



16 April 2014 - "Hebron embodies all the worst features of apartheid, colonialism and oppression that are to be found throughout Occupied Palestine," noted Richard Falk, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territories occupied since 1967.

He describes Hebron as a divided town of checkpoints, walls, barbed wires and apartheid roads where Israeli settlers and Palestinians are kept apart despite living within metres of each other. "This unacceptable situation is aggravated by a lack of law enforcement by Israeli security forces," stated the expert. "What once was a vibrant market in the heart of Hebron is now a ghost town."

The most recent manifestation of this is the expressed desire by Israeli settlers to take over the Al-Rajabi House located in the old city of Hebron. Its a four-story building capable of housing 40 families, is located strategically between the illegal settlement of Kiryat Arba and the Ibrahimi Mosque, also known as Cave of Patriarchs.

Should the building be inhabited it will likely mean more movement restrictions for Palestinians in the area, more road closures, and more harassment of Palestinian residents and human rights defenders by settlers," warned Falk. A prior occupation in 2007 occurred at the house during which the UN and non-governmental human rights organisations witnessed a sharp rise in settler violence and harassment against Palestinian residents living in the close vicinity.

“Israel must take steps to comply with international law and ensure that tensions – already high in Hebron – do not get out of control,” the Special Rapporteur urged. He noted that “The establishment of settlements in the West Bank is a clear violation of international law and contravenes article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention”.

Yet this situation is endemic of the greater situation throughout the country, and poses a real threat to achieving a peaceful treaty. In Jerusalem during this time, Israeli authorities are planning the demolition of inexpensive apartment high-rises in Palestinian neighborhoods inside Jerusalem’s municipal boundary but cut off by the separation barrier, because they were built without permits.

Israel and Palestine resumed negotiations last August following efforts by United States Secretary of State John Kerry. Direct negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians had stalled in September 2010, after Israel refused to extend its freeze on settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory. The Secretary General, after separate phone calls over last weekend with the leaders of both sides, expressed hope “that both leaders will seize the current opening created by US efforts to find a way forward to achieve the two-State solution”.