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Crisis



Palestinians stock up on food in Gaza
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UN envoy: Israel turned Gaza into prison

Special UN envoy on human rights in PA says in special report Israel's actions in territories can be described as 'ethnic cleansing,' adds three-quarters of Gaza population depend on food aid for survival

Ali Waked and Reuters

United Nations Human rights envoy to the Palestinian territories John Dugard has published a report Tuesday where he does not shy away from sharply criticizing Israel and the West for the situation in Gaza. "Israel has turned the Gaza Strip into a prison for Palestinians and have thrown away the key," he said, adding that "in other countries this process might be described as ethnic cleansing."

In the report handed to the UN Human Rights Council Dugard wrote that "life in Gaza has turned to be intolerable, appalling and tragic." According to him, 75 percent of Gaza's population is dependant on food aid for survival, and the destruction left from Israeli bombings is "intolerable."

Dugard also mentions the situation in the West Bank where there is a danger of a humanitarian crisis because of the security fence which is as bad as in Gaza.

The South African lawyer, who has been a special UN investigator since 2001, repeated earlier accusations that Israel is breaking international humanitarian law with security measures which amount to "collective punishment."

Dugard also attacked the United States, the European Union and Canada for withdrawing funding for the Palestinian Authority in protest at the governing party Hamas' refusal to accept Israel's right to exist.

"If ... The international community cannot ... take some action, it must not be surprised if the people of the planet disbelieve that they are seriously committed to the promotion of human rights," he said.

"Israel violates international law as expounded by the Security Council and the International Court of Justice and goes unpunished. But the Palestinian people are punished for having democratically elected a regime unacceptable to Israel, the US and the EU," Dugard said.

Israeli Ambassador to the UN headquarters in Geneva Itzhak Levanon said in response that "the report lays the blame solely on Israel and does not hold the terror groups responsible for taking the Palestinian people hostage."

Saddest Ramadan in 40 years

To many residents of Gaza, this month of Ramadan is the poorest and saddest holiday since 1967. According to them, the economic situation has never been worse and the holiday feasts have never been as lacking as this year.

Abed Srur, a construction worker from Gaza said that unlike the Ramadan tradition, for their fast ending meal they eat only rice with no meat. He said that his income since May has been only NIS 3,000.

The Palestinians continue to be troubled by the closure imposed on the Strip that prevents the transfer of goods and people and hurts the ability of traders and workers to support their families.

Srur also said that the salaries that the Palestinian government has promised to pay its employees have not been paid because of conflicts between the government and Palestinian President Abbas. "Ramadan has never been so sad," said Srur.

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