

Statement by Tunisia

On behalf of the Arab Group

Before the Sixth Committee of the 71st Session of the United Nations General Assembly

On Agenda Item 81:

“Status of the Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and relating to the protection of victims of armed conflicts”

New York, 10 October 2016

Distinguished Delegations to the 6th Committee,

At the outset, the Arab Group notes the lack of consensus regarding the qualifications of the Chair of this important Committee, especially in view of its mandate regarding legal matters, primarily respect of and promotion of international law.

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the Arab Group to address agenda item 81 entitled “*Status of the Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and relating to the protection of victims in armed conflict*”.

Allow me at the outset, to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report on the issue.

The Arab Group underscores its principled positions concerning international law, in particular international humanitarian law and reaffirms the continuing value of established humanitarian rules relating to the protection of victims in armed conflict and appeals to States to comply fully with the provisions of international humanitarian law, in particular as provided for in the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols.

Distinguished Delegates,

The Arab Group is compelled to express its alarm regarding the situation in the Occupied State of Palestine, including East Jerusalem. International humanitarian law aims to protect those who do not take part or are no longer taking part in hostilities, namely civilians, wounded, sick and prisoners. These are the primary targets and victims of the Israeli occupation's illegal policies and practices. Israeli crimes and violations persist unabated against the Palestinian people and their land, in grave breach of international law and contrary to the law and norms of international humanitarian law. The settlement regime, the blockade, mass arbitrary arrest and extra-judicial killings, despite being widely condemned, have gone largely unchallenged by the international community. The immunity and impunity enjoyed by Israel, the occupying Power, has encouraged it to pursue and entrench its colonial occupation.

Transfer of the occupying Power's population into occupied land, and forcible transfer of people under occupation are grave breaches under the Geneva Conventions and war crimes and other relevant international instruments. The Arab Group insists on the need to translate verbal condemnations of the settlement regime into actions able to reverse the situation on the ground so as to ensure the independence and sovereignty of the State of Palestine on the land occupied in 1967.

Moreover, the Arab Group expresses its grave concern regarding the critical humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, which is suffocating under the illegal, inhumane Israeli blockade now in its 10th year. The Palestinian civilian population in Gaza, the majority Palestine refugees, is being collectively punished by this illegal and inhumane blockade which affects every aspect of life in Gaza, destroying the economy, obstructing humanitarian aid and basic materials from reaching those in dire need of receiving them, impeding reconstruction of the thousands of destroyed homes and infrastructure, and obstructing economic and social recovery. The Arab Group calls for an end to this inhumane Israeli blockade and an end to the suffering of the Palestinian people.

The magnitude and persistence of the violations and grave breaches of international law, including international humanitarian law, being committed by Israel, the occupying Power, in the Occupied State of Palestine, including East Jerusalem, is forcing the dramatic deterioration of the situation. The Arab Group stresses that respect for international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law is key to a peaceful solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole. We reiterate our calls on the international community to uphold its legal, political and moral responsibilities to bring an end to Israel's illegal policies and practices against the Palestinian people and an end to Israel's prolonged and illegal colonial occupation of the State of Palestine.

The Arab Group reiterates its call for the Government of Switzerland, as the depositary of the Geneva Conventions, to speedily arrange for the convening of a Conference for the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to adopt further legal measures to ensure respect for and compliance with the Convention in this situation and to assess and evaluate the implementation of the Declaration adopted at the Conference of the High Contracting parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention of 17 December 2014.

The Arab Group condemns all measures taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan and demands Israel, the occupying Power, to withdraw fully from all occupied Arab land to the borders of 4 June 1967, in accordance with relevant UN resolutions.

Distinguished Delegates,

The Arab Group encourages the promotion of respect for the obligations arising from international law, particularly international humanitarian law and welcome the opportunity for promoting awareness through discussion and dissemination of information on the international humanitarian law relevant to the protection of civilians in armed conflicts. In this regard, we commend the role of the International Committee of the Red Cross in the promotion and dissemination of international humanitarian law and encourage the continuation of such.

Thank you.