103. The economic empowerment programme is one of the most important anti-poverty initiatives of the Ministry of Social Development. It arose when the Ministry envisioned a shift away from relief and towards sustainable development. The programme targets groups for empowerment so as to move families from the stage of being in need to the stage of being productive. This then reflects back on the social empowerment of the target groups, creating job opportunities and reducing unemployment and poverty rates.

104. In 2021, 356 families were the subject of economic empowerment projects involving various activities such as agriculture, livestock, commerce, service and industry. The ages of the persons involved ranged from 18 to 55 years and there were 138 males and 218 females, 15 of whom were persons with disabilities.

105. Through the Palestine Employment Fund, six-month-long paid employment opportunities are provided to graduates who are children of families registered on the database of the Ministry of Social Development. Around 750 graduates from poor families have been employed in this way.

Impact of measures taken under the Labour Sector Strategy (2017–2022) and of measures taken and resources allocated for the implementation of the National Employment Strategy (2021–2022)

106. The Labour Sector Strategy (2017–2022) seeks to address the reality of the labour market and the high unemployment and poverty rates. It aims to ensure that unemployed workers are involved in the development process by promoting employment and entrepreneurial programmes, focusing on small-scale projects and on new businesses and cooperatives, and involving workers who have recently joined the labour market, including graduates and especially women and marginalized and vulnerable groups. The principal objectives of the Strategy are to reduce unemployment rates, to provide a trained and professional workforce by improving the amount and quality of training, to develop an occupational inspection and safety system, to approve a law regulating the work of safety inspectors, to maximize the role of the cooperative sector in employment and sustainable development, to promote principles of decent work in Palestine and to build the capacity of the three partnership institutions and enhance their role at the local and international levels.

107. The National Employment Strategy (2021–2025) acts as a unified frame of reference for goals and priorities in employment policy. It is put into effect via active labour market programmes and multisectoral measures, with the broad participation of social partners, ministries, official institutions and other stakeholders. It is currently in the process of being implemented by dividing it into ten thematic areas, each of which shows apparent gaps.

108. Measures were put in place to address unemployment and underemployment among young persons, women and persons with disabilities via a number of programmes that were rolled out during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The measures included support for small-scale and micro projects for persons with disabilities via zero-interest loans, the “Your project” programme to support unemployed persons with facilitated loans, vocational guidance programmes for unemployed persons, locating suitable job openings through field visits to civil society institutions and launching youth support programmes and activities, including recruitment days.

109. Several measures have been taken to address the challenges that have emerged since the COVID-19 pandemic, including the provision of support amounting to 105,000 shekels for a group of unemployed persons, in the form of an unemployment allowance of 700 shekels per head. Other measures include support for small enterprises affected by the pandemic, in the form of facilitated loans provided in cooperation with the Employment Fund and the Taawon Association, and the development of a labour market system to help jobseekers, matching demand and supply with a view to reducing underemployment. This is in addition to several working-from-home projects run during the pandemic.

Paragraph 15

110. As concerns labour disputes, the Ministry of Labour constantly seeks to open channels of communication and dialogue between the parties concerned in order to resolve disputes in a way that achieves the interests and protects the rights of both sides, while improving working conditions and the production process. The right of workers to bring labour-related legal action against their employer in the event of any violation of their rights is enshrined in the Palestinian Labour Code (Act No. 7 of 2000). Such cases are exempt from fees and are dealt with as a matter of urgency – on an equal footing with outstanding debts – by the Palestinian courts. Workers are entitled to compensation if they have suffered a violation of any of their legal rights, such as unfair dismissal, workplace injuries, etc.

111. Palestinian workers working for Israeli employers inside the Green Line or in illegal Israeli settlements suffer from the arbitrary measures taken against them by those employers as well as exploitation at the hands of work-permit brokers and drivers. In addition, most workers do not have employment contracts to afford them protection before the law, leaving them at the mercy of their Israeli employers.

112. More than 60 per cent of Palestinian workers inside the Green Line work in dangerous jobs, particularly building and construction and, unlike Israeli workers in the same jobs, without minimum occupational health and safety requirements. Thus, the majority of fatal injuries are among Palestinian workers and are due to a lack of supervision, of personal protective equipment and of training. In addition to this, the workers are defrauded by their employers as their work permits expire or are cancelled on security pretexts or the employers dismiss them arbitrarily because the workers are unable to reach the workplace regularly or seek to claim their legitimate rights.

113. As concerns wages, there is a clear difference in the salaries paid to Palestinian and Israeli workers in the same establishment. This includes the amount of salary and of overtime allowance. In fact, Palestinian workers work long hours and do not receive overtime. In addition to this, working days are reduced to the detriment of their financial rights, with only the minimum value being recorded.

114. The Palestinian Ministry of Labour seeks to protect workers who work inside the Green Line or in the illegal settlements by ensuring they obtain their rights, notably savings, mutual insurance, retirement benefits, health insurance, and compensation for work injuries, in cooperation with the Workers' Hotline association.

115. The State of Palestine coordinates with international and regional bodies to inform them of the human rights situation in Palestine, including workers' rights. The International Labour Organization (ILO) sends an annual fact-finding mission to Palestine then issues a report on the situation of Palestinian workers in the Israeli labour market. However, the Israeli occupying authorities do not undertake to implement the recommendations contained in the report.

Paragraph 16: Formalization of informal economy activities

116. The Palestinian Ministry of the Economy regulates economic activities and seeks to move them from the informal to the formal sector. The chief actions the Ministry has taken in this regard are as follows:

(a) The Council of Ministers issued a decree in June 2021 concerning the definition and national classification of micro, small, medium-sized and large enterprises;

(b) With a view to regulating e-commerce and boosting the online economy, the Ministry of the Economy, in cooperation with the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, has prepared a preliminary draft of an e-commerce bill.

