

Israeli war crimes in Gaza provoke global outrage

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As the Israeli onslaught on Gaza enters its second week, more and more evidence of atrocities is being made public, producing widespread expressions of outrage around the world.

There have been numerous protests in Europe and North America, which though still relatively small, reflect the growth of popular understanding of the criminal character of the one-sided “war” against Gaza.

Since the non-stop air strikes began on Gaza July 7, Israel has carried out more than 1,300 bomb and missile attacks on the Gaza Strip, an average of one massive explosion every nine minutes, 24 hours a day.

Amid reports that Israel’s security cabinet was to meet early Tuesday morning to consider a cease-fire proposal advanced by the Egyptian regime, there was no letup in this onslaught, and Israeli troops and tanks remained poised on the border of Gaza for a potential ground invasion.

Hamas and other Palestinian groups have fired more than 900 rockets, but there is no comparison in terms of the damage inflicted. The rockets are primitive and unguided, most hit open land; not one Israeli has been killed. Every Israeli bomb and missile finds some human target in Gaza, one of the most densely populated areas on the planet, with more than 10,000 people in each square mile.

The death toll among Palestinians in Gaza stood at over 185, as of this writing Monday. The vast majority of these are civilians, not fighters in any of the Palestinian armed groups, and a significant number, at least 50, are children. At least 1,200 more Gazans have been wounded.

The Israeli military also claimed its first victim on the West Bank since the latest onslaught on Gaza began. Soldiers shot to death a Palestinian man, 21-year-old Munir Ahmed Hamdan al-Badarin, in the village of Samua in the southern West Bank. His “crime” was to participate in a protest against the Gaza war that including

throwing stones at passing Israeli cars.

Pierre Krähenbühl, the commissioner general of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency in Gaza, which assists Palestinian refugees, told the press Monday that he was “deeply alarmed and affected” by the escalation of violence in the Gaza Strip and the devastating human and physical toll it is taking on civilians, including Palestine refugees. He called on Israel to “put an end to attacks against, or endangering, civilians and civilian infrastructure which are contrary to international humanitarian law.”

A whole series of horrific incidents have been reported that are war crimes under international law. The following facts have been widely reported in the world media, including within Israel itself:

- Israel bombed a rehabilitation center for people with disabilities in Jabaliya, in northern Gaza, killing four people, including a nurse and three disabled people. Others were severely burned by the explosion. Another two were killed and four wounded in an attack on a home for the disabled in Beit Lahiya.

- Eight Palestinian men who were watching the World Cup semifinal match at a café were killed by an Israeli air strike. The café was a well-known local gathering place, particularly popular in the evening during Ramadan, when observant Muslims fast during the day and eat only after dark.

- Israeli warplanes have repeatedly targeted the families of Hamas and Islamic Jihad officials, killing five members of the Hamad family in Beit Hanoun, eight members of the Kawara family, including six children aged 8 to 13, and a staggering 17 members of the Al-Taysh family, in an effort to kill Gaza’s chief of police,

- Israeli airstrikes hit El Wafa Medical Rehabilitation Hospital in Gaza City five separate times Friday, according to its executive director Basman Alashi. The strikes destroyed the rooftop water containers that supply

the hospital's 30 patients.

- More than 1,000 private homes have been destroyed or heavily damaged by airstrikes, clear evidence that Israel is deliberately targeting the civilian population of Gaza, in violation of the Geneva Conventions.

- Those wounded by the airstrikes are further endangered by the policy, enforced by Israel and Egypt, of restricting the passage of medical supplies into Gaza. Many hospitals are already running low on basic medicines and another 10 days of bombardment would mean catastrophe, doctors and medical relief workers said. The Israeli-Egyptian blockade has also affected fuel supplies for ambulances, which are unable to provide effective emergency services in the territory for lack of gasoline.

- A mosque in Al-Nuseirat, in central Gaza, was destroyed in overnight raids Saturday night, one of dozens of such strikes on buildings where large numbers of Palestinians gather, with the risk of exterminating entire family groups.

- Palestinian journalist Hamed Shehab was incinerated July 9 when an Israeli missile struck the car he was driving, clearly marked as "TV" with large red letters. Shehab worked for the local press outlet Media 24. The Palestinian Journalists Syndicate condemned this killing as a "deliberate and planned crime to discourage Palestinian journalists from showing occupation crimes and horrors of collective punishment against the Gaza Strip."

Mahmoud Daher, head of the World Health Organization mission in Gaza, told *Al Jazeera*, "The striking of hospitals and health facilities is a clear violation of international law. The WHO demands all parties to spare the health centers and keep them out of the conflict."

Even some of the actions the Israeli regime claims are aimed at reducing casualties constitute war crimes under international law. On July 13, for example, the Israeli military dropped thousands of leaflets on northern Gaza warning the population to evacuate because a large Israeli military operation was imminent. Some 17,000 people fled as a result, a deliberate displacement of civilians by terroristic threats against their lives.

Israeli officials, right up to the top, have made no effort to conceal their deliberate attacks on civilian targets in Gaza. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, interviewed on Sunday by the American television network ABC, sought to blame Hamas for his own crimes, spluttering: "Who hides in mosques? Hamas. Who puts arsenals under

hospitals? Hamas. Who puts command centers in residences or near kindergartens? Hamas. Hamas is using the residents of Gaza as human shields and it is bringing disaster to the civilians of Gaza."

On the contrary, with these very words, Netanyahu confesses to deliberately targeting mosques, hospitals, private residences and kindergartens. The videotape should be evidence at a war crimes tribunal.

Even in the Israeli press, there is uneasy discussion of the dimensions of the atrocities being carried out in Gaza. A carefully worded column in *Ha'aretz* bore the headline, "Is Israel committing war crimes in Gaza?" Its conclusion, after a detailed examination of the actions of the Israeli Defense Force (IDF), was a cautious "Yes."

The commentary pointed out, "Bear in mind that it's not just deliberate targeting of civilians that is prohibited. Strikes that by their nature will indiscriminately harm civilians, or civilian objects, alongside military targets, are also forbidden... the data that indicates that many of the casualties in Gaza are civilians, combined with some reports about the circumstances in which these civilians died, raises the prospect that Israel has committed forbidden actions, some of which could possibly be defined as war crimes. The quantity of these cases makes it very difficult to absolve them based on arguments of 'inaccuracy' or 'error'."

The column went on to cite several of the incidents referred to above, including the World Cup café bombing and the wiping out of entire families of Hamas officials, and asked a pointed question: "What would Israel say about an attack on the civilian residence of an IDF battalion commander, killing the civilians living there? If such an act is illegal, then so is what is being done in Gaza."

Only in one quarter is there an effective ban on any discussion of Israeli war crimes: the corporate-controlled media in the United States.



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