

African statement
under item 7

The follow up to the Special Session on Beit Hanoun

Mr. President,

I am honored to deliver this statement on behalf of the African Group.

The African Group would like to highly commend the exhaustive ~~report~~ *and long awaited* submitted by the Fact Finding Mission dispatched by the Council to investigate the atrocities committed by Israel in the town of Beit Hanoun on 8 November 2006.

The Group would like to highlight the exemplary integrity, diligence and courage shown by His Eminence Archbishop Dismund Tutu and Professor Christine Chinkin in fulfilling their mandate.

The Group would like also to make reference to the fact that the fact finding Mission had to travel to Beit Hanoun via Egypt due to the Israeli longstanding procrastination and refusal to show any form of cooperation with the Mission dispatched by the Council.

The report provides the Council with a meticulous legal investigation of the grave violations of the international law, the international humanitarian law and the international human rights law committed by the Israeli forces bombarding the civilians of Beit Hanoun in that dark day of human history.

The report also reflects the plight of the Palestinian civilians seeking treatment after the attack. It shows that Israel hindered approval to move the injured to hospitals some 12 hours after the shelling. It also addresses the refusal of the Israeli authorities to allow the injured children and elderly to be

accompanied by family members when traveling to seek treatment.

One of the most striking accounts of the report was the fact that Israeli ambulances refused to transport the injured from Erez crossing to hospitals without the immediate payment of some thousands of Shekels.

Mr. President,

Paragraph 49 of the report leaves no doubt of what happened in that shocking massacre. It states that . . . I quote "the firing of artillery towards Beit Hanoun on the morning of 8 November 2006 was a deliberate act in the context of the long-term occupation of Gaza and of the deaths of civilians and destruction of property in Autumn Clouds" . . . end of quote.

The Group is deeply alarmed at the conclusion of the Mission that there is a possibility that the shelling of Beit Hanoun constituted a war crime. The Group believes that such a serious conclusion warrants a rapid and clear response by the international community at large.

The African Group fully endorses the recommendations contained in the report and joins the Mission in emphasizing that the occupation of the Palestinian Territories remains the root cause of the bleak situation in the territories.

Mr. President,

The African Group would like to seize this opportunity to, once again, renew its unwavering support for the legitimate cause of the Palestinian People and for their just aspirations to establishing their independent state with east Jerusalem as its capital.

I thank you.