(c) A specialized survey has been developed concerning home-based enterprises and their legal status, and work is currently under way to prepare instructions on how to register and license such enterprises.

(d) A first national strategy for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises has been drawn up, which will address the problems and challenges faced by such initiatives.

117. The Ministry of Labour has taken several measures intended to address the obstacles that stand in the way of the formalization of informal economic activities. This includes focusing on the system of vocational education and training with a view to creating a formal labour sector and engaging in relevant regional and international programmes and projects.

118. A body of measures has been taken to enforce vocational health and safety regulations in the formal and informal sectors. These include a national strategy and policy for vocational health and safety as well as capacity-building efforts in the form of specialized training courses for health and safety inspectors. In that regard, three training bodies for health and safety inspectors have been certified and 45 vocational health and safety inspectors have been accredited. In addition to this, internal oversight inside places of work has been strengthened as part of the implementation of the 2019 Decree-Law concerning occupational health and safety committees and inspectors. At the same time, visits of inspection have been made to hazardous sites where high rates of occupational injuries have been recorded. So far, the work environment in 267 such sites has been inspected and evaluated, and reforms put in place to correct the situation and avoid workplace injuries.

119. The Legislative Harmonization Committee has been reviewing the Palestinian Labour Code (Act No. 7 of 2000) with a view to amending it, in coordination with the Ministry of Labour, national institutions and relevant civil society bodies. Recommendations have been referred to the Council of Ministers and the Ministry of Labour is currently in the process of conducting consultations at the national level with relevant bodies and institutions so as to bring the Code into line with international standards and ILO Conventions. Among the most important of these recommendations are, inter alia, expanding the scope of the Code to include all groups, defining workplace discrimination in accordance with the two International Covenants, criminalizing workplace harassment as per ILO Conventions and promoting the role of inspection bodies.

Paragraph 17: Sexual harassment in the workplace

120. Efforts are currently being made to include a definition of sexual harassment in the workplace and to criminalize it in the 2022 draft decree-law on the protection of the family from violence. Sexual harassment is also criminalized – in line with international treaties – in the draft Palestinian criminal code of 2011, which is currently being reviewed by a specialized working group formed by a decree of the Council of Ministers.

121. In the same context, efforts are also being made to amend the Palestinian Labour Code so as to embrace the concepts of discrimination and harassment. In that regard, a recommendation has been made to include passages from the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) in the draft code. In addition, a definition of sexual harassment has been included in the 2022 draft national referral system for female victims of violence, which is currently before the Council of Ministers.

122. There is currently no database in which cases of workplace sexual harassment are recorded because female workers who suffer harassment do not come forward to report it. However, over the past three years, the Ministry of Labour has been forming technical committees to undertake a general and comprehensive review of labour legislation, examining it in particular from a gender perspective and discussing and clarifying certain legal provisions and exceptions. The Ministry has also focused on the need to add punitive provisions against workplace violence, including sexual harassment. The draft decree-law on the protection of the family from violence also criminalizes sexual harassment within the family, since many women work in family businesses and are vulnerable to harassment there.

123. The 2018 Decree-Law regarding cybercrime addresses the topic of extortion, threats and all forms of sexual harassment and exploitation when committed using electronic means. The penalties envisaged for such acts are increased if the victim is a child.

124. The Palestine General Federation of Trade Unions recorded 310 cases of sexual violence and harassment in the workplace, including 3 episodes of full sexual assault, between 2020 and 2021. In 45 per cent of those cases, according to the Federation, the perpetrator was an employer or director.

Paragraph 18: Child labour

125. The State of Palestine has taken action to combat and reduce child labour and to regulate the employment of juveniles under the age of 18 by organizing intensive inspection campaigns and, while child labour still exists, it is gradually declining. According to data for 2021 compiled by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, the percentage of working children (with or without pay) amounted to about 2.5 per cent of the total number of children in the 10 to 17 age group (3.8 per cent in the West Bank and 0.9 per cent in the Gaza Strip). The percentage of working schoolchildren totalled 0.9 per cent (1.5 per cent in the West Bank and 0.2 per cent in the Gaza Strip). The percentages in terms of gender were 1.7 per cent for males and 0.1 per cent for females. In addition, 41.6 per cent of working children (in the 10 to 17 age group) were paid employees, and 47.2 per cent were working as unpaid family members.

126. According to reports and data from the Ministry of Social Development, child labour in the West Bank and within the Green Line often involves an employer who sends children to beg in return for a paltry sum paid to the child's guardian. Children may be employed for a low wage in agreement with owners of commercial or industrial enterprises on the pretext of vocational training or due to the guardian's inability to maintain the family due to illness or the high cost of living.

Measures taken to reduce child labour:

- Child protection networks organize awareness-raising meetings for parents and children in all governorates;
- Needy families are targeted through the cash assistance and emergency aid programme in order to reduce child labour;
- Coordinators of child protection networks conduct inspection campaigns in cafes, amusement arcades and other facilities;
- A central task force has been created to run a campaign aimed at protecting minors at risk of delinquency; in addition, an operational field team has been created in the governorates to run campaigns aimed at identifying children involved in beggary, vagrancy and child labour.

Trade union rights (art. 8) paragraph 19

127. The Palestinian Government seeks to promote the activity of trade unions, in line with its national and social vision and with international and Arab labour standards, especially those that concern trade union pluralism and labour equality. The aim is to establish stable labour relations, robust social dialogue and democratic trade unionism that is protected by law within a framework of economic and social development.

