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Continuing War Crimes By Karen Nakamura

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While the world focused on Lebanon, the Israeli government inflicted more suffering on Palestine, especially in Gaza. July was the deadliest month since October 2004. The percentage of deaths rose 222% from the month before, injuries over 200%.

The Palestinian Monitoring Group reports at least 151 people were killed between June 25, when an Israeli soldier was kidnapped, and August 8. Of these, 138 were civilians and about 45 children. This surge compares with the former highest monthly total of 166 in October 2004. Other sources, including the PLO, put the total closer to 200.

Adding insult to injury, Israel regularly kidnapped members of the democratically elected Palestinian parliament and cabinet. These Israeli kidnappings began before the Hezbollah kidnapping; a point that has been lost in the storm. The Hezbollah kidnapping occurred July 12.

On June 24, Israeli troops entered Gaza and abducted Dr. Osama Muntar and his brother, Mustafa, alleging they were members of Hamas, which is not illegal just unpalatable to Israel. The IDF had already kidnapped at least 8 government officials. The following day, Palestinian groups attacked an Israeli army post, killing two soldiers and kidnapping a third. That kidnapping caused Israel to lie siege to the Gaza Strip and has now abducted nearly 65 officials, most of who are Hamas and include Cabinet ministers and parliamentary representatives.

Of the number of officials grabbed by the IDF, 10 were abducted before June 29, 2006. Ministers of three departments plus a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council were taken June 29, 2006 but subsequently released. August 19, the abducted ministers rose by one when the IDF grabbed the Deputy Prime Minister in his home.

On August 8, Chief Palestinian negotiator, Dr. Saeb Erekat, spoke in a report issued by the PLO Negotiations Affairs Department concerning the August 7 kidnapping of Dr. Aziz Dweik, Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council. "The continued abduction of our ministers and parliamentarians is only the latest Israeli attack on Palestinian aspirations to live in a free, democratic and independent Palestinian state alongside IsraelÉ"

Israel has also continued its assassinations of Palestinian leaders. International civil rights laws consider assassinations approved by a government to be murders and constitute war crimes. State assassinations, however, relate only to targeted victims whose executions were decided at the political and military level and organized by the State. Those who plan, deploy and carry them out are personally responsible and therefore subject to legal prosecution.

The Israeli army admitted responsibility for at least 25 assassinations between November 2000 and January 2002, However, human rights organizations suggest the number of those executed without trial is much higher, citing the dates November 9, 2000 through January 14, 2002 when 53 Palestinian were assassinated in Israel's "liquidation" policy. That number has been exponentially added to in the last four years. In any case, the twenty-five assassinations the Israeli military admits to are sufficient to be considered war crimes.

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Assassinations are carried out when a suspect's name is put on a "liquidation" list by the Israeli security cabinet after due political considerations. The planning is then developed by the Chief of Staff and carried out by the IDF. The Oslo Process allows Israel to carry out arrests in much of the occupied territories. This fact makes it difficult for Israel to claim that the alternative of arrest and interrogation does not exist.

Israeli forces previewed their game plan for Lebanon in the weeks before their invasion when they bombed Gaza's main power plant, knocked out bridges connecting northern and southern Gaza and destroyed housing and government offices. The flow of gasoline, food and other essentials into the strip are constantly interrupted and the few border crossings are rarely opened, especially commercial.

The United Nations says that densely populated Gaza is now facing some of the worst humanitarian conditions in years. In a report released on August 7, the UN also said the capacity of a wastewater treatment plant in the northern Gaza Strip had reached a "critical point," with sewage ponds threatening to flood populated areas nearby.

Seventy percent of the population is reliant on emergency assistance to meet daily food needs, while prices of essential goods, such as wheat flour and sugar, have risen 15 percent to 33% since January. These figures come a year after a significant percentage of Gaza children were reported by the UN to be suffering from chronic malnutrition.

One sign of any army's true intentions are shown in its treatment of injured civilians. In the week of July 24 through July 31, and these statistics are only for one week, 9 Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) ambulances were denied by the IDF access to, or experienced delayed access to, injured citizens. The shortest delay time was 30 minutes, the longest 2 hours. This pattern was repeated in Lebanon when the Israelis dropped a rocket on the exact center of the Red Cross symbol painted on the roof of a crammed Lebanese ambulance right after shooting up another ambulance at the same location.

Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) President Mr. Al-Khatib emphasized that the invasion of the Ministry of Health Hospital in Nablus in July and the use of the facilities as a military site and detention center was a clear violation of the Geneva Conventions which prohibit invasion of hospitals. The PRCS, a full member of the International Red Cross Society, makes its case on its website for the prosecution of war crimes committed by the Israeli Defense Forces.

"These practices [denying access and attacking ambulance/medical workers] constitute a breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention and the First Additional Protocol of the Geneva Conventions, which are legally applied to the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In particular, they violate articles 20 of the Fourth Geneva Convention which guarantees the protection and respect of persons who engage in the search for, removal and transport of and caring for wounded and sick civilians, and article 63 which stresses that 'Subject to temporary and exceptional measures imposed for urgent reasons of security by the Occupied Power, recognized National red cross and red crescent societies shall be able to pursue their activities in accordance with Red Cross principles, as defined by the international Red Cross Conferences'".

"In addition to articles 12 and 15 of the First Additional Protocol of the Geneva conventions which guarantees that " Medical units shall be respected and protected at all times and shall not be the object of attack and shall have access to any place where their services are essential" and article 16 which stresses that, "Under no circumstances shall any person be punished for carrying out medical activities compatible with medical ethics, regardless of the person benefiting there from." in addition to article 21, which stresses that," Medical vehicles shall be respected and protected in the same way as mobile medical units under the Conventions and this Protocol."

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