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Date: July 28, 2024

In your response please make reference to: 40670

Major-General Avi Balut  
**The Military Commander of the Area**

**By e-mail**

Brigadier General Hisham Ibrahim  
**Head of the Civil Administration**

**Urgent!**

Dear Sirs,

Re: **Preparation for the Olive Harvest Season**

1. As you known, the harvest season is about to commence when the rains start, in the upcoming month of October, and is expected to continue for approximately three months.
2. These days it is incumbent upon you to make special and early preparations to ensure that the rights of the harvesting farmers to livelihood and freedom of movements are not adversely affected beyond the severe harm which already exists.
3. Following the war which broke out on October 7, 2023, you have decided to sweepingly prevent holders of seam zone entry permits for agricultural purposes from accessing the seam zone. Consequently, in the vast majority of the cases, seam zone land owners, their family members or laborers assisting them, have not been able to access the lands and carry out the required agricultural work as of the day the war broke out until this day.
4. On November 29, 2023, a consolidated preliminary response to two petitions: H CJ 7945/23, H CJ 8112/23 stated as follows: "With respect to permits for agricultural purposes, on November 17, 2023 a decision was made by the Military Commander to coordinate harvesting works in the seam zone in the region of Jenin and Efraim. Currently, respondent's officials allow the entry of agricultural permit holders subject to coordination with them in a format which complies with the security needs and a gamut of relevant considerations. As aforesaid, it was informed by respondent's officials that the holders of agricultural permits pass through changing agricultural gates, according to need, the evaluation of the situation and the allocation of the forces, subject to prior notice to the Palestinian Coordination and the land owners in the relevant area, the above as of the day before yesterday, Sunday November 26, 2023, when dozens of farmers entered the different seam zones for agricultural purposes. This will also continue in the upcoming weeks according to the weather and the evaluation of the security situation" (paragraph 78).
5. Indeed, by the end of November 2023 you have opened many of the gates in the separation fence to enable the farmers to harvest their olive trees, but only for a few single days.
6. In addition, and following the aforementioned petitions, you have decided to exclude from the provisions of the above general prohibition, a small number of farmers having crops requiring ongoing and daily cultivation such as owners of greenhouses, orchards and nurseries.

7. Therefore, after the passage of approximately ten months in which the vast majority of the farmers entitled to seam zone entry permits for agricultural purposes have been prevented from accessing and farming their lands, we demand that you at least enable these farmers to properly prepare for the olive harvest season.
8. We wish to emphasize that allowing entry into the seam zone only for the harvesting season is insufficient. Farmers require access to their lands prior to the harvest itself for the purpose of carrying out preparatory works such as plot cleaning, stone removal and de-thorning.
9. In view of all of the above said, we request as follows:
  - a. To act for an automatic extension of existing seam zone entry permits for the harvest season.
  - b. To facilitate the submission of applications for seam zone entry permits, since many permits were cancelled or have expired. We wish to point out that during the entire period in which entry to the seam zone was prohibited, the Palestinian coordination offices did not agree to accept and transfer applications to the Israeli District Coordination Offices (DCOs) and the farmers were denied access to the DCOs.
  - c. That the seam zone entry permits for the olive harvest shall be valid for a period sufficiently long to prevent the need to go through the tedious process of renewing the permit during the harvest season itself and reaching the (expected) situation in which farmers and laborers find themselves without a permit at the peak of the harvest. We request, at least, to establish a mechanism which will handle quickly the issuance and **immediate** renewal of permits in the beginning of and during the harvest season.
  - d. We request that you publish in advance, as soon as possible, the dates on which you shall open all the gates (seasonal gates and agricultural gates) for the harvest preparatory works.
  - e. We request that you publish in advance the dates on which you shall open the gates for the harvest itself.
  - f. We demand that the gates shall be opened all week long, including Fridays and Saturdays.
  - g. We request that the above gates shall be opened at the times published by you to prevent situations in which the farmers wait for a long time for the gates to open.
10. These matters as well as other matters handled by HaMoked Center for the Defence of the Individual demonstrate again the severe and prolonged harm afflicted by the route of the separation fence and the permit regime on the Palestinian population. This fact only reinforces the need to make the necessary arrangements, in advance, for the harvest season, all the more so at a time such as this, to protect the rights of the Palestinians wishing to access their lands, in their country, lands located on the west side of the separation fence.
11. It should be emphasized that we reiterate our demand that the sweeping preclusion imposed on the entry of all farmers to the seam zone as of October 7, 2023 be cancelled. However, this letter does not deal with this matter but rather, only with the preparations for the olive harvest in the seam zone.

12. Your prompt response in writing is highly appreciated.

Sincerely,

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Jessica Montell

Executive Director, HaMoked Center for the  
Defence of the Individual

CC:

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