128. The role of the Ministry of Labour vis-à-vis workers' and employers' unions is prescribed in the Palestinian Labour Code. The Ministry oversees their conferences and elections to ensure that they comply with the rules of procedure laid down for public bodies, and it complies fully with the principle of preserving and protecting trade union freedoms without interfering in their internal affairs or compromising their independence.

129. The Ministry of Labour is temporarily concerning itself with the administrative and organizational issues of certain trade unions, which still require a specific law to regulate their operations and membership, the requirements for practising the profession in question and the disciplinary authority. In the meantime, other professional and technical issues concerning those unions are covered by the competent ministry, so that the unions can represent their members and protect their rights and interests in an appropriate and effective manner. The Department for Trade Union Organizations and the various labour relations sections in the directorates monitor and tend to the needs of general trade unions and union branches in all governorates.

130. As of 2021, there were 622 trade unions and 14 union federations. Thirty-eight per cent of workers in the Gaza Strip are affiliated to a trade union, about three times more than in the West Bank, where the figure stands at 14 per cent. In addition, 210 notices were issued

to regularize several trade unions, and the Ministry of Labour conducted 1,621 awareness-raising and guidance activities.

131. The Labour Code states that workers and workers' representatives are to be protected during the course of collective disputes involving trade union organizations. Article 39 of the Code stipulates that involvement or participation in union activities outside working hours (or within working hours, with the employer's consent), requests on the part of workers to act as union representatives, and other such actions are rights guaranteed by law and cannot be considered as a justification for terminating a contract of employment. For its part, article 57 of the Code stipulates that collective labour agreements must envisage freedom to engage in union activities. These legislative texts serve to guarantee that members and leaders of trade unions are able to exercise their union rights and to operate without reprisal.

132. Efforts are currently being made to draft a law to regulate trade unions in a manner consistent with international standards. The aim is to preserve workers' right to establish unions, give unions freedom to operate, provide safeguards for the protection of members, guarantee their rights and promote dialogue and fair representation for workers across Palestine.

Social security (art. 9) paragraph 20

133. Social Security Act No. 19 of 2016 aims to provide coverage for all workers who are subject to the provisions of the Labour Code. However, after the Act had been issued and published, but before it had entered into force, the President – in response to public opposition and recommendations from several civil society institutions – issued a decree to block it. Dialogue between stakeholders is currently ongoing in order to reach a national consensus on the provisions of the Act and the date of its implementation. In this connection, the Palestinian Ministry of Labour has cooperated with ILO on the draft of a new and amended social security law which is based on a recent actuarial study. This was in response to a mass movement that demanded changes to social security benefits.

134. The Palestinian Ministry of Social Development and other competent authorities are currently working to apply social protection floors so that they can disburse social security allowances for older persons and persons with disabilities. However, the absence of a budget to cover this matter has rendered it difficult to make disbursements to these groups outside the cash transfer programme.

Protection of the family and children (art. 10) paragraph 21

135. As concerns the Personal Status Act, on 5 March 2018 the Council of Ministers set up a technical committee to review legislation governing personal and civil status and to update it in line with international standards and best practices. The committee brings together governmental institutions and the General Union of Palestinian Women, and it can call on the help of such experts and specialists as it feels it needs in order to accomplish its tasks. The committee began work in July 2018 when it drew up its plan of action; however, it has not held many meetings and there are campaigns that oppose the Convention as certain segments of society reject any amendment to personal status legislation that would bring it into line with the Convention. Nevertheless, the national team monitoring the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the high-level ministerial committee monitoring the country's accession to international treaties have this matter in hand.

136. The State of Palestine has a body of measures to protect the rights of families and children, as described below:

- A decree-law was issued in 2019 to fix marriageable age, which states that anyone can marry once they have attained the age of 18. This is applicable to both sexes and to Muslims and Christians alike. In this way, the elimination of discrimination and of gender inequality vis-à-vis marriageable age have been unified in a single law;
- A draft decree-law concerning the control and distribution of inheritance was drawn up in 2022 and referred to the President for issuance;

- Discussions are currently ongoing to develop a national strategy to combat violence against women (2022–2030), to promote the role of the National Committee to Combat Violence against Women and other institutions and to increase the ranking of members to include decision makers. This process is currently in its final stages, after which the strategy will be submitted to the Council of Ministers in order to be officially adopted;
- The draft decree-law on the protection of the family from violence has been submitted to the Council of Ministers several times following the inclusion of comments made by governmental bodies and civil society institutions. The bill is currently progressing through stages until it can be issued by the President. The purpose of the initiative is to protect women and families from all forms of violence;
- A review of the national referral system for female victims of violence was carried out in 2013 and efforts are currently under way to create a new system that covers all sectors and service providers and is consistent with international human rights standards;
- A draft amendment to the 2004 health insurance system has been prepared and is currently undergoing its fourth submission before the Council of Ministers;
- The Council of Ministers has issued a decree for the creation of a mobile legal clinic for human rights, intended chiefly for rural areas;
- Activities within the programme of the Worldwide Campaign to End Violence against Women takes place between 25 November and 10 December each year. In addition to this, there are activities to mark International Women's Day and the National Day of Palestinian Women, which focus on issues related to violence against women and seek to shed light on violations against the rights of Palestinian women, violence perpetrated by the occupiers and other instances of societal violence;
- The Ministry of Women's Affairs, in cooperation with the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, has launched a survey on violence in Palestinian society, which aims to identify what percentage of women are subjected to violence, both inside and outside the home;
- The national strategy to combat violence against women (2021–2030) has been updated;
- A national committee has been formed to oversee the system for monitoring Israeli violations by identifying the institutions that operate in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security.

