

Independent Investigation Details Israel's Deliberate Killing of Civilians in Gaza

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In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

A new independent medical fact-finding mission in Gaza has detailed Israel's deliberate killing of Palestinian civilians in its summer 2014 attack, codenamed Operation "Protective Edge." Acts documented in the investigation include the use of human shields, close-range murder of civilians, targeting of medics, and more.

[The report](#), based on fieldwork and research conducted by Physicians for Human Rights-Israel (PHR-Israel), in conjunction with several other human rights and medical organizations, sits at a bulky 237 pages. PHR-Israel, in its words, "recruited eight independent international medical experts, unaffiliated with Israeli or Palestinian parties involved in the conflict," leading specialists in numerous medical, health, and human rights fields. [Jennifer Leaning](#), the Director of the Center for Health and Human Rights Department of Global Health and Population in Harvard University's School of Public Health, was among those chosen to oversee the report.

The investigation was also supported by a wide array of prominent international organizations, including the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the Science and Human Rights Program, the British Shalom-Salaam Trust, Christian Aid, the Open Society Foundation, and many more.

In its executive summary, the fact-finding mission estimates that, in Israel's 50-day attack on Gaza,

- over 2,100 Palestinians were killed;
- at least 70% of those killed were civilians;
- over 500 children were killed;
- more than 11,000 were wounded; and
- at least 100,000 were made homeless.

The Electronic Intifada published [a summary of the investigation's findings](#), drawing particular attention to an incident in the Gazan village of Khuzaa, in which the Israeli military shot into a crowd of civilians who were fleeing Israel's siege and carrying white flags while shouting "peaceful, peaceful."

This attack, nonetheless, pales in comparison to those disclosed in the report. PHR-Israel reported Israel did the following in its Operation Protective Edge:

- used civilians as human shields;
- shot civilians dead at close range;
- left mortally wounded children on the ground to die, even after soldiers made

- eye contact with them;
- conducted multiple consecutive strikes on a single location (“double taps”), killing injured survivors and those attempting to rescue them;
- bombed medical clinics that were acting as shelters for civilians and the wounded;
- “deliberately” attacked hospitals;
- prevented emergency medical evacuation, even by international organizations such as Red Cross;
- killed and injured “many” medical teams that were evacuating the injured;
- refused to allow civilians to exit areas being attacked;
- targeted civilian escape routes;
- shelled ambulances;
- attacked civilians attempting to flee areas under fire;
- physically beat civilians;
- denied civilians food and water;

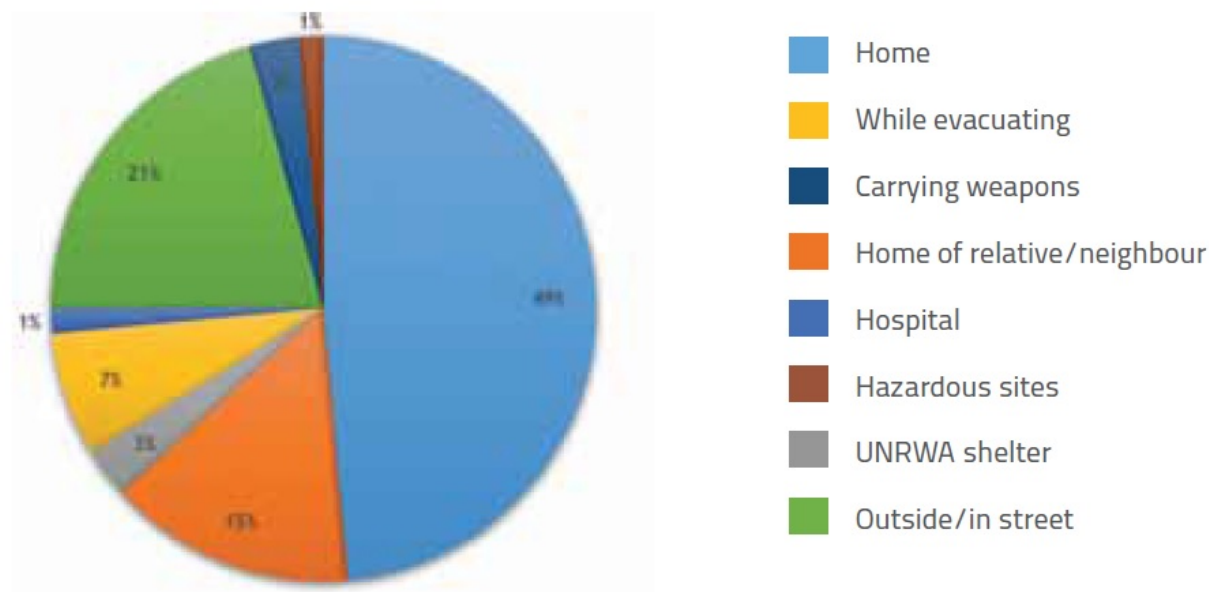
and more.

