



11 May 2021

Senator the Hon. Marise Payne
Minister for Foreign Affairs
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Dear Minister Payne

RE: ISRAEL MUST END BRUTAL REPRESSION OF PALESTINIANS PROTESTING FORCED DISPLACEMENT IN OCCUPIED EAST JERUSALEM

Amnesty International is deeply concerned about recent incidents in which Israeli security forces have used repeated, unwarranted and excessive force against Palestinian protesters in occupied East Jerusalem following four days of violence in which 840 Palestinians were injured. At least 21 Israeli police officers and seven Israeli civilians were also injured, according to Israeli police.

I am writing to you to urge the Australian government to call on:

- Israel to immediately halt forced evictions in the neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah and end the ongoing forced displacement of Palestinians from East Jerusalem, and
- Israel to use all opportunities available to hold Israel accountable for its systematic violations under international law, and
- United Nations Security Council members to convene an open session and for the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process to brief member states.

Evidence gathered by Amnesty International reveals a chilling pattern of Israeli forces using abusive and wanton force against largely peaceful Palestinian protesters in recent days. Some of those injured in the violence in East Jerusalem include bystanders or worshippers making Ramadan prayers.

Eyewitness testimonies – as well as videos and photographs taken by Amnesty International’s researchers on the ground in East Jerusalem –show how Israeli forces have repeatedly deployed disproportionate and unlawful force to disperse protesters during violent raids on al-Aqsa mosque and carried out unprovoked attacks on peaceful demonstrators in Sheikh Jarrah.

Since the beginning of Ramadan on 13 April tensions have been steadily rising as Palestinians protested against Israeli restrictions limiting their access to Damascus Gate, a main entrance to the Old City of Jerusalem. On 26 April, Israeli authorities removed the restrictions in response to the

continuous demonstrations. Anger has also been rising over the imminent plans to forcibly evict four Palestinian families from Sheikh Jarrah to make way for Israeli settlers.

Unlawful use of force

Tensions reached boiling point on 7 May, when more than 170 Palestinians were injured as Israeli forces stormed the al-Aqsa mosque compound in dispersing worshippers along with protesters, firing 40mm kinetic impact projectiles (KIPs) and concussion grenades into crowds gathered there for prayers on the last Friday of Ramadan. In response, protesters at al-Aqsa threw stones and lit fires as Israeli forces on horseback and in riot gear used stun grenades to repel them.

On 10 May, more than 300 Palestinian protesters were injured when Israeli forces stormed the al-Aqsa compound for the second time in days. A Red Crescent spokesperson told Amnesty International that the violence led to the hospitalisation of at least 250 Palestinians, with seven in a critical condition.

Sheikh Jarrah

Over the past week Palestinians in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood have held nightly demonstrations in response to the imminent threat of forced eviction. Amnesty International has documented arbitrary arrests of peaceful demonstrators, the use of excessive force, arbitrary use of sound and stun grenades as well as the arbitrary spraying of malodorant (skunk) water canons at demonstrators and homes in Sheikh Jarrah.

Four Palestinian families in the neighbourhood are under imminent threat of forced eviction after a Jerusalem court rejected their appeal against an eviction order. Nahalat Shimon International, a settler company, has filed lawsuits to seize the homes of dozens of families in Sheikh Jarrah using inherently discriminatory laws, such as the Legal and Administrative Matter Laws as well as the Absentee Property Law of 1950, to confiscate Palestinian land or property and transfer it to settler groups. Forcible transfer of the occupied population is prohibited under international humanitarian law and constitutes a war crimes according to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Amnesty International researchers witnessed an unprovoked attack by Israeli forces against a group of peaceful demonstrators in Sheikh Jarrah on 9 May. Israeli forces arrived shortly before iftar, the evening Ramadan meal. After the meal a tens of peaceful protesters formed a circle and began chanting against the imminent plans to evict Palestinian families from their homes. The demonstrators were at least 10 metres away from the Israeli forces who were stationed by a nearby Israeli settlers' home. A short while later Israeli forces launched a coordinated attack to disperse the crowd of Palestinian protesters. Israeli forces on horseback began to sprint towards the crowd. One man limping in pain said he was trampled on by police horses as he tried to run away from the area. Residents were pushed into the walls of their homes and five men were arbitrarily arrested.

Israeli forces began to shove and hit the group including an Amnesty researcher observing the protest. At around 10pm they brought the skunk water canons and sound grenades and began to arbitrarily fire at demonstrators.

Referral to International Criminal Court

Amnesty International remains deeply disappointed that the Australian government did not support the investigation of alleged war crimes in Occupied Palestinian Territory by the International Criminal Court (ICC). Australia's non-recognition of Palestine as a State should not preclude any opportunity for serious allegations to be investigated. The question at hand is not about statehood, it is about the human rights of people in OPT. I note that the ICC will review this decision in 2021, and I urge your government to support the investigation.

Amnesty International will continue to monitor the human rights situation on Occupied East Jerusalem and report on it at every opportunity.

For further information, or to discuss and organise a meeting, please contact Joel MacKay at joel.mackay@amnesty.org.au or 0424 242 112.

Yours sincerely,

Tim O'Connor
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