

September 07 2005

Israelis Protest 'Shoot-to-Kill' Policy

Breaking a deafening silence, Israeli soldiers are speaking out against illegal shoot-to-kill orders against Palestinian civilians, a leading British newspaper reported Tuesday, September 6. "The reason why I am telling you this is that I want the army to think about what they are asking us to do, shooting unarmed people. I don't think it's legal," Assaf, a discharged Israeli soldier, told the Guardian.

He said that in the summer of 2002 his armored unit had been ordered to enter the Gaza town of Dir Al-Balah following the firing of mortars into nearby Jewish settlements. Assaf said the orders were clear and simple. "Every person you see on the street, kill him'. And we would just do it." Recalling one of many incidents, Assaf said he saw through his machine gun a Palestinian man was aged between 20 and 30, unarmed and trying to get away from an Israeli tank. This, he admitted, did not matter.

With an order to "fire at anything that moved," the soldier pressed the trigger, firing scores of bullets as the unarmed Palestinian fell to the ground. "He ran and I started shooting for a few seconds. He fell. I was a machine. I fire. I leave and that's that. We never spoke about it afterwards." Palestinian and international human rights groups have repeatedly accused Israel of killing Palestinians in cold blood.

They slammed Israel for targeting Palestinian children and women, and using them as shields.

Testimonies

Other Israeli soldiers told the British daily they were ordered to shoot anyone who appeared on a roof or a balcony, anyone who appeared to be kneeling to the ground or anyone who appeared on the street at a designated time. They were also ordered to open fire in some parts of the occupied Palestinian territories on people regardless of whether they were armed or not, or posed any physical threat.

Among those killed by soldiers acting on the orders were children. Soldiers said that many of the shootings occurred in periods of calm when there was no immediate risk to the soldiers involved. Dozens of testimonies were collected by Breaking the Silence, a pressure group of former Israeli soldiers committed to exposing human rights abuses by the Israeli army against the Palestinians. The testimonies shed light on how around 1,700 Palestinian civilians have been killed during the second Intifada, which erupted in September 2000 after the provocative visit by then Likud leader Ariel Sharon to Al-Aqsa mosque, Islam's third holiest shrine, the paper said.

Leaders Blamed

Yehuda Shaul, the co-founder of Breaking the Silence, said their campaign is aimed to show that individual soldiers were not to blame for killings of innocent Palestinians. "It is the situation which is to blame and that is created by military and political leaders, not the soldiers on the ground," he said.

Israeli military prosecutors have opened 17 separate criminal investigations into the soldiers' testimonies, according to the British daily. The probes cover a range of accusations, including misuse of weapons and other misuses of power. Erlik Alhanan, 27, an Israeli soldier, has told IslamOnline.net in an interview that at least 80 percent of reservists have lost confidence in the declared moral principles of the Israeli army due to the inhumane practices in the occupied territories. "It runs counter to the code of ethics of the Israeli Defense Army and what we have learnt inside the military institution. They do not practice what they preach," Alhanan said.

Source: IslamOnline.net