The report additionally documented Israel’s use of unconventional and experimental weapons, resulting in injuries local doctors characterized as “strange or inexplicable.” Among those used were

- flechette munitions (which doctors reported surgically removing from the faces of children);
- “explosive barrel” bombs, referred to as “Tzefa Shirion” weapons, that were made to be used to clear mines, but were dropped on civilians;
- what are suspected to be DIME weapons, leading to “unusual burns” and “unusual amputations,” with “charred” black skin that did not smell like burning flesh and black “tattooing” around cauterization-like stumps of amputees;
- weapons that left “‘computer chips’ with Sony markings embedded as shrapnel in people’s bodies”;
- and “a gas of unknown type,” a white-colored substance with a “sewage-like smell” that burned skin and caused respiratory problems and could be seen and smelled from 500 meters away.

The medical fact-finding mission notes that the “overwhelming majority of injuries causing death or requiring hospitalisation ... were the result of explosion or crush injuries, often multiple complex injuries.” Roughly half of interviewed Gazans were attacked in their homes. [Entire families were killed in the attack.](#)

Location of incident leading to patient's injury



A graph from the report illustrating the most common locations in which Gazans were injured.

A graph from the report illustrating the most common locations in which Gazans were injured

The report states that Israel's

attacks were characterised by heavy and unpredictable bombardments of civilian neighbourhoods in a manner that failed to discriminate between legitimate targets and protected populations and caused widespread destruction of homes and civilian property. Such indiscriminate attacks, by aircraft, drones, artillery, tanks and gunships, were unlikely to have been the result of decisions made by individual soldiers or commanders; they must have entailed approval from top-level decision-makers in the Israeli military and/or government.

It also indicates that "there was no guaranteed safe space in the Gaza Strip, nor were there any safe escape routes from it." The experts accused Israel of "serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law."

The Aftermath

These findings are based on extensive interviews with victims, witnesses, healthcare professionals and human rights workers, local government officials, and representatives of international health organizations. Forensic, medical, and other material evidence was also collected to scientifically verify these oral testimonies.

PHR-Israel spoke with 68 hospitalized patients who were injured in the attacks, and includes transcripts of these discussions in its report. The majority of Gazans interviewed after the attacks suffered from:

- insomnia,
- flashbacks,
- nightmares,
- depression,
- weight loss,
- loss of appetite,
- unstable emotional states

In the wake of the attack, the fact-finding mission reports

- strains on and a lack of resources in Gaza hospitals;
- problems with sending patients from Gaza hospitals to outside hospitals outside for treatment;
- long-term displacement because of the partial or total destruction of approximately 18,000 homes;
- long-term psychosocial and mental health damage; and
- a dire need for rehabilitation services with insufficient resources to meet them.

Potential War Crimes

In its recommendations, PHR-Israel et al. call upon international actors, including the UN, the EU, and the US, to “ensure that the governments of Israel and Egypt permit and facilitate the entry of investigative teams into Gaza, including experts in international human rights law and arms experts,” revealing that this “has not yet been done, months after the offensive.”

[Israel prevented the world’s leading human rights organizations](#), Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, from entering Gaza in August 2014 to investigate. This medical fact-finding mission may be the first large-scale independent investigation conducted in Gaza since the summer attacks.

PHR-Israel also encourages the international community to support investigations conducted by local Palestinian civil society groups in their “efforts to collate evidence in Gaza, in order to proceed with legal and/or other remedies as well as to seek justice and/or reparations.” It suggests that the evidence presented in the report “be used for the purposes of legal determination of violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.”

Both [Amnesty International](#) and [Human Rights Watch](#) have accused Israel of committing war crimes in its summer 2014 attack on Gaza. Israeli human rights organization B’Tselem has shown that most of those killed in Israel’s approximately 70 attacks on Gaza homes were women, children, and the elderly, and says [the IDF’s targeting of homes may constitute war crimes](#).

Palestine will join the International Criminal Court [on 1 April 2014](#). In January 2015, the court’s prosecutor [launched a preliminary probe](#) into possible war crimes in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Israel, and its US allies, often refer to the Israel Defense Forces as “[the most moral army in the world](#),” leading some, such as esteemed Israeli journalist Gideon Levy, to criticize what they see as hypocrisy, in light of documented attacks such as these. In July 2014, in the midst of Operation “Protective Edge,” Israeli ambassador to the US Ron Dermer insisted that the Israel Defense Forces deserve a [Nobel Peace Prize for the “unimaginable restraint”](#) they practiced in Gaza and that Israel earned “the admiration of the international community” for its purported caution. This report appears to indicate otherwise.

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