

**For the attention of:**

Mr Guy Ryder  
ILO Director-General  
Geneva, Switzerland  
Email: [ryder@ilo.org](mailto:ryder@ilo.org)

**Cc:**

Mr Mounir Kleibo,  
ILO Jerusalem Representative  
ILO in the occupied Palestinian territory  
Email: [kleibo@ilo.org](mailto:kleibo@ilo.org)

4 May 2020

**Ref: Joint Open Letter – Protection of Palestinian Workers During and After COVID-19**

Dear Mr Ryder,

We, the undersigned civil society organisations, trade unions, and concerned citizens around the world, address this joint open letter to the International Labour Organization (ILO) on the occasion of International Workers' Day on 1 May 2020, urging you to take action in the framework of your mandate to protect the rights, livelihoods, and dignity of Palestinian workers, women and men, and their families during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work has confirmed the essential role that ILO, one hundred years since its creation, must play for the achievement of 'social justice, democracy and the promotion of universal and lasting peace.'<sup>i</sup>

We welcome the ILO's recent statement calling on governments around the world to take action to prevent and control the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace. As stressed by the ILO, 'It is only by implementing occupational safety and health measures that we can protect the lives of workers, their families and the larger communities, ensure work continuity and economic survival.'<sup>ii</sup> We also welcome the ILO's Palestinian Decent Work Programme, as a serious effort to enhance employment and livelihood opportunities and realise fundamental principles and rights at work for Palestinian women and men.<sup>iii</sup>

Around the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated vulnerabilities linked to poverty, discrimination, conflict and occupation. In Palestine, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the forefront Israel's regime of institutionalised racial domination and oppression over the Palestinian people as a whole, which amounts to the crime of apartheid.<sup>iv</sup> As highlighted in your latest 2019 report on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories, 'the Palestinians themselves have little scope to improve their destiny. The Israeli occupation is stifling in every respect, dominating almost every aspect of Palestinian life.'<sup>v</sup> Throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, the Israeli occupying authorities have continued to indiscriminately target Palestinians' livelihoods during the COVID-19 pandemic, including through attacks on farmers, shepherds, and fishermen in the Gaza Strip.<sup>vi</sup>

During COVID-19, the susceptibility of Palestinian workers to the pandemic has been compounded, with the Israeli occupying authorities continuing to prioritize economic considerations over the inherent rights and dignity of Palestinian workers. With the start of the outbreak, the Israeli occupying

authorities allowed approximately 60,000 Palestinian workers employed in Israel to temporarily reside in Israel for a maximum period of two months during the public health emergency, with Israeli employers mandated to ensure adequate housing, proper sanitation, and food for workers.<sup>vii</sup> Yet, Palestinian workers have faced dire housing conditions and have been forced to sleep at construction sites or in greenhouses,<sup>viii</sup> while Palestinian workers displaying symptoms of the flu have been thrown at checkpoints without coordination to ensure they would receive treatment.<sup>ix</sup> At the same time, the Israeli occupying authorities have refused to test Palestinian workers for COVID-19, thereby failing to take adequate measures to curb the spread of the pandemic in the occupied Palestinian territory, and further undermined containment and mitigation efforts by the Palestinian Authority for returning workers. The Palestinian Health Ministry has found that workers, their families, and their contacts make up a majority of COVID-19 infections in the West Bank.<sup>x</sup>

As we commemorate International Workers' Day and the achievements in advancing labour rights across the globe, Palestinian workers employed in Israel and in illegal Israeli settlements continue to endure dire working conditions, receive lower wages than their Israeli counterparts, and are denied access to healthcare and other benefits, amongst other discriminatory policies and practices of the Israeli occupation.<sup>xi</sup> In particular, the Israeli construction sector, which is dominated by Palestinian workers from both sides of the Green Line and which has continued as an 'essential service' during COVID-19, is considered to be one of the most dangerous sectors for work-related accidents, as it lacks the necessary supervision by the Israeli government, whose responsibility it is to ensure that employers uphold Palestinian workers' rights.<sup>xii</sup>

As highlighted by the ILO, COVID-19 has exposed the fragility of economies across the globe, with the pandemic having the potential 'in the longer-term [to] dramatically amplify cycles of poverty and inequality.'<sup>xiii</sup> It is therefore more urgent than ever to address the prolonged denial of the individual and collective rights of the Palestinian people as the root cause depriving Palestinians of an adequate standard of living, including the right to work. Notably, United Nations Special Rapporteurs have recalled Israel's legal duty to ensure that Palestinians receive essential health services,<sup>xiv</sup> expressed concerns over Israel impeding efforts to effectively control and mitigate the impacts of COVID-19, and called for equal access to treatment and testing without discrimination.<sup>xv</sup>

Accordingly, we the undersigned civil society organisations, trade unions, and concerned citizens around the world call on you today, as Director-General of the ILO, to:

- i. Send an urgent letter to the Minister of Labour and Minister of Health in Israel, calling on the Israeli occupying authorities to urgently provide Palestinian workers with their three months' wages during the emergency period, as per Israeli labour law; to take all necessary measures, including with employers, to guarantee healthcare coverage for Palestinian workers during and in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic; to provide Palestinian workers staying in Israel with adequate housing, food, water, and sanitation, as essential to upholding their rights and mitigating the effects of COVID-19 amongst workers and their families upon return; and

- ii. Invite the 109th session of the International Labour Conference to hold Israel, the occupying power, accountable for its violation of Palestinian workers' rights through the adequate supervision of the Committee of Experts to implement the recommendations of the report on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories and for the enforcement of the conventions it has ratified.

