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Israel Uses Gazans as Human Shields

Israeli invading troops are using armless civilians in the Gaza Strip as human shields to protect them against attacks from Palestinian resistance fighters.

"It's standard practice for Israeli soldiers to go into a house, lock up the family in a room on the ground floor and use the rest of the house as a military base, as a sniper's position," Donatella Rovera, Amnesty International's investigator in Israel, told The Guardian on Tuesday, January 13.

"That is the absolute textbook case of human shields."

Last week, Amnesty accused Israel of using civilians as human shields in its nearly three-week onslaught against the Gaza Strip, which has so far killed more than 971, half of them women and children.

Rovera said this is not the first time that Israel has used Palestinian civilians as human shields.

"It has been practiced by the Israeli army for many years and they are doing it again in Gaza now."

In several well-documented cases, Israeli troops forced Palestinian civilians, at gunpoint, to go before them into buildings from which they feared attack.

They also use Palestinians to drive out wanted Palestinian resistance fighters by making them approach their homes first and asking them to surrender.

In 2005, Israel's Supreme Court banned the military's practice of using Palestinian civilians as human shields in arrest raids.

The use of human shields in conflict is prohibited under the Geneva Conventions which clearly states that they "shall not be used to...shield military objectives from attacks or to shield, favor or impede military operations."

War Crimes

Amnesty's Rovera also accused Israeli troops of committing war crimes by using weapons which cause huge fatalities among the 1.6 million population of Gaza.

"There has been reckless and disproportionate and in some cases indiscriminate use of force," she said.

"There has been the use of weaponry that shouldn't be used in densely populated areas because it's known that it will cause civilian fatalities and casualties," added the investigator.

"They have extremely sophisticated missiles that can be guided to a moving car and they choose to use other weapons or decide to drop a bomb on a house knowing that there were women and children inside.

"These are very, very clear breaches of international law."

The Human Right Watch has accused Israel of using white-phosphorus, a chemical that burns away human flesh to the bone, in shelling Gaza.

The 1980 Third Convention on Conventional Weapons bans the use of white phosphorus as a weapon, even against military targets situated within population centers.

John Ging, director of UNRWA operations in Gaza, called Tuesday for a full investigation into reports of Israel's use of illegal weapons in its 18-day offensive.

He also appealed for the international community to provide protection for civilians in Gaza as mandated by the 1949 Geneva Conventions.

"All the people, the first thing they say to me and the last thing they say to me is 'Please, we need protection, nowhere is safe'," he told reporters in Geneva via an audio link from an UNRWA distribution center after visiting shelters and clinics.

"And they're right, nowhere is safe."

(IslamOnline.net and newspapers)