



Human Rights Now calls for an immediate end to escalating military operations and attacks on civilians in the conflict in Palestine and Israel, as well as for the roots of injustice to be addressed

Human Rights Now (HRN) expresses grave concern over the ongoing violence in Palestine and Israel. Both the targeting of Israeli civilians and the taking of hostages by Hamas, as well as the indiscriminate use of force, targeting of civilian infrastructure and widespread destruction of property in Gaza by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) are inexcusable under international law, and have precipitated a dire humanitarian crisis.

HRN denounces all military actions targeting the civilian population as war crimes and urges all parties to immediately cease military action. It further urges Israel to refrain from any attempt at a ground invasion of Gaza, which would cause further victimization of people in Gaza.

I. Israeli and Palestinian Civilian Casualties

More than 1,300 Israelis and foreign nationals were killed in the attack launched by Hamas' militant wing on October 7, with an additional 3,000 reported wounded.¹ Concerningly, the majority of those targeted by Hamas appear to have been civilians, including children and the elderly, while at least 150 individuals have reportedly been taken hostage and transported into Gaza.²

While the aforementioned acts are serious violations of international law, they can never be a justification for an ongoing military offensive that is causing grave harm to Palestinian civilians in Gaza. Over the past week, the indiscriminate retaliatory airstrikes launched by the IDF in Gaza, one of the most densely populated areas in the world, have destroyed entire neighbourhoods and killed no less than 1,500 Palestinians, the majority of whom were civilians.³ The obstruction of foreign aid and the targeting of essential infrastructure will lead to further loss of civilian life, particularly with regard to the most vulnerable Gazans, including the more than 1 million children who live in the enclave.

¹ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Israel/occupied Palestinian territory: UN experts deplore attacks on civilians, call for truce and urge international community to address root causes of violence*, OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS (2023), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/10/israeloccupied-palestinian-territory-un-experts-deplore-attacks-civilians#:~:text=Hamas%20stated%20that%20its%20actions,and%20more%20than%203%2C000%20wounded>.

² Ibid.

³ Israel Gaza live news: Gaza situation dire, UN says, as Israeli military admits security failures, BBC NEWS, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/live/world-middle-east-67073970> (last visited Oct 13, 2023).

Collective punishment against the population of Gaza, as well as the targeting of civilians and civilian objects, constitute clear violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

II. Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza

The Israeli attacks have already resulted in an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, which will only escalate if indiscriminate attacks continue. In less than one week, IDF airstrikes have displaced more than 338,000 Palestinians in the narrow Gaza Strip.⁴ While hospitals and UN schools are already inundated with those seeking shelter, the targeting of ambulances and other health services by IDF airstrikes has exacerbated the ongoing crisis, and constitute war crimes.⁵ Similarly, the bombing of the Rafah crossing into Egypt has effectively stranded Gazans, only serving to worsen internal displacement.⁶

Civilian deaths and suffering are escalating as Israel tightens its 16-year blockade on the Gaza Strip, preventing foreign aid and vital resources such as food, fuel and medicine from reaching those in need.⁷ With water supplies having been cut and the enclave's only power plant already having run out of fuel, Palestinians are left with no access to sanitation.⁸ Of particular concern is the fact that hospitals and other essential services are currently running on generators, which will only provide electricity for a maximum of a few days.⁹

Collectively, the actions of the IDF have created an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Gaza, an enclave in which, even prior to the latest IDF strikes, 81% of the population already lived in poverty and 63% suffered from food insecurity.¹⁰

⁴ Le Monde, *Death toll in Gaza reaches 1,200 with over 338,000 people displaced*, LE MONDE.FR, Oct. 12, 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/10/12/more-than-333-800-people-have-been-displaced-from-gaza_6166086_4.html (last visited Oct 13, 2023).

⁵ Federica Marsi, *Gaza medics say Israel targeting ambulances, health facilities*, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/12/war-crime-gaza-medics-say-israel-targeting-ambulances-health-facilities> (last visited Oct 13, 2023).

⁶ Rafah border crossing: A barrage of Israeli fire endangers Gaza's only gateway to Egypt, LE MONDE.FR, Oct. 11, 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/10/11/rafah-border-crossing-a-barrage-of-israeli-fire-endanger-s-gaza-s-only-gateway-to-egypt_6165190_4.html (last visited Oct 13, 2023).

