

**Independent International Commission of Inquiry  
on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel**

**Public hearings on the shrinking space for civil society in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel**  
**Geneva – 20-24 March 2023**

*Opening remarks*

I would like to start by welcoming everybody to this second set of public hearings of the Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel. My name is Navi Pillay, and I am the Chair of the Commission of Inquiry. I am here with the other two Commissioners, Chris Sidoti and Miloon Khotari.

The Commission of Inquiry was created by the UN Human Rights Council in May 2021 to investigate in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel all alleged violations of international humanitarian law and all alleged violations and abuses of international human rights law leading up to and since 13 April 2021, and all underlying root causes of recurrent tensions, instability and protraction of conflict, including systematic discrimination and repression based on national, ethnic, racial or religious identity.

The present hearings follow on from the first set, held from 7 to 11 November 2022, which focused on the closure orders and terrorism designation of a number of Palestinian NGOs, and on the incident surrounding the killing of the journalist Shireen Abu Akleh. This second set will continue along the same theme and will focus on the shrinking space for civil society in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel, along with additional testimony on the killing of Shireen Abu Akleh. The Commission will hear from human rights defenders and activists, women human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers, family members of victims, cultural activists, and individuals who have been subjected to, or witnessed, attacks, restrictions and harassment by authorities and non-State actors.

The Commission is very grateful to those who have agreed to participate in the public hearings which will be broadcast live. The proceedings and the publicity given to the testimonies have been explained to the participants, and they have agreed to testify in public of their own free will. They know that what they say is being broadcast and recorded. During the hearings, questions will only be put by the three Commissioners and participants are free to decline to answer any question. The hearings are not judicial. The Commission is not a court, not a truth and reconciliation commission. The aim is to allow victims and survivors on all sides to speak for themselves to the international community in a formal, but comfortable setting. In that way the Commission of Inquiry hopes that their concerns will be better understood by a worldwide audience and especially in the region where the events have taken place.

The Commission has invited the concerned States to provide all documentary evidence and information in their possession or under their control on the killing of journalist Shireen Abu Akleh and efforts to ensure accountability and on the circumstances that led to the death of

political and human rights activist Nizar Banat, along with relevant information on accountability proceedings being conducted.

**(Check against delivery)**

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