137. Legal frameworks and institutional mechanisms have been strengthened to protect women from violence, via the following:

- Action to combat violence against women has been integrated into national plans. Also, administrative procedures and codes of conduct have been developed to define roles and methodologies in institutions that deal with female victims of violence, while local laws to protect women from violence have been developed and amended. Moreover, the issue of violence against women and girls has been integrated into the plans of gender units in certain ministries, including the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Justice and the police;
- Enhanced social protection and social support has been provided to female victims of violence thanks to improved service quality, and a national referral system has been created that clarifies and regulates the role of institutions that provide protection to victims. Rehabilitation and reintegration into society has been made available to female victims and survivors of violence, and capacity-building has taken place among personnel who provide counselling to victims of violence;
- Shelters have been set up in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to offer protection to women and girls who have suffered violence. There are five such shelters in all,

three in the West Bank and two in the Gaza Strip, and a national referral system has been developed and adopted by the authorities. Work is currently ongoing to create a system intended to meet the needs of all categories of women and girls who have been subjected to violence, including women with disabilities. The system also deals with cases of violence during periods of emergency, whether humanitarian or medical. In addition, rehabilitation programmes have been developed for female victims of violence in shelters;

- The Ministry of Social Development is responsible for dealing with cases of domestic violence against women and children. It monitors the number of such cases, leads “case conferences” with survivors and service providers. The Ministry also works to coordinate services in cooperation with the governorate-level offices of the Family Protection Directorate.

Right to an adequate standard of living (art. 11) paragraph 22

138. The State of Palestine strives to improve the national economy; however, the long-term Israeli occupation has led to limited resources and to increased want and need. The best solution that has been found to this is the financing of small-scale projects and, accordingly, the Palestinian National Economic Empowerment Institution was established in 2019 to complement the Palestinian People’s Economic Empowerment Programme (DEEP), under the auspices of the Palestinian Government.

139. Having been established in this context, during the course of 2020 the National Institution developed 111 projects for 117 beneficiaries of both sexes from the West Bank and Jerusalem as well as a further 47 projects for 53 beneficiaries with facilitated loans. Grants were provided to 42 micro projects run by persons affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, while 17 small-scale and micro projects affected by the pandemic received financing in the form of facilitated loans. A number of affected sectors were targeted, including the service sector and kindergartens as well as projects for persons with disabilities, who were integrated into the labour market through vocational training.

140. The State of Palestine has taken action to confront high poverty rates and improve food security. This includes the adoption of regulations and policies in the agricultural sector to improve food security in rural areas. In 2018, in fact, the Council of Ministers issued a decree to regulate the use of agricultural fertilizers and another decree to regulate the operation and licensing of agricultural greenhouse systems. A further decree in 2022 addressed the question of seeds and plant propagation materials with the aim of facilitating, organizing and controlling the process of circulating and preserving local varieties. Lastly, a decree was issued in 2019 to establish public slaughterhouses in all localities with 10,000 or more inhabitants.

141. The Ministry of the Economy is working on a project to build grain silos, which will help to maintain food security and provide grain stocks as a basic strategic commodity. A tender has been issued for the design, construction, financing and management of two grain silos with a storage capacity of 40,000 tons each, in two different locations, for a total of 80 tons in the first phase.

142. Policies that support rural women have been adopted to bolster food security, notably via financing programmes for the empowerment of women who do not own land, who are entering business or who have recently graduated, which aims to build women’s industrial administration capacities in small and medium-sized enterprises. Cash transfers using an electronic card system have been provided for poor and food-insecure families to purchase food and other basic necessities. At the same time, a national investment plan has been adopted as part of food and nutrition security policies and work to develop the central desalination plant in the Gaza Strip has been completed.

143. The Ministry of Social Development provides food assistance to poor families. In all, 182,000 individuals have received such assistance, with around 76 million shekels being disbursed in that regard in a single year. Economic empowerment projects funded by the World Food Programme (WFP) also focus on nutrition-related initiatives with a view to ensuring food security for poor families.

144. As concerns action taken to tackle environmental risks, climate change and health pollutants in agricultural areas, a decree-law issued in 2021 to amend the Environment Act of 1999 seeks to enhance national capabilities to address and mitigate the effects of climate change. A system was put in place in 2021 for the correct management – including administrative oversight and inspection – of pollutants resulting from hazardous waste, in order to protect the environment. The system also aims to enhance the use of wastewater in irrigation, build capacity in the area of climate change and address questions related to rubbish disposal and landfills.

Paragraph 23 (a): Reconstructing houses that were destroyed during armed conflict, with timelines

145. The State of Palestine has rebuilt and repaired a number of damaged dwellings in the southern governorates. To this end, it has obtained funding from several stakeholders, which has helped to strengthen the resolve of the population and to reconstruct housing units that were fully or partially destroyed. A Kuwaiti grant of \$75 million was allocated for the reconstruction of citizens' homes in the southern governorates, following the 2014 aggression. A total of 2,253 units – each around 150 square metres – that had been completely destroyed were rebuilt. Of these, 200 or around 10 per cent, are owned by women. In addition, projects funded by an Italian grant have served to develop the Al-Nada neighbourhood and to reconstruct the Italian Complex in the Gaza Strip. Work began in 2018 with funding of €16.2 million.

146. Six housing units were built in the governorate of Tulkarm in 2020 for persons whose houses had been demolished due to their proximity to the wall, with funding from the Ministry of Finance. Ninety per cent of restoration and reconstruction work in three similar cases in the governorate of Jenin was completed in 2022.