⁷ Henriette Chacar et al., *Israel links Gaza aid to hostages' release as humanitarian disaster looms*, REUTERS, Oct. 12, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/biden-warns-iran-over-gaza-israel-forms-emergency-war-cabinet-2023-10-11/> (last visited Oct 13, 2023).

⁸ Gaza cut off from food, water and fuel as Israel's punishing bombardment continues, PBS NEWSHOUR (2023), <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/gaza-cut-off-from-food-water-and-fuel-as-israels-punishing-bombardment-continues> (last visited Oct 13, 2023).

⁹ Nils Adler Kasturi Charu Sudan, *Why is Gaza out of fuel — and what now?*, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/11/why-is-gaza-out-of-fuel-and-what> (last visited Oct 13, 2023).

¹⁰ United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, *Gaza Strip*, UNRWA (2023), <https://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/gaza-strip>.

Further, on October 13, the IDF instructed the 1.1 million Palestinians living in northern Gaza to evacuate within 24 hours. As noted by the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons, the evacuation order will have a catastrophic humanitarian impact, and constitutes a crime against humanity as well as a blatant violation of international humanitarian law.¹¹

III. Ongoing Oppression of Palestinians

While HRN condemns the ongoing violation of human rights by both Israeli forces and Hamas as singularly unlawful acts, we recall that the violence and instability in the region is rooted in the systemic discrimination against the Palestinian people by the Israeli government and Israel's ongoing occupation of Palestinian territory in violation of international law.

Violence and unrest in the region are an inevitable result of Israel's 56-year-long illegal military occupation against the repeated calls of the UN, including numerous Security Council Resolutions.¹² In particular, the 16-year long blockade and closure of the Gaza Strip, which has kept more than 2 million Palestinians in an open-air prison, exemplifies the dire situation.¹³ The situation in Gaza is not an isolated problem, but an integral part of Israel's apartheid policy against the Palestinian people, denying them fundamental rights such as self-determination and return. Israel's persistent dismissal of warnings that it is in violation of public international law, as evidenced by reports and opinions by authoritative bodies such as the United Nations and the International Court of Justice, fails to demonstrate a genuine commitment to ending hostilities in the region and the preservation of peace.¹⁴ Furthermore, the latest actions by the IDF demonstrate Israel's tragic irresponsibility in failing to protect civilian lives and property in its use of force. Impunity for past alleged grave war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Israel in the course of its previous military offensives, including the 2009 and 2014 conflicts, has not been effectively addressed by the international community. Despite the commencement of an investigation by the International Criminal Court, the process is desperately slow and does not meet the urgent necessity of the current situation, amid ongoing grave human rights violations and a worsening humanitarian crisis.

¹¹ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Israel must rescind evacuation order for northern Gaza and comply with international law: UN expert, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/10/israel-must-rescind-evacuation-order-northern-gaza-and-comply-international> (last visited Oct 14, 2023).

¹² United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Israel/occupied Palestinian territory: UN experts deplore attacks on civilians, call for truce and urge international community to address root causes of violence, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2023), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/10/israeloccupied-palestinian-territory-un-experts-deplore-attacks-civilians>.

¹³ Amanda Ufheil-Somers, Gaza as an Open-Air Prison, MERIP (2015), <https://merip.org/2015/06/gaza-as-an-open-air-prison/> (last visited Oct 14, 2023).

¹⁴ Human Rights Now, The Government of Israel Must End the Discrimination and Dispossession of Palestinians (2021), <https://hrn.or.jp/eng/news/2021/05/31/hrc47-palestine-statement/> (last visited Oct 13, 2023).

IV. Recommendations

HRN calls for an immediate cease fire by all parties. We urge Hamas to immediately and unconditionally release all hostages taken in the October 7 attack.

We urge the government of Israel to cease indiscriminate airstrikes and the targeting of civilian infrastructure in Gaza and to cease all violations of international criminal law, international human rights law, and international humanitarian law against the Palestinian people. Further, we urge the Israeli government to withdraw its evacuation order for the population of northern Gaza and refrain from any attempt at a ground invasion, which would cause further victimization of people in Gaza.

Moreover, we call on the government of Israel to bring an end to the underlying source of hostilities with the Palestinian people by ending its illegal occupation of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and its apartheid policies.

We also call on the international community, including the UN Security Council, to immediately intervene in the situation to prevent further escalation of conflict, especially a ground invasion of Gaza, and to make every effort to bring about an end to the conflict and facilitate a durable peace.