

## **Israel/occupied Palestinian territory: UN experts deplore attacks on civilians, call for truce and urge international community to address root causes of violence**

GENEVA (12 October 2023) – UN independent experts\* today unequivocally condemned targeted and deadly violence directed at civilians in Israel and violent and indiscriminate attacks against Palestinian civilians in Gaza and a further tightening of the unlawful blockade, which will have devastating impacts on the whole civilian population.

“We strongly condemn the horrific crimes committed by Hamas, the deliberate and widespread killing and hostage-taking of innocent civilians, including older persons and children. These actions constitute heinous violations of international law and international crimes, for which there must be urgent accountability,” the experts said.

“We also strongly condemn Israel’s indiscriminate military attacks against the already exhausted Palestinian people of Gaza, comprising over 2.3 million people, nearly half of whom are children. They have lived under unlawful blockade for 16 years, and already gone through five major brutal wars, which remain unaccounted for,” they said.

“This amounts to collective punishment,” the UN experts said. “There is no justification for violence that indiscriminately targets innocent civilians, whether by Hamas or Israeli forces. This is absolutely prohibited under international law and amounts to a war crime.”

The experts also expressed concern about reports that journalists and media workers reporting on the conflict had been targeted, with seven Palestinian journalists and media workers reportedly killed in Israeli airstrikes.

At dawn on 7 October 2023, Palestinian armed groups from Gaza fired more than 5,000 rockets indiscriminately towards Israel, and breached the heavily fortified Gaza barrier to launch ground attacks in multiple locations in Israel. The attacks indiscriminately targeted both civilians and security forces. Hamas stated that its actions were taken in response to Israel’s continuous violence against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank including east Jerusalem. More than 1,200 Israelis and foreign nationals, the majority of whom were civilians, were reportedly killed, and more than 3,000 wounded. Reports suggest that more than 100 Israelis and foreign nationals, including children and older persons, and some known human rights defenders, have been taken hostage in Gaza by Hamas.

“Taking hostages in the context of hostilities constitutes a war crime. The civilians taken by Hamas must be immediately released, pending which their fate and whereabouts must be disclosed,” the UN experts said.

As a result of the Israeli attacks against Gaza, by air, land and sea, at least 1,100 Palestinians have been killed, including older persons and 290 children, and more than 5,000 injured. The airstrikes appear to have targeted densely populated areas, including markets, two hospitals, destroyed residential buildings and damaged 20 United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) facilities, including schools sheltering displaced civilians. As of 11 October, the UN

estimated that at least 340,000 people have been displaced within Gaza, and nearly 218,600 people are sheltering in 92 UNRWA schools across the Gaza Strip.

“Indiscriminately killing civilians in the context of hostilities, with no regard for the principles of distinction, precaution and proportionality, is a war crime,” the experts said.

They also stressed that indiscriminate rocket attacks, bombing of civilian infrastructure and shelling densely populated areas constitute grave breaches of international humanitarian law, whether committed by Palestinian armed groups or by Israeli Defence Forces.

On 9 October, the Israeli Defence Minister announced that authorities would completely cut essential supplies to Gaza, stating they are fighting “human animals.” The Minister threatened to bomb those attempting to provide humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip. On 9 and 10 October, Israel reportedly bombed the Rafah crossing at the Gaza-Egyptian border, disrupting movement in and out of Gaza, rendering the crossing closed and the enclave completely blockaded.

“Besides this appalling language that dehumanises the Palestinian people, especially those who have been unlawfully “imprisoned” in Gaza for 16 years, we condemn the withholding of essential supplies such as food, water, electricity and medicines. Such actions will precipitate a severe humanitarian crisis in Gaza, where its population is now at inescapable risk of starvation. Intentional starvation is a crime against humanity,” the experts said.

The experts reminded the international community of its responsibilities to address the root causes of the current conflict, including the 56-year-old occupation and the annexation pursued by Israel. They urged the international community to identify viable paths to prevent further violations of international law, human suffering, and bloodshed.

A peaceful solution is imperative in view of the dehumanising language that is increasingly being used against both Palestinians and Israelis, the experts said.