Yours sincerely,

**Organisations worldwide:**

1. Asociación Alnakba, Venezuela
2. Asociación Árabe Guatemalteca, Guatemala
3. Asociación Canaán, Venezuela
4. Asociación Comunidad Palestina, Guatemala
5. Asociación Salvadoreña Palestina, El Salvador
6. Association Belgo-Palestinienne (ABP), Belgium
7. Association France-Palestine Solidarité (AFPS), France
8. Assopace Palestina, Italy
9. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS), Egypt
10. Centre for Arab Unity Studies, Lebanon
11. Cine Fértil, Argentina
12. Civic Coalition for Palestinian Rights in Jerusalem (CCPRJ), Palestine
13. CNCD-11.11.11, Belgium
14. Comunidad Colombo-Palestina, Colombia
15. Comunidad Palestina de Chile, Chile
16. Een Andere Joodse Stem (Another Jewish Voice), Belgium
17. Europol Forum, United Kingdom
18. European Coordination of Committees and Associations for Palestine (ECCP), Belgium
19. European Legal Support Center (ELSC), The Netherlands
20. European Trade Union Network for Justice in Palestine – Steering Committee
21. Fundación Cultural Colombo Palestina, Colombia
22. Habitat International Coalition – Housing and Land Rights Network (HIC-HLRN), Egypt
23. Instituto Brasil Palestina (IBRASPAL), Brazil
24. International Labour Network of Solidarity and Struggles
25. Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Ireland
26. Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), United States
27. Juventud Chileno-Árabe por Palestina de Valdivia, Chile
28. Mouvement contre le Racisme et pour l'Amitié entre les Peuples (MRAP), France
29. Mouvement International de la Réconciliation (MIR), France
30. Organización Solidaria con Palestina (OSP-Chile), Chile
31. Palästina Spricht, Koalition für palästinensische Rechte und gegen Rassismus – Palestine Speaks, Coalition for Palestinian Rights and Against Racism, Germany

32. Palestine Solidarity Campaign, United Kingdom
33. Palestinian National Institute for NGOs (PNIN), Palestine
34. Plateforme des ONG françaises pour la Palestine, France
35. Society of St. Yves – Catholic Center for Human Rights, Palestine
36. The Palestine Institute for Public Diplomacy (PIPD), Palestine
37. Unión Árabe de Cuba, Cuba
38. Unión General de Estudiantes Palestinos (UGEP-Chile), Chile
39. Union Juive Française pour la Paix (UJFP), France
40. Unión Palestina de América Latina (UPAL), El Salvador
41. Union syndicale Solidaires, France
42. Youth Development Association (YDA), Palestine

**The Palestinian Human Rights Organizations Council (PHROC), Palestine, including:**

43. Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association
44. Al Mezan Center for Human Rights
45. Al-Haq – Law in the Service of Mankind
46. Aldameer Association for Human Rights
47. Defense for Children International (DCI) – Palestine
48. Hurriyat – Center for Defense of Liberties and Civil Rights
49. Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center (JLAC)
50. Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR)
51. Ramallah Center for Human Rights Studies (RCHRS)
52. Independent Commission for Human Rights (Ombudsman Office) – Observer Member
53. Muwatin Institute for Democracy and Human Rights – Observer Member

**The Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations Network (PNGO), Palestine, including:**

54. Agricultural Development Association (PARC)
55. Al-Awda Center for Childhood and the Youth
56. Alrowwad Cultural and Arts Society
57. An-Najda Society for the Development of Palestinian Women
58. Arab Agronomists Association (AAA)
59. Arab Center for Agricultural Development (ACAD)
60. Burj Al-Luqluq Social Center Society
61. Democracy and Workers' Rights Center (DWRC)
62. Early Childhood Resource Center (ECRC)
63. Health Work Committees (HWC)
64. Human Rights and Democracy Media Center – SHAMS
65. Land Research Center (LRC)
66. Ma'an Development Center
67. Musawa – The Palestinian Center for the Independence of the Judiciary and the Legal Profession

68. Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA)
69. Palestinian Center for Democracy and Conflict Resolution (PCDCR)
70. Palestinian Center for Peace and Democracy (PCPD)
71. Palestinian Family Planning and Protection Association (PFPPA)
72. Palestinian Medical Relief Society (PMRS)
73. Palestinian Women’s Development Society (PWDS)
74. Palestinian Working Women Society for Development (PWWSO)
75. Popular Art Centre
76. Psycho-Social Counselling Center for Women (PSCCW)
77. Sareyyet Ramallah
78. Tamer Institute for Community Education
79. Teacher Creativity Center
80. The Palestinian Businesswomen’s Association – ASALA
81. Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC)
82. Union of Health Work Committees (UHCW)
83. Union of Palestinian Women’s Committees (UPWC)
84. Women’s Centre for Legal Aid and Counseling (WCLAC)
85. Women’s Studies Centre
86. Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) – Palestine
87. Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) – Ramallah

## **Individuals:**

**1,837 concerned citizens** signed the open letter online between 1 and 4 May 2020.<sup>xvi</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> *ILO Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work*, adopted by the International Labour Conference at its 108th Session in Geneva on 21 June 2019, Preamble.

