

GROUND OPERATIONS IN GAZA OCCUR AS PROTECTED OBJECTS ARE INCREASINGLY BOMBED

FROM: GLOBAL CENTER FOR THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT

On 28 October Israeli forces began major ground operations in the Gaza Strip, intensifying the risks of atrocities for trapped civilians. Israeli forces have attacked Gaza City from several directions with tanks and armored vehicles, as well as targeted the main road linking Gaza City to the south of Gaza. Intense clashes in the southern and northwestern outskirts of Gaza City are ongoing, posing increased risks to civilians caught in the fighting. During the last major Israeli ground operation into Gaza between July and August 2014, Israeli forces perpetrated numerous international law violations, including likely war crimes.

Meanwhile, Israel's indiscriminate bombardment of Gaza has escalated, with intensive air raids in recent days that have struck civilian objects protected under International Humanitarian Law (IHL), including residential buildings, mosques and water and sanitation facilities. On 27 October telecommunications across Gaza – including cellular and internet services – were abruptly cut after the bombing of telecommunications infrastructure, effectively cutting all communication from Gaza. The services have been largely restored since then. On 31 October and 1 November air raids on the densely populated Jabalia refugee camp killed and wounded hundreds.

The World Health Organization has also documented over 82 attacks on healthcare facilities in Gaza since 7 October. Following evacuation requests by Israeli authorities, the vicinities of Al Quds and Shifa hospitals have been bombarded. Both hospitals are providing life-saving care for thousands of Palestinians, as well as shelter to those displaced. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has reiterated that “there is nowhere safe for these patients to go” and that any evacuation would “be a death sentence.” Hospitals are protected objects under IHL and airstrikes against them may amount to a war crime. The reported use of human shields in hospitals by Hamas may also amount to a war crime, should recent allegations be verified.

Since 7 October at least 8,525 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza, including 3,195 children, and over 21,543 injured. Approximately 1,950 people are reported missing and are likely trapped under rubble. Ambulances are increasingly unable to reach injured and trapped civilians as many roads have been destroyed by Israeli airstrikes, while the lack of fuel has forced ambulances to scale back rescue operations. Meanwhile, Hamas has continued to fire indiscriminate rockets toward Israel, with no reported fatalities. According to Israeli authorities, 240 people are still held captive in Gaza, including many children.

During an Emergency Special Session of the UN General Assembly, 121 member states voted in favor of a resolution that called for an immediate “humanitarian truce leading to a cessation of hostilities.” Amid an ever-worsening humanitarian catastrophe caused by Israel's ongoing siege, this call must be urgently heeded. Israel's collective punishment of Palestinians in Gaza and indiscriminate bombardments must cease immediately. Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups must safely and unconditionally release all individuals taken hostage.