



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
25 June 2021

English only

---

## Human Rights Council

Forty-seventh session

21 June–9 July 2021

Agenda item 7

**Human rights situation in Palestine and other  
occupied Arab territories**

### **Written statement\* submitted by Global Institute for Water, Environment and Health, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[26 May 2021]

---

\* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



## Gaza's Escalation

The night of May 15, 2021 saw the single deadliest Israeli attack on Gaza since the outbreak of the latest escalation between Israel and Gazan militant groups that left 253 Palestinians dead, including 66 children and 39 women, while 1,910 Palestinians have been wounded.

On May 16, at 1:00 p.m., Israeli fighter jets fired approximately 50 bombs and missiles that hit buildings, residential homes, and roads in the central Al-Rimal neighbourhood, west of Gaza City. The raid hit one residential building belonging to Abu Al-Awf family and another belonging to the Al-Kulak family, in addition to the headquarters of the Ministry of Labour.

This airstrike led to the death of 42 civilians, including two of Gaza's most prominent doctors, 10 children and 16 women. 50 others were wounded, including eight children, and 15 women. The Al-Wehda road that leads to Gaza's main hospital al-Shifa was blocked and destroyed.

16 family members of the Kulak family were killed, including Mohammed Al-Kulak (63), four of his children, his daughter-in-law and her 6-months-old baby. While 11 members of the Abu Al-Auf family were killed, including Dr. Ayman, chief of the internal medicine department at the Shifa hospital, along with two of his teenager kids, and one toddler.

On the morning of May 16, it is documented that among the bombs used was the US-made Mark-84 bomb that weighs 1000KG and which has entered service during the Vietnam war.

This odious attack falls within a pattern of Israel's use of disproportionate force and disregard for civilian casualties in Gaza.

On the day before, Israel directly bombed with at least six rockets another civilian home, also at night, belonging to Abu Hatab's family in the densely populated Shati refugee camp northwest of Gaza City. This led to the death of 10 civilians, including Mr. Abu Hatab, his wife, four children, sister, and her three children who had fled their home on that day due to the heavy Israeli bombing in Eastern Gaza. Only a five-month-old infant has survived the deadly attack.

According to testimonies collected by the Euro-Med monitor for human rights, Israel gave no warning whatsoever to any of those families or other civilians in the vicinity of the targeted houses in both incidents. This led to a sharp increase in the wounding of civilians by shrapnel or broken windows in nearby areas from the blast. We emphasize that both attacks are not isolated incidents but are rather clear examples of a systematic policy witnessed over the last six days.

Between May 10 and May 16, Israeli airstrikes hit around 27 families: sixteen family homes were bombed and destroyed while their inhabitants were inside; two civilian gatherings of family members were targeted; a man and his wife were struck inside their car, and a man and his son were targeted in an agricultural land. These incidents left 78 Palestinians killed, including 30 children and 22 women.

Israel's airstrikes were intensified the most at night, especially after midnight, and the sheer scale and intensity of those airstrikes were unprecedented.

On Thursday evening, May 13, the day of the Eid Al-Fitr festival that marks the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, Israel pounded 150 proclaimed targets in Gaza with 450 bombs and missiles from 160 warplanes and dozens of artillery units, all within one half-hour. This was the most violent event in the history of Israel's military attacks on Gaza in terms of the size and intensity of the fire, considering the time taken to carry out this attack.

Testimonies obtained by the Euro-Med monitor for human rights from the field indicate that Israel gave no prior warning to residents near targeted areas to evacuate or take any other precautionary measures. "Between one second and the other, our neighbourhood became unrecognizable," one testimony from a resident of the Beit Lahia area read. According to the witness, him and his wife were too afraid to glimpse out the window when

the airstrikes took place, or even make a run for their lives because “airstrikes seemed to be everywhere.”

“Unrecognizable” is a word that is now echoed widely across Gaza to describe several of its iconic sites. Like the Rimal District in Central Gaza, where Israel flattened four of its top residential towers, Al-Jalaa, Hanadi, Al-Shorouq and Al-Jawhara.