<sup>ii</sup> ILO, “Protect workers both now and after lockdowns ease, says ILO,” 28 April 2020, available at: [https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS\\_742898/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_742898/lang--en/index.htm).

<sup>iii</sup> ILO, “The Palestinian Decent Work Programme 2018–2022,” April 2018, available at: [https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/how-the-ilo-works/departments-and-offices/program/dwcp/WCMS\\_629011/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/how-the-ilo-works/departments-and-offices/program/dwcp/WCMS_629011/lang--en/index.htm).

<sup>iv</sup> See, notably, Al-Haq, “Israeli Apartheid Undermines Palestinian Right to Health Amidst COVID-19 Pandemic,” 7 April 2020, available at: <http://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/16692.html>.

<sup>v</sup> ILO, The situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories, Report of the Director-General, International Labour Conference, 108th Session, 2019, ILC.108/Dg/App, para. 152, available at: [https://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/108/reports/reports-to-the-conference/WCMS\\_705016/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/ilc/ILCSessions/108/reports/reports-to-the-conference/WCMS_705016/lang--en/index.htm).

<sup>vi</sup> Al-Haq, “Israel’s Gross Violations of Human Rights in the Face of COVID-19 (Reporting Period 8 - 29 March 2020),” 3 April 2020, available at: <http://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/16676.html>.

<sup>vii</sup> See, for example, Lee Yaron and Hagar Shezaf, “For Palestinian Construction Workers in Israel, the Coronavirus Is Just One More Danger,” Haaretz, 20 March 2020, available at: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-for-palestinian-construction-workers-in-israel-the-coronavirus-is-just-one-more-dan-1.8694613>.

<sup>viii</sup> See, e.g., Suha Arraf, “‘The moment a worker is sick, they throw him to the checkpoint like a dog,’” +972 Magazine, 24 March 2020, available at: <https://www.972mag.com/checkpoint-palestinian-laborers-coronavirus/>.

<sup>ix</sup> See Akram Al-Waara, “Coronavirus: Palestinian workers left in the lurch as Israel reneges on containment plan,” Middle East Eye, 25 March 2020, available at: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/coronavirus-palestinian-workers-israel-reneges-deal-contain-pandemic>; see also Adam Ragson, “PA accuses Israel of abandoning sick Palestinian worker at

West Bank checkpoint,” The Times of Israel, 24 March 2020, available at: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/pa-accuses-israel-of-abandoning-sick-palestinian-worker-at-west-bank-checkpoint/>; Wafa, “Israel’s treatment of Palestinian workers is inhumane, says government spokesman,” 24 March 2020, available at: <http://english.wafa.ps/page.aspx?id=PNU4Tka115493323044aPNU4Tk>.

<sup>x</sup> Al-Haq, “Civil Society Groups Send Appeal to UN Special Procedures on the Rights and Dignity of Palestinian Workers in Israel during COVID-19,” 15 April 2020, available at: <http://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/16733.html>.

<sup>xi</sup> Al-Haq, “Occupied Livelihoods: Palestinians Striving for their Right to Work,” 1 May 2012, available at: <http://www.alhaq.org/advocacy/6891.html>.

<sup>xii</sup> See *supra* note x.

<sup>xiii</sup> ILO, “COVID-19 has exposed the fragility of our economies,” 27 March 2020, available at: [https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS\\_739961/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_739961/lang-en/index.htm).

<sup>xiv</sup> OHCHR, “COVID-19: Israel has ‘legal duty’ to ensure that Palestinians in OPT receive essential health services – UN expert,” 19 March 2020, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/FR/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25728&LangID=E>.

<sup>xv</sup> OHCHR, “COVID-19: Israel must release Palestinian prisoners in vulnerable situation, say UN experts,” 24 April 2020, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25822&LangID=E>.

<sup>xvi</sup> The online petition to sign this joint open letter to the ILO was published by The Palestine Institute for Public Diplomacy (PIPD) and is available in English at: [https://secure.everyaction.com/KDKDXdr\\_WkySEjdUfN-oEQ2](https://secure.everyaction.com/KDKDXdr_WkySEjdUfN-oEQ2). It was also published in French at: <https://secure.everyaction.com/gVyMWpG9yUiaxz91nu-z4Q2>; and in Spanish at: <https://secure.everyaction.com/wvthGPGzWkCULP7ONyORog2>.