147. A Kuwaiti grant amounting to \$37,466,536 has been allocated for the reconstruction of infrastructure in the southern governorates. Sixty-four projects have been funded, as well as 13 additional infrastructure projects and around 65 km of roads. The implementation of most of these projects began in 2017 and work was completed in the five governorates by the end of 2022. There can be no doubt that the delay was due to the blockade on the Gaza Strip and the difficulty of importing the materials necessary to rebuild roadways with all their concomitant services such as water, sewerage, electricity, rainwater drainage and traffic signals.

148. Three sub-projects – costing \$620,000 and involving additional works in the governorates of Khan Younis and Gaza – are currently being wound down. A sum of €2.2 million from an Italian grant has been allocated for the development of infrastructure and public areas in the Al-Nada neighbourhood.

149. Needs of communities in the area of the Masafer Yatta have been addressed by repairing and restoring houses and caverns, and levelling land to build roads; the following actions have been taken:

- In the first stage, building materials were supplied for the maintenance and restoration of the homes of 25 beneficiaries, for a total value of 65,127 shekels; i.e., between 2,200 and 3,400 shekels per unit;
- In the second stage, building materials were supplied for the maintenance and restoration of 12 out of the 19 caverns envisaged for that stage, for a total value of 62,200 shekels; i.e., 3,400 shekels per unit;
- A list of 18 beneficiaries for the third stage has been prepared, with a total amount of 58,800 shekels or 3,400 shekels per unit.

Paragraph 24: Living conditions in the refugee camps

150. There are several national bodies that concern themselves with Palestine refugees residing in the camps. Those bodies, which include the Department for Refugee Affairs of the Palestine Liberation Organization, work to provide refugees with the services and assistance they require, in cooperation and coordination with relevant international organizations, notably UNRWA. They make serious and effective contributions to help

alleviate the suffering of Palestine refugees, especially those residing in the camps, both at home and abroad, and provide and mobilize support to improve refugees' socioeconomic circumstances. This includes supporting infrastructure and construction projects, restoring and maintaining damaged homes and public facilities and providing refugees, particularly the most affected, with the services they require.

151. Although Israel denies them the right to return to the homes from which they were driven in 1948, Palestine refugees enjoy the same rights as non-refugee Palestinians, including rights to employment, education and property. However, those rights are undermined by the racist system of Israeli occupation, which continues to implement arbitrary measures that prevent the Palestinian Government from fulfilling its duties towards the Palestinian people. Thus, refugees suffer as their living conditions worsen; rates of poverty, unemployment and food insecurity increase as a consequence of attacks, arbitrary measures and the 16-year illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip; and the policy of racial discrimination and ethnic cleansing continues, especially in Bedouin communities in the so-called Area C and in communities close to settlements.

152. The number of refugee families living in extreme poverty inside and outside the 19 refugee camps of the West Bank has reached 3,130, which means that 22,044 Palestine refugees are living on less than two dollars per head and are dependent on assistance provided by UNRWA and relevant ministries.

153. Between 65 and 70 per cent of the population of the Gaza Strip suffer food insecurity, and 1.2 million Palestine refugees are dependent on assistance from UNRWA, with 60,000 families under the poverty line still on the waiting list. In all, 38,350 persons in Bedouin and pastoralist communities and in the so-called Area C are food insecure and in need of emergency food assistance. Among Bedouin refugees, food insecurity levels exceed 60 per cent.

154. The State of Palestine allocates fixed monthly budgets to 79 community institutions that operate in Palestinian camps. They include 25 women's centres, 29 youth centres and 25 centres for persons with disabilities and community development, as well as kindergartens.

155. Action has been taken to address the question of overpopulation inside the camps. In that regard, the State of Palestine issued a decree to promote vertical construction and to expand camp boundaries so as to alleviate population density. Within this framework, land was allocated for the Qastal rehousing project in Dayr al-Balah, which was completed in 2022 and included 10 buildings intended to rehouse 121 refugee families, or around 600 people.

Right to physical and mental health (art. 12) paragraph 25

Health care services in Palestine

156. The Palestinian Ministry of Health takes great care over the provision of primary health care services. In fact, the number of Ministry-run primary health care centres rose from 203 at the end of 1994 to 491 in 2021, an increase of 142 per cent.

157. As of 2021, there were 89 operational hospitals and 7,769 hospital beds (including in psychiatric and neurological hospitals); i.e., 4.9 beds per 10,000 inhabitants and 1.7 hospitals per 100,000 inhabitants.

158. The Ministry of Health is the largest employer of health-care workers, with 19,342 employees as of 2021.

159. Data collected during the 2017 census conducted by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics showed that about 80 per cent of Palestinians have at least one type of health insurance. Government health insurance is the most common, while UNRWA insurance covers Palestine refugees in the camps. In that regard, a total of 322,133 government health insurance cards were issued in 2021, covering 322,133 families in the West Bank. Government health insurance, it should be noted, is free and also covers the entire Gaza Strip. In addition to this, in 2021 the Council of Ministers rolled out a free government health insurance system for persons with disabilities and their families.

160. The largest proportion of spending on health in 2020 came from the Government, which accounted for 42.2 per cent of total expenditure as compared to 45.3 per cent in 2019. The proportion of the total State budget allocated to health amounted to around 12 per cent – or 2 billion shekels – for the year 2022.

