

Urgent Release

27 December 2008

Palestinian human rights community calls for international action

Palestinian human rights organizations strongly condemn the recent military attacks carried out by the Israeli occupying forces in the Gaza Strip on 27 December 2008. The attacks began at approximately 11:30 am and lasted for approximately three hours. These attacks have destroyed most of the Gaza security offices including police stations, resulting in the deaths of over 200 Palestinians. More than 350 have been injured with over 120 critically.

The number of deaths resulting from these attacks indicates a willful targeting of the civilian police forces in these locations and a clear violation of the prohibition against willful killings. Willful killings are a grave breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention under Article 147 and therefore, a War Crime. Both the time and location of these attacks also indicate a malicious intent to inflict as many casualties as possible with many of the police stations located in civilian population centres and the time of the attacks coinciding with the end of the school day resulting in the deaths of numerous children.

The ongoing siege of the Gaza Strip has left medical facilities in the Strip incapable of meeting the needs of the hundreds more who have been injured which will likely lead to an increase in the number of deaths. According to Israeli officials, these attacks are only the beginning of an open military campaign in Gaza. It is therefore imperative that the international community not stand in silence while Israel moves forward with impunity.

Despite repeated calls from the Palestinian human rights community with regard to Gaza, the international community has failed to act. We are now on the brink of an explosion of violence as result of this failure and are pushed once again to call for action.

In light of the above, Palestinian human rights organisations urge:

1. The UN Security Council to call an emergency session and adopt concrete measures, including the imposition of sanctions, in order to ensure Israel's fulfilment of its obligations under international humanitarian law.
2. The High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Conventions to fulfil their obligation under common Article 1 to ensure respect for the provisions of the Conventions, taking appropriate measures to compel Israel to abide by its obligations under international humanitarian law, in particular placing pivotal importance on the respect and protection of civilians from the effects of the hostilities.
3. The High Contracting Parties to fulfil their legal obligation under Article 146 of the Fourth Geneva Convention to prosecute those responsible for grave breaches of the Convention.
4. EU institutions and member states to make effective use of the European Union Guidelines on promoting compliance with international humanitarian law (2005/C 327/04) to ensure Israel complies with international humanitarian law under paragraph 16 (b), (c) and (d) of these guidelines, including the adoption of immediate restrictive measures and sanctions, as well as cessation of all upgrade dialogue with Israel.

- Ends -

Al-Haq

Addameer Prisoners' Support & Human Rights Association

Ad-Dameer Association for Human Rights

Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights

Defence for Children International

Ensan Center for Democracy & Human Rights

Independent Commission for Human Rights (ICHR)

Jerusalem Legal Aid & Human Rights Center (JLAC)

Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR)

Palestinian Center for the Independence of the Judiciary and the Legal Profession - Musawa

Ramallah Center for Human Rights Studies (RCHRS)

Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counseling (WCLAC)

Women's Studies Center

The Palestinian Non-Governmental Organizations' Network - PNGO