
Gaza aid convoy killings: "Those responsible must be held criminally accountable" - UN expert

GENEVA (31 May 2010) – The UN Special Rapporteur for the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Richard Falk, urged Monday the international community to bring to justice those responsible for the killing of some 16 unarmed peace activists, when Israeli armed commandos stormed a convoy of ships carrying aid to Gaza.

"Israel is guilty of shocking behavior by using deadly weapons against unarmed civilians on ships that were situated in the high seas where freedom of navigation exists, according to the law of the seas," Mr. Falk said. "It is essential that those Israelis responsible for this lawless and murderous behavior, including political leaders who issued the orders, be held criminally accountable for their wrongful acts."

There are confirmed reports of lethal interference by Israeli military units on the high seas with the Freedom Flotilla of six ships carrying some 10,000 tons of medicine, food, and building materials to the civilian population of Gaza. Preliminary reports suggest as many as 16 unarmed activists were killed, and dozens more wounded.

"This peaceful humanitarian initiative by citizens from 50 countries is an urgent response to the continuation of an unlawful blockade that has been maintained for almost three years causing great physical and mental harm to the whole of the 1.5 million people entrapped within Gaza," the UN independent expert said. "Such a massive form of collective punishment is a crime against humanity, as well as a gross violation of the prohibition on collective punishment in Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention."

"As Special Rapporteur for the Occupied Palestinian Territories, familiar with the suffering of the people of Gaza, I find this latest instance of Israeli military lawlessness to create a situation of regional and global emergency. Unless prompt and decisive action is taken to challenge the Israeli approach to Gaza all of us will be complicit in criminal policies that are challenging the survival of an entire beleaguered community."

Mr. Falk urged the world community "to take urgent action in response to this flagrant flouting of international law. It is time to insist on the end of the blockade of Gaza. The worldwide campaign of boycott, divestment, and sanctions against Israel is now a moral and political imperative, and needs to be supported and strengthened everywhere."