

July, 8 2006

IOF Offensive Continues in the Gaza Strip

PCHR strongly condemns the continued killing of Palestinian civilians and destruction of civilian facilities in the Gaza Strip by Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF), which have been exercising disproportionate and lethal force. PCHR also reiterates its calls for the international community, particularly the High Contracting Parties to the 1949 Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War to immediately intervene to protect the Palestinian civilian population and force the occupying power to comply with the Convention. PCHR further calls upon the High Contracting Parties to implement article 1, which calls for respecting and ensuring respect for the Convention in all circumstances.

According to investigations conducted by PCHR, on Friday, 7 July 2006, IOF continued their wide scale incursion into the northern Gaza Strip for the second consecutive day. They moved into the north east of Beit Hanoun and razed large areas of Palestinian agricultural land. They also moved into the north of Beit Lahia, occupying the al-Salateen, al-'Atatra and al-Israa' neighborhoods. Moreover, IOF continued to shell civilian populated areas and seized control of dozens of houses, forcing hundreds of Palestinian civilians to leave their homes. PCHR's field worker in the northern Gaza Strip reported that IOF detained at least 5000 people and endangered their lives by using them as human shields.

On Saturday morning, 8 July 2006, IOF redeployed to the edges of less densely populated Palestinian areas. They also moved to the edges of al-Zaytoun and al-Shojaeya neighborhoods in the east of Gaza City. IOF are apparently using an attack-and-withdraw tactic and they may move again into the areas in the north, around which they have currently redeployed. Israeli military sources declared that IOF is using a policy of moving from one area to another in order to cause maximum damage and exhaust Palestinian civilians. Over the past 24 hours, IOF have escalated their attacks on the Gaza Strip. They have killed ten Palestinians, including two children, one of whom is deaf. The body of one of the victims was found after IOF had redeployed outside the al-Israa' area. The victim was mentally disabled. This brings the number of Palestinians killed since the capture of the Israeli soldier on 25 June 2006 to forty, in addition to at least one hundred and thirty injured.

In a further serious development, IOF have attacked media crews. PCHR believes that attacks on media crews aim to prevent them from carrying out their jobs in reporting on crimes committed by IOF.

In addition, this escalation is accompanied by a strict siege imposed on the Gaza Strip since 25 June 2006, which is having serious economic and humanitarian impacts. IOF have continued to close all border crossings of the Gaza Strip. As a result, thousands of Palestinian civilians have been stranded at the Egyptian side of Rafah International Crossing Point, and the flow of foodstuffs, medical supplies and fuels through commercial crossings has been stopped, which may lead to a serious humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip.

Chronology of Developments in the Gaza Strip in the past 24 hours:

* At approximately 12:40 on Friday, 7 July 2006, IOF opened fired at Palestinian civilians in the al-'Atatra area. As a result, Mo'taz Mohammed 'Abdul Qader al-Fairi, from Beit Lahia, was killed by a live bullet to the abdomen. In addition, a number of other civilians were wounded by live bullets and shrapnel from artillery shells fired by IOF. Among these civilians was Hamdi al-Khour, 29, a cameraman from the Turkish Ikhlas news agency, who was seriously wounded by a live bullet to the right forearm, while he was photographing incidents in the al-Salateen area of Beit Lahia. IOF also fired at medical crews several times, which obstructed provision of medical aid to the wounded.

* At approximately 13:50, IOF shot dead Shadi Yousef 'Omar, 16, from the Sheikh Radwan neighborhood of Gaza City, who is deaf. He was hit by a bullet to the chest, while he was walking near the al-Twam intersection, which leads to al-Israa' neighborhood.

* At approximately 15:30, an IOF drone fired a missile at a number of members of the Palestinian resistance, killing two of them and wounding a number of others, one of whom died later. The three resistance men, who were killed, were identified as:

1. 'Abdul Nasser 'Eissa Abu Hwaidi, 42, from Gaza City;
2. 'Abdul Jabbar Muneer al-Husari, 20, from al-Shati refugee camp; and
3. Khalil Ibrahim al-Hajjar, 22.

* At approximately 17:00, IOF positioned in a house continued to fire at Palestinian civilians. As a result, Tha'er Te'ma al-Tanani, 22, was killed by a live bullet to the chest, when he was near a mosque in the al-Israa' neighborhood. A number of other civilians were also wounded.

* At approximately 17:50, IOF fired artillery shells at Palestinian civilians in the al-'Atatra area. As a result, Musbah Fayez al-'Attar, 25, was killed, and a number of other civilians were wounded. IOF did not allow medical crews to evacuate the victim's body for more than one hour. They fired at ambulances and forced them to travel back.

* At approximately 18:30, IOF forced dozens of Palestinian civilians out of their homes and used them as human shields. They also continued to occupy a number of houses, holding their residents in one room.

* At approximately 21:00, medical sources at Shifa Hospital in Gaza City declared that Anwar Isma'il 'Abdul Ghani 'Atallah, 12, from Beit Hanouan, had died from his wounds. The child was hit by a live bullet to the head fired by IOF near Erez industrial zone on Wednesday, 5 July 2006.

* On Saturday morning, 8 July 2006, as IOF redeployed outside the al-Salateen neighborhood, residents of the neighborhood found the body of Jaber Raihan, 42, who was mentally disabled, on agricultural land in the al-'Israa' neighborhood in the west of Beit Lahia. The victim had been hit by a live bullet to the abdomen and apparently bled to death. IOF caused major destruction to civilian property in the area. They partially destroyed at least hundred houses, razed at least 50 dunums of agricultural land, destroyed the fence of a cemetery and damaged many civilian vehicles. They also arrested four Palestinian civilians, including three brothers from the al-'Attar family.

* While IOF were redeploying in Beit Lahia, IOF troops, reinforced by helicopters, moved into areas on the edges of al-Shojaeya and al-Zaytoun neighborhoods in the Gaza Strip. They opened fire indiscriminately. As a result, two members of the Palestinian resistance were killed:

1. Ahmed Isma'il al-Sarsak, 35, from al-Shojaeya neighborhood; and
2. Hani Mohammed Abu al-Qumboz, 25, a member of the Palestinian National Security Forces, from al-Shojaeya neighborhood.

2. In addition, ten others were wounded, including Mohammed al-Za'noun, 22, a photographer from Ma'an news agency, who was seriously wounded by a live bullet to the abdomen and shrapnel to the face.
* As a result of continued IOF shelling in recent nights, particularly last night, near Sofa crossing and al-Shouka areas, northeast and east of Rafah respectively, UNRWA has provided shelter for thirty nine Palestinian families (365 people) at Rafah Elementary School "F" for Refugees, as a temporary shelter for them, since staying in their homes had become impossible.

PCHR strongly condemns the killing of Palestinian civilians by IOF, which constitutes a form of reprisal and collective punishment, in violation of article 33 of the 1949 Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. PCHR further calls upon the international community to immediately intervene to protect the Palestinian civilian population, in accordance with international humanitarian law and human rights law, before the situation deteriorates even further.

The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) <<http://www.pchrgaza.org>> is an independent legal body based in Gaza City dedicated to protecting human rights, promoting the rule of law and upholding democratic principles in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.