“As the civilian death toll from the violence mounts, we call for an immediate de-escalation of tensions in the region and an effective response by the international community premised upon international law and the protection of equal rights and dignity of all,” they said.

In the **short term**, the experts urged:

1. An **immediate end to violations of international humanitarian law and human rights**, in particular the right to life. To this effect, support the investigation launched by the Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, into all violations reported since 7 October, including unlawful deaths and enforced disappearances, and the investigation by the International Criminal Court;
2. The **agreement of a ceasefire**, to be monitored by an independent, international body;
3. The **release of hostages** taken by Hamas and Palestinians **arbitrarily detained** by Israel, particularly women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities and those who are gravely ill;
4. The establishment of an **international protective presence** in the occupied Palestinian territory;
5. The provision of all **necessary financial and humanitarian aid** and the creation of humanitarian corridors that allow people to leave Gaza and return as soon as the hostilities cease; and
6. The **dignity of the dead** from the latest violence be respected and that they are swiftly handed over to mourning relatives.

“Breaking the cycle of violence in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory is paramount,” the experts said. “Armed attacks and military responses have already proven incapable of leading to security and respect for human rights of all. Restoring international legality, accountability and respect for humanity and dignity of all must prevail, including an end to Israel’s 56 years of military occupation.”

ENDS

**The experts:** [Francesca Albanese, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967](#); [Pedro Arrojo Agudo, Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation](#); [Balakrishnan Rajagopal, Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing](#); [Aua Baldé \(Chair-Rapporteur\), Gabriella Citroni \(Vice-Chair\), Angkhana Neelapaijit, Grażyna Baranowska, Ana Lorena Delgado Pérez, Working Group on enforced or involuntary disappearances](#); [Reem Alsalem, Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences](#); [Mama Fatima Singhateh, Special Rapporteur on the sale, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children](#); [Morris Tidball-Binz, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions](#); [Ian Fry, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of Human Rights in the context of Climate Change](#); [Javaid Rehman, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran](#); [Siobhán Mullally, Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children](#); [Ashwini, K.P, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance](#); [Tomoya Obokata, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences](#); [Fernand de Varennes, the Special Rapporteur on Minority issues](#); [Michael Fakhri, Special Rapporteur on the right to food](#); [Irene Khan, Special Rapporteur on the protection and promotion of freedom of opinion and expression](#); [Mary Lawlor, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders](#); [Dorothy Estrada Tanck \(Chair\), Ivana Radačić \(Vice-chair\), Elizabeth Broderick, Meskerem Geset Techane and Melissa Upreti, Working Group on discrimination against women and girls](#); [Farida Shaheed, Special Rapporteur on the right to education](#); [Mohamed Abdelsalam Babiker, Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Eritrea](#); [Clément Nyaletsossi Voule, Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association](#); [Attiya Waris, Independent Expert on the effects of foreign debt and other related international financial obligations of States on the full enjoyment of all human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights](#); [Vitit Muntarbhorn, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia](#); [Barbara G Reynolds \(Chair\), Bina D’Costa, Catherine S. Namakula, Dominique Day, Miriam Ekiudoko, Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent](#); [Isha Dyfan, Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Somalia](#); [Alexandra Xanthaki, Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights](#); [José Francisco Calí Tzay, Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples](#); [Richard Bennett, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan](#); [Obiora C. Okafor, Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity](#); [David Boyd, Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment](#); [Livingstone Sewanyana, Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order](#); [Alice Jill Edwards, Special Rapporteur on Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#); [Muluka-Anne Miti-Drummond, Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism](#); [Ravindran Daniel \(Chair-Rapporteur\), SORCHA MacLeod, Chris Kwaja, Carlos Salazar Couto, Working Group on the use of mercenaries](#); [Surya Deva, Special Rapporteur on the right to development](#)

The Special Rapporteurs are part of what is known as the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN Human Rights system, is the general name of the Council's independent fact-finding and monitoring mechanisms that address either specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. Special Procedures experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are independent from any government or organisation and serve in their individual capacity.

UN Human Rights, Country Pages: [Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel](#)

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