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SHAMS Center:**Israeli Occupation Hastening Annexation and Apartheid in the West Bank amid Global Focus on the "Gaza Ongoing Genocide War"**

Human Rights and Democracy Media Center- SHAMS, asserts that the Israeli army is making use of the fact that the world is busy in following up on the genocide war in the Gaza Strip, to enhance its crimes of expanding settlements and applying apartheid regime in the West Bank. The purpose of the Israeli occupation is to annex the maximum possible areas and Judaize the Palestinian lands. The occupation forces are confiscating Palestinians' land for the sake of building new settlements and expanding the existing ones. Parts of Palestinians' land are confiscated for establishing military zones and natural reserves. The end-to-day purpose is to confiscate the widest possible areas of land, restrict Palestinians' lives, and creating facts on the ground to ensure that there is no possibility of establishing a Palestinian state in the future.

The Center deplores the crimes of the Israeli settlers in the West Bank, which include shooting, burning houses, destroying properties, and banning Palestinians from accessing their agricultural lands. The settlers are active in stoning Palestinians as well as burning and theft the crops. Additionally, they burn Palestinian cars and block the roads, under the support and protection of the Israeli army itself. Such a policy is encouraged and directed by the current Israeli radical government, where the ministers of this government incite for killing of Palestinians daily. An example is the call of the Israeli Minister of Finance to burn Hiwara Town, to the south of Nablus. In addition to that, the Israeli government is distributing thousands of guns among the settlers in the West Bank. Additionally, the Israeli government legalized the settlers militias, especially those known as (Hells Boys and Price- Tag Group). These groups are attacking Palestinians systematically and destroying their properties, through the support of the Israeli army.

SHAMS Center asserts that the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, witnessed a noticeable increase in the settlement units, since 2017. The settlement expansion included projects for infrastructure and establishing the new so-called illegal settlement farms. The Center added that the number of settlers in the West Bank and Jerusalem reached 726 thousand and 427 settlers distributed among 176 settlements and 186 settlement spots (unlicensed), including 86 agricultural spots, as of 2023. In addition to that, the Israeli Knesset approved a law on 30/3/2023, which allows settlers to enter the areas, in the northern of the West Bank, evacuated within the 2005 disengagement plan.

The Center affirms that the policy of the Israeli government to provide incentives to the settlers, health/ education services, opening roads, rehabilitating the infrastructure, and connecting with electricity/ water networks, all that for symbolic fees in addition to the tax exemptions for the settlers in the West Bank, are clear violations of Palestinians' rights. At the time Palestinians, especially Jerusalemites are deprived of accessing their land and building, and deprived of basic services (mainly in Jerusalem and the areas classified as "C" areas), settlers are granted all facilities and lands are confiscated for the sake of building settlements. The Israeli government is applying a clear apartheid regime against Palestinians where it uses the various forms of violence and terrorism where the Israeli army, government, judiciary authority, civil administration, police, and the nature police implements these practices, as well as the other arms of the Occupying Power.



SHAMS Center affirms that the Israeli policy of settlement violates the international law and the international humanitarian law. In particular, it violates the Geneva Fourth Convention (dated 12/8/1949). Article 49 of the Convention states: "Individual or mass forcible transfers, as well as deportations of protected persons from occupied territory to the territory of the Occupying Power or to that of any other country, occupied or not, are prohibited, regardless of their motive". Article 15 of the same Convention states: "Parties to the conflict may establish safe places to host civilians who are not taking part in the adverse acts or military conflict during their stay in such places". The Israeli acts violate the United Nations Security Council Resolution number 2334 (issued on 23/12/2016), which urged the Israeli government to halt the process of building settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem. The given Resolution considered building settlement as a violation of international law and an obstacle in the face of achieving peace and a two-state solution. Moreover, Israel violates Resolution number 446/ 1979, which affirmed that settlement in the Occupied Palestinian Territory is illegal and hinders the efforts to achieve peace.

SHAMS Center demands the United Nations and the permanent member states of the Security Council, as well as the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and governmental/ non-governmental institutions, to take immediate action and compel the occupying government to stop settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory and prevent the crimes committed daily by settlers against Palestinian citizens in the West Bank. It is imperative to compel the occupying government to comply with international humanitarian law in protecting civilians and their properties in times of occupation and armed conflict.