

UN special rapporteur Richard Falk likens Gaza to Warsaw Ghetto

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There is more than enough evidence that Israel committed war crimes in its three week-long offensive into Gaza, says a UN investigator.

UN special rapporteur Richard Falk called for an independent inquiry into Israel's violation of international humanitarian law.

Falk said Israel's actions against the besieged Gazans are reminiscent of "the worst kind of international memories of the Warsaw Ghetto" which included the starvation and murder of Polish Jews by Nazi Germany in World War Two.

"There could have been temporary provision at least made for children, disabled, sick civilians to leave, even if where they left to was southern Israel," said the Jewish American academic on Thursday.

Falk, who was denied entry to Israel in December, said Gazans may have been mentally scarred for life because Israel made no effort to allow civilians to escape.

Israeli officials moved closer to being prosecuted for war crimes after Norwegian medics in Gaza found traces of depleted uranium on Gaza victims, suggesting that Israel used the illegal weapons in its war on the impoverished territory, which houses some 1.5 million Palestinians.

According to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), there is a "high risk of developing cancer from exposure to radiation emitted by ... depleted uranium weapons. This risk is assumed to be proportional to the dose received."

The Geneva Convention has classified depleted uranium ammunitions as 'illegal weapons of mass destruction' due to their high radioactivity and toxicity.

Israel faces potential war crimes charges over its excessive use of other controversial weapons on the densely-populated coastal strip.

Human rights group Amnesty International has also touched on the issue, saying that Tel Aviv used white phosphorus munitions "indiscriminately and illegally" in overcrowded areas of Gaza.

"The repeated use [of White Phosphorus] in this manner, despite evidence of its indiscriminate effects and its toll on civilians, is a war crime," said Donatella Rovera of the Amnesty International.

White phosphorus is a high-incendiary substance that bursts into all-consuming flames that cannot be extinguished with water, burning flesh to the bone and often leading to death.

Israel launched its Operation Cast Lead on December 27 to allegedly defend its territories from Hamas rockets, which were fired in retaliation for Israel's violation of a ceasefire that had then been in place.

Falk dismissed Israel's argument that the assault was for self-defense, saying that "the UN charter, and international law, does not give Israel the legal foundation for claiming self-defense."

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