

### PRESS RELEASE



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#### ***In less than 9 hours:***

#### **IOF Kill 5 Civilians in the Gaza Strip, including 3 Children, & Injures 7 others; Two of the Victims Bled to Death when IOF Prevented Ambulances from Rescuing them**

Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) has used excessive force in the north and south of the Gaza Strip during a 9-hour span today, Thursday, 21 September 2006, resulting in the death of 5 Palestinian civilians and the injury of 7 others, including a father and 2 of his children. Two of the victims including a woman were killed in cold blood in Rafah. They were left to bleed to death inside their houses. The other 3 victims were children from the town of Jabalia who were killed by a surface-to-surface rocket as they were herding sheep.

PCHR seriously views this latest escalation by IOF, which comes within the context of the open ongoing aggression on the Gaza Strip for the past three months, which inflicted hundreds of casualties among the civilian population. In addition, the IOF attacks have inflicted great material damage on civilian property and infrastructure.

PCHR's preliminary investigation indicates that at approximately 1:20 on Thursday, 21 September 2006, IOF armored vehicles moved approximately 3 kilometers into the village of Um El-Naser, northeast of Rafah. The forces cut off the Khan Yunis-Rafah section of Salah El-Deen Road in the area. The force surrounded the house of Nathmi Hussein Zo'rob, a Hamas activist. IOF also fired indiscriminately at houses in the area. At approximately 2:00, IOF chased a number of youth who gathered in the area. The youth fled into a house; and IOF stormed the house, and beat the house owner who is deaf. When the man's wife, Itemad Ismail Abu Mo'ammam (35), protested the attack, one of the soldiers fired directly at her. She was hit by multiple bullets in different parts of the body. She was left to bleed death in the house, and died at 6:00. IOF prevented a Palestinian ambulance from reaching the area to save the woman. Eight civilians were injured by the indiscriminate firing in the area, including a father and 2 of his children. At approximately 10:00, one of the injured, Mohammad Suliman Abu Mo'ammam (28), bled to death from gunshot wounds in the left thigh and right hand.

Palestinian medical sources informed PCHR's fieldworker that IOF prevented Palestinian ambulances from entering the area of operations. In addition, IOF refused to coordinate the entry of emergency services with the Red Cross. Thus, two of the injured bled for more than four hours, leading to their death.

At approximately 12:30, IOF left the area after completely destroying 13 houses and the infrastructure in the area. In addition, IOF detained 5 civilians, including a 13-year old boy and the wife of the Hamas activist.

In another incident at approximately 8:50, IOF stationed along the Gaza Strip border to the east of Jabalia fired a surface-to-surface rocket at three children herding sheep in the Abu Safeyya area, east of Jabalia town. The area is located about 2 kilometers away from the border. The children were killed and their bodies torn to pieces. They are:

- Ala Saqer Dahrouj Abu Dahrouj (15);
- Zeidan Rafiq Mohammad Abu Rashid (16); and
- Mohammad Selmi Mohammad Masalha (17).

PCHR's preliminary investigation indicates that, while herding, the children had come near an abandoned rocket stand used earlier by Palestinian gunmen to fire a homemade rocket. It is noted that another civilian was killed yesterday in

similar circumstances. Thus, the number of Palestinian civilians killed under similar circumstances over the past 3 months has reached 15 victims.

PCHR strongly condemns IOF killing of Palestinian civilians, and considers these actions to be a form of reprisal and collective punishment, which violate article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. PCHR condemns today's crimes, and:

- Expresses serious concern over the lives of Palestinian civilians due to the escalating use of force by IOF against civilians;
- Reminds of the past IOF crimes against civilians, and the continued failure to discriminate between civilians and combatants by IOF during operations; and
- Calls upon the international community and High Contracting Parties of the Fourth Geneva Convention to intervene immediately and effectively to protect Palestinian civilians.

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