Furthermore, the Israeli military campaign in the Gaza Strip has increased pressure on the health system, already exhausted by the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic and by Israel’s blockade for nearly 15 years. The airstrikes led to shutting down Gaza’s main Covid-19 lab.

We reiterate that article 25 of the 1899 Hague Regulations provides: “The attack or bombardment of towns, villages, habitations or buildings which are not defended, is prohibited.” Article 53 of the Fourth Geneva Convention also states that “Any destruction by the Occupying Power of real or personal property belonging individually or collectively to private persons, or to the State, or to other public authorities, or to social or cooperative organizations, is prohibited, except where such destruction is rendered absolutely necessary by military operations.” According to Article 147 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, the unjustified destruction of properties is considered a grave breach of the Convention. It is also considered a war crime according to Article 8 (2) (b) of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Furthermore, we strongly believe that if the international community wants to see an effective and sustainable de-escalation of the situation and prevent such violent events from happening, the latest round of violence should be first and foremost placed within its full context.

This escalation is unfortunately part of a repetitive cycle that is all too familiar for observers and human rights organizations working on the topic. It always begins with a restoration of an inherently destabilizing status quo that prioritizes calm and stability over progress towards ending Israeli violations against Palestinians.

As the Euro–Med monitor for human rights documented<sup>1</sup>, the first three months of 2021 have been the least violent for Israel in the last three decades. There was no rocket-firing from the blockaded Gaza Strip and virtually no lone wolf attacks across the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem. However, Israel’s government under Benjamin Netanyahu failed to build on, incentivize or reward this stability and calm by for instance improving Palestinian lives under its occupation or ceasing violations of their rights. It instead saw as an opportunity to push the limits and squeeze Palestinians further into the corner.

This can be seen in forcing more Palestinians out of their homes in Sheikh Jarrah; building more settlements in Givat Hamatos and Har Homa that would effectively render a two-state solution more impossible; imposing restrictions on Muslim worshipers’ access to al-Aqsa mosque in Ramadan and installing barriers at the Damascus gate; or maintaining Gaza’s suffocating blockade while it’s being ravaged by the pandemic.

This escalation of state violations, amid the absence of concrete actions from the international community, has emboldened far-right elements in Israel, including settlers and Kahanists to sharply increase attacks on Palestinians, their farms and properties across the West Bank and East Jerusalem, while Israel’s government took no action to put an end to these growing attacks.

The surge in settler and right-wing violence against Palestinians peaked in a “death to the Arabs” riot in Jerusalem on April 22 by the far-right anti-miscegenation Lehava. As Palestinians took also to the street, Israel’s police responded with disproportionate violence leaving 100 wounded.

Thus, the daily scenes of wounded protesters, violent settlers acting with impunity, police brutality, humiliation of worshipers and eviction of Palestinians from their homes all became factors that fueled sentiments of rage, anger, despair, and powerlessness amongst

<sup>1</sup> Euro-Med monitor for Human Rights 2021.

Palestinians, regrettably lending credence to calls for violent actions as a way to end the concerning events in Jerusalem.

The “Flags March” on May 10, a hard-right Israeli event to assert dominance over Palestinians in Jerusalem, along with Israel’s police invading and assaulting Palestinian in Al-Aqsa Mosque were then the trigger that purportedly led armed groups in Gaza to take matters into their own hands and initiate indiscriminate rocket attacks on Israel hours after they had set an ultimatum that they would not attack if Israel was to end the violence in Jerusalem. This prompted an Israel disproportionate retaliation that has evolved into targeting high-rise residential towers and other central civilian infrastructure in the heart of Gaza to collectively punish the population.

We warn that such actions of deliberately targeting civilian areas qualify as war crimes, necessitating urgent actions from the international community to ensure that no more of such grave crimes would be likely to be perpetrated in Gaza in the future.

We believe the international community needs to comprehensively address the violations, provocations and abuses that rendered this escalation possible; and must undertake concrete actions, including taking a clear position supportive of the International Criminal Court’s investigation in the occupied territories, to deter Israeli violations that otherwise threaten exacerbating tensions and increasing the likelihood of more violence.

---