161. Hospitals – i.e., general hospitals, specialized hospitals, psychiatric hospitals and unclassified hospitals – accounted for the highest proportion of health expenditure among service providers: 39.2 per cent and 37.9 per cent for the years 2020 and 2019 respectively. This was followed by centres selling medical goods and other providers of medical supplies, which accounted for 18.9 per cent of expenditure in 2020, as compared to 18.8 per cent in 2019. The lowest proportion was outlaid on providers of preventive medical services, which stood at 0.4 per cent in 2019 and 2020. The data also shows that 13.4 per cent of total health expenditure in 2020 went on primary health care centres.

162. (Paragraph 26) The Israeli occupiers target the health sector in Palestine through repeated incursions and attacks against medical facilities and staff. They also attack ambulances, carry out deliberate killings and arrest doctors and nurses who are in the course of carrying out their duties. Palestinian patients in high-risk areas, especially villages near the settlements, the apartheid wall, the Jordan Valley and the governorate of Jerusalem governorate are hindered in their access to health services. They also face difficulties in reaching hospitals in East Jerusalem or in leaving the Gaza Strip for treatment. In fact, the occupying authorities require all Palestinian patients in the West Bank to obtain permits for treatment in hospitals in occupied Jerusalem or inside the Green Line, and the same applies to patients from the Gaza Strip seeking treatment in Jerusalem or the West Bank. Most months, the approval rate for applications to enable patients to leave the Gaza Strip through the occupation-run Erez Crossing does not exceed 65 per cent.

163. Around 235 attacks by the Israeli occupation forces against medical facilities and staff were documented in 2021, as detailed below:

- There were 235 attacks against health-care workers (169 in the West Bank and 66 in the Gaza Strip);
- One hundred and six health-care workers were injured (98 in the West Bank and 8 in the Gaza Strip);
- One hundred and five ambulances were damaged (104 in the West Bank and 1 in the Gaza Strip);
- One hundred and thirty health-care facilities were damaged as a consequence of the occupation (7 in the West Bank and 123 in the Gaza Strip);
- Around 10 per cent of applications for permits submitted by patients in the West Bank were rejected;
- In all, 15,466 (or around 37 per cent) of applications for permits submitted by patients in the Gaza Strip were rejected or delayed, while 18,632 (or around 60 per cent) of applications for permits submitted by persons accompanying the patients were rejected or delayed.

Paragraph 27: Measures taken to contain the spread of COVID-19

Crisis management and coordination among different sectors

164. Since the beginning of the spread of COVID-19, the State of Palestine activated its ministries and institutions to coordinate and prepare national plans to provide health care and ensure community preparedness to confront the pandemic in its various stages. Crisis management cells were set up, as well as a number of technical committees headed by the Ministry of Health. Other steps and measures were also taken, the most significant of which are listed below:

- A state of emergency was declared throughout the country, then extended. A lockdown was announced, citizens' movements were restricted and they were confined to their homes, depending upon the level of the crisis and the health situation in the country;

- An initial plan to address the coronavirus pandemic was drawn up, which had three stages to intended to accommodate the potential scenarios for the spread of the disease: prevention and containment of the virus; detection of initial cases and mechanisms for dealing with them; and spread of the disease. The plan was then updated to reflect developments in the health and epidemiological situation;
- The Ministry of Health strove to provide adequate diagnosis and treatment to suspected and confirmed cases. To that end, it established triage, testing and treatment centres in various governorates, and it trained medical and health staff in how to handle suspected and confirmed cases of infection. It also drew up and issued instructions and circulars concerning the disease and how to deal with it, and it appointed additional medical and nursing staff and provided medical devices and equipment, especially ventilators and intensive care beds;
- Health education was improved and public awareness was raised via a number of educational activities including the production of media materials and didactic publications which were disseminated via social media and sought to raise awareness about the virus, its symptoms and how to prevent it. Thanks to coordination and cooperation with stakeholders, ministries and civil society institutions, health messages and educational posters were produced and put on display at crossing points;
- Infrastructure and special facilities for triage and sampling were set up in quarantine centres and hospitals, as well as treatment facilities and quarantine and isolation centres in all governorates, so as to ensure separation from the regular health-care system, isolating confirmed cases and thus not prejudicing basic health services in the governorates.

Vaccinating the population against COVID-19

- Thanks to its unceasing efforts, the State of Palestine was able to obtain vaccines and to begin immunizing its health-care workers. Subsequent rounds of vaccination were delivered according to a predetermined plan with the target groups being expanded according to the current and anticipated availability of vaccines. A number of vaccination centres were opened in various directorates;
- As of August 2022, approximately 1.8 million people had been vaccinated with 3.7 million doses. Sixty-three per cent of persons in the West Bank and 36 per cent in the Gaza Strip have been fully vaccinated. The low vaccination rate in the Gaza Strip is due to a community reluctance to take the vaccine;

Challenges and obstacles faced by the Palestinian health sector during the pandemic

- Promptly providing designated and appropriate locations, in all governorates, in which to undertake triage and quarantine, with the support of the Government, the private health sector and civil society institutions;
- Meeting public needs for masks, personal protective equipment and sterilizers, at reasonable prices and in sufficient quantities;
- Providing equipment and infrastructure in isolation and treatment centres (respirators and intensive care beds);
- Providing a sufficient number of medical personnel including specialist doctors (pulmonologists, intensive care specialists, etc.);
- Providing medicalisation and treatment promptly and in appropriate quantities, and providing vaccines quickly and in sufficient quantity;
- The Israeli occupation and its illegal control of borders, crossings and resources, the restrictions it imposes on movement between Palestinian cities and villages, and the illegal blockade on the Gaza Strip;
- The failure on the part of the Israeli occupation authorities to comply with international treaties or to fulfil their responsibility to protect health; at the same time,

the occupation Government is quite happy to vaccinate its own citizens in large numbers.

