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ICRC gravely concerned about humanitarian situation in Gaza

Geneva (ICRC) - "The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is alarmed about the deteriorating situation in the Gaza Strip.

The continuing escalation of violence, with military operations taking place in highly populated areas, has serious consequences for the civilian population.

Over the past two weeks, Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip have led to the deaths of dozens of people and the wounding of many more, among them a large number of civilians. In one single incident on 12 July, nine family members – including children – were killed in their home by an air strike in Gaza City. In some cases, people living near operations have been unable to leave their homes for several days.

The ICRC has urged and continues to urge Israel to respect the rules of international humanitarian law. In particular, in the conduct of hostilities, Israel must take all precautions to spare civilian life and property. It must also ensure that the wounded have access to medical facilities.

Meanwhile, the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip is continuing to deteriorate. The strike on Gaza's only power plant on 28 June reduced the power supply in the Strip by half, with direct and indirect effects on the population. Hospitals and a large part of the water and wastewater systems now depend on generators that consume considerable amounts of fuel, which is also in short supply owing to recurrent closures of the Strip. Furthermore, the strict controls imposed on the passage of basic items into the Strip have exacerbated the difficulties faced by residents, who were already living in precarious conditions. Under international humanitarian law, Israel is responsible for meeting the basic needs of the population, which include food, medical supplies and means of shelter.

As a further consequence of the ongoing situation in the Gaza Strip, hundreds of Palestinians have been stranded on the Egyptian side of the Rafah terminal, two of whom have reportedly died. The material and psychological conditions in which these people live are deteriorating day by day and no solution to their plight has been found by the parties concerned. The ICRC has already offered its services to facilitate their passage into the Gaza Strip. Meanwhile, together with the Egyptian Red Crescent, it is providing the affected people with assistance.

The ICRC is seriously concerned about the consequences of the repeated launching of rockets from the Gaza Strip against the civilian population in Israel. These attacks, which have wounded several people, are indiscriminate and thus prohibited by international humanitarian law.

Finally, the ICRC urges those detaining IDF corporal Gilad Shalit to treat him humanely and allow him to contact his family. It has informed all the parties that it stands ready to provide its services.

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