
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ALARMED AT MOUNTING CIVILIAN TOLL IN GAZA, APPEALS TO ALL SIDES TO ABIDE BY INTERNATIONAL LAW

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GENEVA (11 July 2014) – United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay on Friday expressed alarm at the Israeli military operations resulting in the killing of Palestinian civilians in Gaza, as well as the indiscriminate firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel. She appealed to all sides to abide by their obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

As of Thursday early afternoon, 88 Palestinians, including at least 21 children and 11 women, had been killed in Gaza as a result of Israeli strikes since the beginning of Israel's latest military operation "Protective Edge" on Tuesday night. Reports suggest that hundreds more have been injured. Israeli media reports over 800 strikes since the operation began, with 60 on the morning of 10 July alone.

Reports indicate that from the start of "Operation Protective Edge" to midday on 10 July, Palestinian armed groups have fired a total of 809 rockets and 61 mortars. Media reports indicate that, as of midday on 10 July, nine Israeli civilians sustained injuries while fleeing to shelters.

"Israel, Hamas, and Palestinian armed groups in Gaza have been down this road before, and it has led only to death, destruction, distrust and a painful prolongation of the conflict," Ms. Pillay said. "This time around, once again, civilians are bearing the brunt of the conflict. I urge all sides to steadfastly respect their obligations under international human rights law and international humanitarian law to protect civilians."

Ms. Pillay warned in particular that attacks must not be directed against civilians or civilian objects, nor should military assets be located in densely populated areas or attacks be launched from such areas.

"For its part, the Government of Israel must take all possible measures to ensure full respect for the principles of distinction, proportionality and precautions in attack, during the conduct of hostilities, as required by international humanitarian law. In all circumstances, they must avoid targeting civilians," she said.

"However, we have received deeply disturbing reports that many of the civilian casualties, including of children, occurred as a result of strikes on homes. Such reports raise serious doubt about whether the Israeli strikes have been in accordance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law."

The targeting of civilian homes is a violation of international humanitarian law unless the homes are being used for military purposes. In case of doubt, buildings ordinarily used for civilian purposes, such as homes, are presumed not to be legitimate military targets. Even where a home is identified as being used for military purposes, any attack must be proportionate, offer a definite military advantage in the prevailing circumstances at the time, and precautions must be taken.

"Every alleged breach of international law must be promptly, independently, thoroughly and effectively investigated, with a view to ensuring justice and reparations for the victims," Ms. Pillay said.

The High Commissioner expressed deep concern about the prospect of a ground offensive and strongly echoed the Secretary-General's call for a ceasefire.

"It is high time that leaders on all sides abandon their poisonous rhetoric and deadly tit-for-tat behaviour in favour of a peaceful resolution to this impasse."

"I have been to Gaza and I have been to Sderot myself and have seen how traumatic these air strikes and rocket attacks are on civilians, especially children. They must stop."

In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, the situation remains tense. The High Commissioner reiterated her call upon all parties to address recent violations, including the excessive use of force, arbitrary arrest and detention, destruction and damage to property, incitement to violence, and to ensure accountability for crimes.

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