Right to education (arts. 13–14)

165. (Paragraph 28) Data from the Ministry of Education indicates that enrolment rates in primary education for the academic year 2021/22 were in excess of 99 per cent, although some action still needs to be taken in order to raise the enrolment rate in secondary education. Overall enrolment rates across all stages of education stood at 95.7 per cent.

166. As concerns school dropout rates, the data indicates that dropout rates were low in the primary stage, being under 0.7 per cent, while they exceeded 3 per cent in the secondary stage. Overall dropout rates across all stages of education stood at 0.8 per cent.

167. The data also indicates that completion rates were high at the primary and lower secondary levels but low at the upper secondary level, with a total of 63.3 per cent.

168. Several measures have been taken to ensure the continuity of education and to address non-attendance and dropouts, especially among girls, children from marginalized households, children with disabilities and Bedouin children:

- State-run kindergartens have been opened as preparatory sections attached to State-run schools or as independent kindergartens; as of the academic year 2021/22, there were 23 pre-preparatory classes and 480 preparatory classes;
- The policy of inclusive education has been reviewed and developed and it has begun to be applied. Special education supervisors, inclusive education supervisors and resource room teachers have been made available in 40 per cent of schools;
- One hundred resource rooms for persons with disabilities have been created as well as four centres for diagnosing persons with special needs; at the same time, curricula have been adapted for persons with visual disabilities;
- Enrolment rates among girls have been increased and new work-related special subjects have been created;
- The role of educational counsellors in schools has been reviewed with a view to providing students with psychosocial guidance and counsel, helping them to overcome their difficulties and enabling them to express themselves and make their views known concerning their rights;
- Coordination and communication take place with parents' councils and the local community so as to draw on their experience and energies to help children enjoy the regular physical, psychological and social aspects of childhood;
- Student parliaments have been rolled out and institutionalized;
- A supportive academic environment is being nurtured via care for students; enhancing trust between students, teachers and schools; and developing a body of standards on the student-teacher, student-book and student-computer ratios;
- The physical and moral learning and educational environment in schools has been rendered more welcoming for persons with disabilities;
- The learning environment has been made more gender-sensitive;
- Meaningful and positive engagement in school life and the surrounding community on the part of students has been encouraged, and efforts have been made to promote their initiative, leadership, participation and responsibility through voluntary work programmes;
- The framework in which school activities take place has been updated to allow activities to be chosen on the basis of the school's educational and developmental results, its legal status and its schedule, and efforts have been made to include all students, not just specific groups, in school activities, and to promote a culture of voluntary work;

- An adolescent health programme has been drawn up to develop students' knowledge and skills and to encourage a positive approach towards reproductive health, sex education, and adolescent health;
- Efforts have been expended to make the school environment safer and more secure and democratic, by freeing it from all manifestations of physical, moral and psychological violence, developing policies to reduce violence in schools and make them more inclusive and representative;
- Schools have been opened for students, especially for girls, in remote (marginalized) and Bedouin areas which are the most vulnerable to the violations, destruction and vandalism perpetrated by the Israeli occupiers; in addition, buses have been laid on to transport students, especially Bedouins, to their schools.

169. The measures taken to improve the quality of education focused initially on improving the school infrastructure, as follows:

- Connecting 70 per cent of schools to the Internet;
- Renovating 70 per cent of existing schools and providing specialized educational facilities as well as libraries and science and technology labs in order to meet the requirements of the Palestinian curriculum; also, providing an educational environment appropriate for persons with disabilities;
- Undertaking to carry out comprehensive and periodic maintenance work in schools, in order to provide a safe and healthy educational environment;
- Replacing inappropriate and rented school buildings as well as old and dilapidated premises as they have become unsafe to use and lack facilities appropriate for the curriculum;
- Accommodating the annual increase in the number of students so as to ensure that there is space for them across all the governorates, while avoiding overcrowding;
- Guaranteeing a geographical distribution so as to ensure safe access and minimal financial outlay for students, especially students in primary education;
- Providing appropriate facilities and classrooms for children in kindergarten (before first grade), particularly in remote and marginalized areas.

170. In order to ensure the availability of qualified teaching staff, teachers are empowered and imbued with personal, social, professional, methodological and cognitive competencies, as follows:

- Pursuing the professional development of teachers in line with teacher training strategies;
- Training teachers to enable them to identify the needs and preferences of students and to provide them with support and assistance;
- Approving and enforcing a licencing system for persons wishing to work as teachers;
- Undertaking a detailed review of the body of laws, legislation and procedures that govern teaching and vocational and technical training then, on the basis of the review, issuing decrees that are binding for the parties concerned;
- Ensuring gender balance in the labour market by cultivating certain vocational and technical specialities, rolling out technical programmes, developing existing programmes with a focus on agricultural education, and freezing certain other programmes;
- Enhancing the capacity of the system vis-à-vis the operation of kindergartens, raising kindergarten enrolment rates and improving the performance of staff;
- Providing budgets to support the early childhood sector and encouraging the private sector and local community institutions to invest in kindergartens.

School curricula

171. Technical committees of experts have been formed at the national level in the Ministry of Education, universities and other institutions to review textbooks and curricula. They are working to:

- Conduct an in-depth review of humanitarian and scientific curricula at all stages;
- Enhance life skills, creative and critical thinking, powers of analysis, initiative, problem solving, spirit of inquiry, scientific research, openness to world cultures, scientific and technological culture and civic education;
- Integrate knowledge, skills and approaches, both horizontally and vertically, and adopt an integrated approach to education at levels 1 to 4, in line with expected competencies;
- Focus on reading, writing, arithmetic, life skills and active academic research at all levels of schooling, in line with students' age and individual characteristics;
- Make the necessary changes before the start of the academic year 2020/21 and supply textbooks to students of all categories and at all stages of education, in a timely manner before the start of the academic year;
- Run professional development programmes to build the competencies of teachers, in accordance with their needs and in line with the new curriculum, building their skills and imbuing them with the knowledge, expertise and effective educational methods, addressing their areas of weaknesses and enhancing their ability to solve problems in creative ways.

