

United Nations  Nations Unies

HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS • HAUT COMMISSARIAT AUX DROITS DE L'HOMME

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28 May 2004

Dear Mr. Owens,

In my mandate as the Special Rapporteur on the right to food entrusted upon me by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights resolution 2000/10, I have been requested to seek, receive and respond to information on all aspects of the realization of the right to food, including the urgent necessity of eradicating hunger. In its most recent resolution 2004/19 adopted in April 2004, the Commission on Human Rights requested all States and private actors, to take fully into account the need to promote the effective realization of the right to food and to cooperate fully in the fulfilment of my mandate.

From my observations during my mission I undertook to the Occupied Palestinian Territories in July 2003 as well as the subsequent information I have received, I am deeply concerned about the actions of the Israeli occupying forces in Rafah and in other locations in Gaza and the West Bank, using armoured bulldozers supplied by your company to destroy agricultural farms, greenhouses, ancient olive groves and agricultural fields planted with crops, as well as numerous Palestinian homes and sometimes human lives, including that of the American peace activist, Rachel Corrie.

I am also concerned that these actions, and the consequent increase in the homelessness and the loss of livelihood among the Palestinian populations, would further aggravate the already precarious living conditions of the Palestinian people, including their access to food. Already, over 50 per cent of Palestinians are largely dependent on food aid. According to the estimates by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations from July 2003, food insecurity is a reality for 40 per cent of the population and a near constant worry for an

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additional 30 per cent who are under threat of becoming food insecure should current conditions persist.

The right to adequate food, contained in article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights among other international human rights instruments, is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement. The actions of the occupying forces to destroy houses, water and agricultural resources which would further limit the sustainable means for the Palestinian people to enjoy physical and economic access to food, would therefore constitute the violation of the right to food.

While only States are parties to the Covenant and are thus ultimately accountable for compliance with it, all members of society - individuals, families, local communities, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, as well as the private business sector - have responsibilities in the realization of the right to adequate food. In this context, there is also a concern that allowing the delivery of your D-9 and D-10 Caterpillar bulldozers to the Israeli army through the Government of the United States in the certain knowledge that they are being used for such actions, might involve complicity or acceptance on the part of your company to actual and potential violations of human rights, including the right to food.

Recognizing your company's commitment to a policy of social responsibility, I would be very grateful if you would inform me what urgent measures you would consider taking, in order to address these concerns in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Please accept the assurances of my highest consideration,



Jean Ziegler
Special Rapporteur on the
right to food