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**Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights while countering terrorism, the Special Rapporteur on the right to peaceful assembly and association, the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children, and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences.**

Ref.: Letter 01/2022

(Please use this reference in your reply)

**To:** Mr. Wopke Hoekstra, **Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands**  
Ms. Liesje Schreinemacher, **Minister for Foreign Trade and Development  
Cooperation of the Netherlands**

**Re:** Decision of the Government of the Netherlands to end funding for the Union of  
Agricultural Work Committees

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26 January 2022

Dear Minister Hoekstra,

Dear Minister Schreinemacher,

We are writing to you in our capacity as members of the United Nations Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council. We are independent human rights experts, appointed by the Council for six-year terms with specific thematic and geographic mandates.

We have previously written a letter, dated 8 December 2021, to the European Union (EU) and its Member States, including the Netherlands, to convey our deep concerns about the decision in October 2021 of the Israeli government to designate six leading Palestinian civil society groups as “terrorist organizations”.

On 5 January 2022, the former Dutch government announced by way of a letter to the Dutch Parliament that it was ending its financial support for the Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC), one of the six Palestinian NGOs that the Israeli government has designated. Over the years, the UAWC has provided essential services and assistance to vulnerable farming and fishing communities in the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT).

The Dutch government's decision to ending funding for the UAWC was announced following an external investigation commissioned by the Dutch Foreign Ministry into possible links between the UAWC and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a group designated as a terrorist organization by the EU.

There are two important features of the 5 January letter that we wish to reflect upon.

First, this external investigation found, contrary to the allegations advanced against the UAWC by the Israeli government, no indications of financial flows and no organizational unity between the UAWC and the PFLP, nor any indications that the PFLP directs the UAWC, or any indications on links between the UAWC and the armed wing of the PFLP.

In its assessment of the external investigation's findings, the Dutch government determined that: "it cannot be concluded from this investigation that there are organizational links between the UAWC and the PFLP." [Translation]

The external investigation did find that there were individuals who were board and staff members of the UAWC with alleged personal links with the PFLP. However, it went on to state that there was no evidence that any of these individuals used their alleged links to the PFLP to organize or support terrorist activities. In its 5 January letter, the Dutch government also noted that: "UAWC has never been designated as a terrorist organization by either the EU or the UN, and that no board or staff member of the UAWC have even been placed on EU sanctions lists." [Translation]

And second, notwithstanding these important and exculpatory findings, the former Dutch government nevertheless decided to end its long-standing funding support for the UAWC. In its 5 January letter, it stated that:

"For the government, the findings about individual links between the UAWC and the PFLP and the lack of openness about this from the UAWC, also during the investigation, are sufficient reason to stop financing the activities of the UAWC." [Translation]

It added that it:

"...will not transfer to the UAWC the last part of the Dutch financial contribution for the Land and Water Resource Management programme." [Translation]

For three reasons, we are deeply concerned about this decision of the former Dutch government, which we understand has not been reconsidered by the current government.

**First, this decision appears to be inconsistent with EU policy.** The European Union stated in a letter dated 30 March 2020 to the Palestinian NGO Network that: “...it does not ask any civil society organization to change its political position towards any Palestinian faction or to discriminate against any natural person based on his/her political affiliation.” We presume that the Dutch government accepts this position of the EU. Accordingly, we cannot square the position of the EU in supporting – financially and politically – a “vibrant, viable and pluralistic civil society in Palestine” based on these ‘political affiliation’ principles with the decision of the former Dutch government to end its funding of the UAWC for its publicly-stated reasons.

**Second, this decision would appear to be contrary to the widely-accepted freedoms of association, expression and privacy.** These freedoms are the cornerstone of modern human rights and democratic societies, and they are values that the United Nations and the European Union encourage everywhere, including in Palestinian society. We insist that efforts by governments and organizations to counter terrorism must always be conducted in accordance with human rights principles. Otherwise, the fundamental values that we seek to protect against the threat of terrorism will themselves be undermined.

**And third, this decision plays into the illegitimate and harmful efforts by the Israeli government to undermine Palestinian civil society, and by extension those marginalized and most at risk of violence and abuse among the Palestinian civilian population that these organizations service, particularly among women and children.** The decision by the former Dutch government to defund one of the six Palestinian civil society organizations targeted by the Israeli government – even though the allegations advanced by Israel for this designation were found to be unsubstantiated by the former government – has been viewed as a major victory for the Israeli government in its very public campaign to shrink the vanishing space still available to Palestinian civil society organizations to conduct critical human rights and humanitarian work in the OPT. Unwittingly or not, this decision is a significant blow to the efforts regionally and internationally to preserve and expand this threatened space.

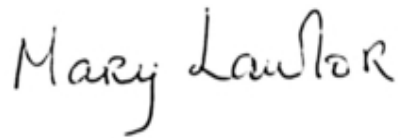
In conclusion, we respectfully ask your government to:

- 1. Review and reconsider the decision of the former Dutch government to end funding by the Netherlands for the UAWC with our concerns in mind;**
- 2. Support the well-established international framework to supervise and end the protracted and illegal Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territory; and**
- 3. Continue, to the fullest extent possible, to support Palestinian civil society organizations, to oppose the illegal “facts on the ground” by Israel that are actively undermining the possibilities of Palestinian self-determination and to support all measures which promote accountability for Israel’s violations of human rights and international law, including at the International Criminal Court.**


Yours very truly,



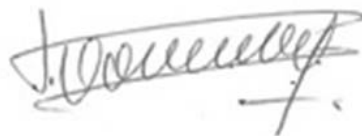
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