172. A committee has been formed in cooperation with the Ministry of Women's Affairs to review school curricula from a gender perspective and to study proposals, initiatives, research, and publications concerning gender integration in schools, then to submit appropriate recommendations to the Ministry of Education.

173. Education on international rights, law and treaties has been integrated into the Palestinian educational curricula, using the following three methodologies:

- (a) Separate teaching materials have been provided, with special classes and teachers and their own timetable;
- (b) Topics concerning human rights and international law and treaties have been integrated into education in a manner consistent with the goals and content of school curricula, as part of curricular and extra-curricular activities;
- (c) Topics concerning human rights and international law and treaties have been addressed by treating them as separate lessons and/or including them in education in a manner consistent with the goals of school curricula.

Israeli incitement campaign against the Palestinian curriculum

174. The right to education is one of the rights most vulnerable to violations committed by the Israeli occupiers, who daily target the Palestinian educational system with attacks against students, schools and teaching staff. The school curriculum itself is threatened with incursions, arrests, demolitions, confiscations and denial of access to schools by the occupation forces and Israeli settlers, who fire live ammunition, tear gas and sound bombs in and around schools and use school facilities for military purposes. This constitutes a violation of the provisions of international law, according to which the right to education is a fundamental legally guaranteed right, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, all of which stipulate the right of all persons to education, equally and without discrimination. In addition to this, under international humanitarian law, occupiers are forbidden from obstructing access to school or from imposing any changes on the content or nature of education or on the operation of educational institutions in the occupied State. On the contrary, the law requires the occupiers to facilitate the operation of schools and to provide an education that is consistent with the culture and customs of the children under occupation.

175. Part of the Israeli targeting of the Palestinian education system includes fierce incitement campaigns against the Palestinian curricula as well as racist colonialist decrees that are issued by the occupying Government and seek to coerce and pressure Palestinian schools into teaching the Israeli curriculum. That curriculum is based on a false narrative that inverts and distorts facts with the aim of obliterating Palestinian history and the history of Israeli colonization of Palestinian lands with its record of systematic and widespread crimes and its ongoing attempts to Judaize Jerusalem. Over recent years, in fact, the occupation Government has been pursuing a policy of falsifying the official textbooks issued by the Palestinian Ministry of Education and replacing them with its own misleading books. Those books are printed and distributed to private and charitable Palestinian schools in East Jerusalem and an official demand is made that they be handed out to students in place of the original Palestinian books. This is contrary to international law because Israel, the Government of occupation, does not have the right to sovereignty over occupied Jerusalem. It has no authority to order the closure of schools there and no right to interfere with or distort the school curriculum, to impose its own curriculum on people living under occupation or to prevent the Palestinian people from recounting their true historical narrative.

176. One of the most significant achievements in the field of education has been the creation and development of databases, information systems and online communication networks, as follows:

(a) The educational platform includes an online school communication environment (e-school) in which students, teachers, school principals, and educational supervisors each have their own account. The system contains student information, such as achievement rates, daily attendance, health, violence and communication with parents. Broadcast video sessions, tasks, activities, etc. can take place via Microsoft Teams, and there are virtual classrooms to accommodate students who are unable to reach their schools;

(b) The Palestine educational satellite channel was established to facilitate integrated learning in Palestinian schools via daily video broadcasts of educational material. That material (around 2000 items) is uploaded to the online e-learning portal so as to reach the largest possible number of students;

(c) An electronic archiving system (e-letter) was set up as an online framework for sending text messages between the Ministry and the education directorates in Palestine.

Programmes and projects

1. The “Seratac” programme is an educational reform initiative intended to improve teaching methods, assessment methodologies and career paths. It includes the following components:

- Building solid foundations for education and caring for students and their well-being;
- Using technology to improve education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, and developing an effective career guidance system for all students;
- Creating inclusive opportunities to obtain the high school diploma by obtaining and using high-quality educational data from international assessments.

2. The STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) programme is an educational methodology based on the creative resolution of problems in their real context. It includes life-related projects and constitutes a shift in education from cognitive attainment to discovery. This is to be achieved by following an approach in which learning and life are closely integrated, and moving away from memorization and recitation, as follows:

- *Research and Inquiry*: The students’ learning programme includes modules dedicated to developing and employing their abilities in research, discovery, analysis and problem solving as well as in other advanced cognitive skills;
- *Scientific culture*: Students are exposed to engaging narratives about the history of science, inventions and discoveries, with particular attention being

paid to science among the Arabs and peoples of the past and, to the extent possible, linking this to educational content;

- *Educational programmes*: Events and programmes for universities are organized and run to help teachers adopt STEM methodologies and curricula in their schools; this is in addition to intensive summer courses for school staff and extracurricular programmes for students.

Cultural rights (art. 15)

177. (Paragraph 29) The State of Palestine reaffirms the statement it made in its initial report under the International Covenant on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights (paras. 267–268 on pages 70–71).

178. (Paragraph 30) The State of Palestine reaffirms the statement it made in its initial report under the International Covenant on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights (paras. 269–270 on page 71) and the statement in its initial report under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.
