

Israel/OPT - Gaza: Urgent Action Needed

Geneva, 5 January 2009. The International Secretariat of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) expresses its deep concern with regard to the military operations started on 27 December 2008 by Israel Defense Forces (IDF) into the Gaza Strip, which have reportedly caused so far the death of more than 400 Palestinian, including 65 children and 21 women and many more injured according to the latest reports, among others by SOS-Torture Network organisation Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights. OMCT is further concerned by the ongoing ground invasion into the Gaza Strip, as it means fighting in densely populated areas.

OMCT also calls on Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups to stop firing rockets from densely populated areas, placing civilians at risk of serious harm and cease all deliberate and indiscriminate rocket attacks against Israeli population places.

Reports have denounced the targeting of civilians and civilian objects during IDF military operations, including of ambulances and civilian houses. OMCT strongly condemns the disproportionate use of force by IDF, causing unprecedented loss of civilian life, and other grave violations of both human rights and humanitarian laws, including of the Geneva Conventions and Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention which forbids collective punishment.

Too often in the last years, the civilian population in Gaza has suffered from the consequences of a blockade, drastic limitation in supplies of most basic products and commodities. Even medical and humanitarian supplies are extremely scarce since the ongoing onslaught started when large sections of the world governments, opinion makers and media were looking the other way. Indeed, the Gaza Strip has remained under blockade since 2007, having only a limited access to humanitarian supplies.

While the humanitarian conditions in the Gaza Strip had already reached a dire situation before IDF military operations, OMCT fears that the current context will increase the death toll, in particular due to the lack of appropriate medical supplies in the hospitals. OMCT calls on IDF to ensure the unhindered movement of medical personnel and ambulances to carry out their duties and of wounded persons to access medical care and on the Israel authorities to take all necessary steps to ensure that the civilian population has access to sufficient food, medical care, and other essential humanitarian goods and services.

Finally, OMCT calls for the immediate cessation of IDF military operations. OMCT is concerned over the lack of common response and action by the international community and calls for the establishment of an UN-led investigation mission whose mandate should be:

- To establish the facts;
- To draw up a list of violations of both human rights and humanitarian law;

- To identify the responsible of these violations and to launch legal action against them;
- To identify the victims and the damages incurred;
- To ensure the full reparation for said damages.

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L'OMCT a son siège à Genève, en Suisse. Elle coordonne le réseau SOS-Torture composé de 282 organisations régionales et internationales dans 93 pays sur cinq continents.

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