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**SHAMS Center:****"Occupation's Destruction of Schools and Universities in Gaza Strip, a Policy of Ignorance and Destruction of Palestinian Educational and Cultural Progress"**

Ramallah: Human Rights and Democracy Media Center- SHAMS, affirms that the systematic targeting of the Palestinian educational institutions in the Gaza Strip, by the Israeli occupation, is a manifestation of the Israeli policy of illiteracy and ignorance applied against Palestinians and depriving Palestinians of education, knowledge, culture, and creativity. The Israeli aggressive forces have targeted Palestinian universities, schools, kindergartens, and cultural institutions within attacks being conducted against the Gaza Strip for more than a month. The Center stressed that through these attacks, the occupation seeks to demolish the literary and cultural movement. Additionally, to abolish the Palestinian narration, which is one of the tools utilized within the national struggle to confront the occupation and propose alternative narration to the false occupation's narration, as well as publicizing the crimes committed by the Israeli army against Palestinians.

SHAMS Center affirmed that targeting the Palestinian educational and cultural facilities (universities, schools, and cultural centers) and demolishing the Palestinian heritage and historical buildings, reveals the level of fascism and criminality mentality of the Israeli military leaders and officers. Such a behavior publicizes the real reasons that undermine the Israeli aggression, which is to demolish all the life elements of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Moreover, it reflects the negligence and denial of the international conventions and treaties that neutralize such facilities during armed conflicts and prohibit targeting them as they are civic establishments and have nothing to do with military clashes.

The Center denounces the systematic targeting and destroying of the educational schools (mainly UNRWA and governmental schools and their teams), by the Israeli occupation forces in the Gaza Strip. The Israeli strikes against the educational facilities as well as against the various civic establishments, resulted in creating a case of fear and anxiety among Palestinians who feel that there is no safe place in the Gaza Strip. In this regard, since the beginning of the aggression, 38 schools have been entirely demolished while another 221 schools have been partially destroyed. 2510 students are among the martyrs in addition to 70 martyrs of the educational teams. As for the high educational institutions, the number of martyrs from their academic cadres reached 439 persons in addition to 427 students and 12 of the administrative teams. 11 universities were partially destroyed as a result of the Israeli attacks. Likewise, several academic and cultural centers were affected as a result of the Israeli attacks (according to the reports of the Ministry of Education).

SHAMS Center affirmed that targeting and destroying educational institutions are violations of the right to education, which is a fundamental human right and these acts are crimes against humanity in accordance with the International Humanitarian Law and International Law. The Hague Convention on Land Warfare- 1907, included special protection of educational institutions during war and armed conflicts. Article 27 of the Convention states: "In sieges and bombardments, all necessary steps must be taken to spare, as far as possible, buildings dedicated to religion, art, science, or charitable purposes,



historic monuments, hospitals, and places where the sick and wounded are collected, provided they are not being used at the time for military purposes". In the same sense, Article 56 states: "The property of municipalities, that of institutions dedicated to religion, charity, and education, the arts and sciences, even when State property, shall be treated as private property. All seizure of, destruction or wilful damage done to institutions of this character, historic monuments, works of art and science, is forbidden, and should be made the subject of legal proceedings". Attacking the educational and cultural institutions violates Article 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which states: "Intentionally attacking civic objects dedicated for educational, cultural, and scientific purposes and those to gather wounded, is a war crime". On a related level, the Israeli crimes violate the Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, where Article 4 of the given Convention states: "The High Contracting Parties undertake to respect cultural property situated within their own territory as well as within the territory of other High Contracting Parties by refraining from any use of the property and its immediate surroundings or of the appliances in use for its protection for purposes which are likely to expose it to destruction or damage in the event of armed conflict; and by refraining from any act of hostility, directed against such property". Additionally, the Israeli attacks violated the General Assembly Resolution 36/ 147 dated 16/12/1981 (paragraph 6), which emphasized that attacking historical and cultural sites is considered a war crime. Attacking educational institutions is a violation of the right to education, which was affirmed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as with the United Nations Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. The same right was also affirmed by the Convention on Child Rights.

SHAMS Center demanded the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization- UNESCO, to initiate immediate press on the occupation's state to stop its crimes against the Palestinian educational and cultural institutions, mainly the schools. Demolishing the schools is an attack by the occupation state against the educational institutions of a state party of UNESCO. Additionally, it is an attack against the United Nations properties as the targeted schools are UNRWA Schools that raise the flag on the United Nations. UNESCO should start immediately in measures to protect the educational institutions including those of the United Nations (UNRWA Schools) and those schools of a state party of UNESCO (State of Palestine. Shams" Center called on the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Special Rapporteur for the United Nations on Child Rights, regional Arab and Islamic international organizations, and international non-governmental organizations concerned with education and culture to urge their governments and parliaments to take immediate action to stop the Israeli aggression on all aspects of life in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in the Gaza Strip. They also called for an end to the policy of destruction carried out by the occupying forces against universities, schools, scientific, and cultural centers