

PUBLIC

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Fear for Safety

ISRAEL/OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip

The Israeli Defence Force (IDF) killed more than 100 Palestinians during a five-day incursion into the Gaza Strip, which ended on 3 March. Many of those killed were Palestinian militants involved in attacks on Israel but at least half of those killed are reported to have been unarmed civilians taking no part in the fighting, including at least 25 children. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has reportedly stated that such military action could be repeated if Palestinian armed groups continue to fire rockets into Israel. Amnesty International fears that, unless there is strong pressure on the Israeli government, there may be more attacks using reckless and disproportionate force leading to deaths of civilian bystanders.

So far this year more than 230 Palestinians, many of them civilians, have been killed by Israeli strikes on the Gaza Strip. The Israeli government says that these are targeted attacks on militants in response to hundreds of rockets launched by Palestinian armed groups from Gaza against civilians in towns in southern Israel. One Israeli civilian was killed on 27 February and dozens of Israelis have been wounded as a result of these rocket attacks. The recent attacks by the Israeli Defence Force, however, are disproportionate and go beyond lawful measures which the Israeli authorities are entitled to take in response to attacks by armed groups.

Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak was also reported on 2 March to have said that the Israeli authorities were considering using artillery against Palestinian rocket launch sites even if they are located in populated areas within the Gaza Strip. Such use of artillery would almost inevitably lead to further civilian deaths among the Palestinian population of the Gaza Strip.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Israeli authorities have imposed a blockade against the Gaza Strip since June 2007, when Hamas forcibly took power there. The blockade prevents virtually all movement of people and goods into and out of Gaza, and permits from the Israeli authorities are needed by those seeking to leave. However, they issue very few permits, and many injured and sick patients continue to be denied passage. Strict restrictions have been imposed on any goods entering the Gaza Strip, while exports have been virtually prohibited. According to a World Health Organization (WHO) report on 3 March, hospitals treating hundreds of people wounded in recent Israeli attacks lack adequate functioning medical equipment. The WHO report stated that, according to the Gaza Ministry of Health, 85 essential drug items are "at zero availability at the major drug stores, mainly drugs needed for operation rooms and emergency interventions". On 4 March United Nations agencies said that 30 out of 87 ambulances cannot operate because of lack of fuel; hospitals have fuel for generators for only four more days.

The Israeli authorities justify their attacks on and blockade of the Gaza Strip on the grounds that Palestinian armed groups continue to launch rockets from there into southern Israel, where they endanger Israeli civilians. Amnesty International continues to call on Palestinian armed groups to end such attacks on civilians and on Hamas and the Palestinian Authority to prevent such attacks and hold those who commit them to account.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English or your own language:

- expressing concern that senior Israeli civil and military officials and politicians have indicated that they will continue, and may intensify, their attacks on the Gaza Strip, following recent attacks which are reported to have killed more than 100 Palestinians including at least 50 civilians;

- reminding the Israeli government that attacks which disproportionately injure the civilian population are unlawful under international humanitarian law; and that they have a responsibility to ensure the welfare of the civilian population of Gaza;
- calling on the Israeli government to ensure that those suffering from life-threatening injuries who require specialised medical care not available in the Gaza Strip are allowed access to suitable facilities outside the Gaza Strip;
- calling on the Israeli government to conduct impartial investigations into the killings of civilians, immediately, make the findings public and bring anyone responsible for violations of international humanitarian law to justice.

APPEALS TO:

Israeli authorities

Ehud Olmert

Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
3 Kaplan Street
P O Box 187
Kiryat Ben-Gurion
Jerusalem 91919, Israel

Fax: +972 2 566 4838

email: roh@pmo.gov.il, pm_eng@pmo.gov.il

Ehud Barak

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense
Ministry of Defence
37 Kaplan Street
Hakirya
Tel Aviv 61909, Israel

Fax: +972 3 691 6940, +972 3 696 2757, +972 3 691 7915

Email: minister@mod.gov.il

Palestinian authorities

Please send appeals to arrive as quickly as possible, in English, Arabic, or your own language:

- urging the Hamas leadership in the Gaza Strip to prevent the launching of rockets indiscriminately into Israel by Palestinian armed groups in the Gaza Strip.

Hamas de-facto administration in Gaza

Ismail Haniyeh and Dr Mahmoud Zahar

Fax: + 970 8282 2159, + 970 8284 5040, + 970 8286 8971

Email: ihaniyyeh@hotmail.com

Salutation: Dear Mr Haniyeh and Dr Zahar

- urging the President of the Palestinian Authority to call on Fatah's armed wing, the *al-aqsa martyrs' brigades*, in the Gaza Strip to put an immediate end to the launching of rockets into Israel.

President of the Palestinian Authority

Mahmoud Abbas

Fax: +972 2 296 1370, +972 2 296 3179

Salutation: Dear President Abbas

COPIES TO: diplomatic representatives of Israel accredited to your country.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY. Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 15 April 2008.