
Israel must deliver on cease-fire agreement in the Gaza Strip – UN Special Rapporteur

CAIRO (5 December 2012) – The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967, Richard Falk, called today on Israel to abide by and fully implement the cease fire agreement that ended the recent crisis with Gaza.

The human rights expert has just concluded a week-long mission to the region, with the initial purpose assessing the overall impact of Israel's prolonged occupation and blockade against the Gaza Strip, which is an integral part of Palestine. "However," he explained, "there arose an urgent need to investigate Israel's seemingly deliberate attacks against civilian targets during recent hostilities."

"We visited the sites of attacks and spoke with surviving family members. It is clear that some attacks killed and harmed civilians in a grossly disproportionate manner and thus appear to violate international law," Mr. Falk said. "There is a widespread feeling among Palestinians that Israel is above the law, and that it is likely to continue to have the benefits of impunity even when it flagrantly and repeatedly violates international human rights and humanitarian laws."

"Experience has shown that Israel fails to meet its international obligation to promptly and impartially investigate its own actions," he noted. "Experience has also shown that Israel is not likely to carry out its obligations under the cease fire agreement; indeed during our visit we heard Israeli warplanes flying directly overhead and received reports of Israeli military incursions into the Gaza Strip."

The Special Rapporteur called for sustained pressure from the international community, including both Governments and civil society, to secure Israel's full implementation of the cease fire agreement, noting that without such pressure it is extremely unlikely to hold. "Worldwide support for the recent General Assembly resolution that made Palestine a non-Member observer State should serve as a starting point for more concerted international protection of Palestinian rights," he said.

Mr. Falk stressed that talks to clarify how certain aspects of the cease fire agreement will be implemented, in particular with regard to access to maritime and agricultural resources, must be swiftly concluded.

"Every day Palestinian fishermen and farmers risk being shot at or detained by Israeli forces. Already since the agreement was reached, Israel has detained 13 fishermen, confiscated 4 fishing boats and sank another fishing boat," he said. "Such actions signal an Israeli intention to maintain its coercive style of occupation rather than to explore whether implementing the ceasefire agreement might lead toward a more hopeful future."

"Palestinians and the international community are confronted with huge challenges to address underlying problems that have been severely aggravated by Israel's occupation and blockade," the independent expert said, underscoring the urgent need for access to clean water and sanitation, productive agricultural land, and new infrastructure.

"We received extensive briefs on what could be done if sufficient resources and political will are made available," he said. "One example is the construction of a desalinization plant to meet urgent water and agricultural needs, but in many such cases funding is not forthcoming as donors are reluctant to invest in infrastructure projects that Israel is likely to bomb in one of its periodic large-scale attacks against Gaza."

According to the Special Rapporteur, "unless these underlying problems are addressed soon, it appears that Gaza will be uninhabitable by 2020, as predicted by a recent UN report. Some of the experts with whom we spoke actually believe that 2016 is a more reasonable assessment. This indicates the gravity of the human rights crisis in the Gaza Strip."

During his visit to Cairo and the Gaza Strip, Mr. Falk met with governmental, inter-governmental and civil society representatives, as well as victims and witnesses. He received briefings from the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) and other UN agencies, which provided an in-depth picture of the magnitude of the challenges in Gaza and the difficulties of addressing such challenges in a situation of occupation and blockade. He expressed his special appreciation to the people of Gaza and the international civil servants with whom he spoke for their support and engagement. Mr. Falk's next report to the Human Rights Council, which he intends to present in June 2013, will fully address the many concerns that were raised during the mission.

In 2008, the UN Human Rights Council designated Richard Falk (United States of America) as the fifth Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights on Palestinian territories occupied since 1967. The mandate was originally established in 1993 by the UN Commission on Human Rights. Learn more, log on to:
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