

## SECTIONS

[HOME](#)  
[LAS TUNAS NEWS](#)  
[CUBA NEWS](#)  
[WORLD NEWS](#)  
[OPINION](#)  
[CULTURE](#)  
[SPORT](#)  
[HEALTH](#)  
[EDUCATION](#)  
[HISTORY](#)  
[FEATURES](#)  
[OFFBEAT NEWS](#)



## LAS TUNAS

[Local Tourism](#)  
[Museums](#)  
[Las Tunas Profile](#)  
[Sculptures](#)  
[Rural Balladry](#)  
[Faces of Cuba](#)

## SERVICES

[Telephones](#)

## Proof Positive: Israel Using White Phosphorus in Gaza

- [U.S. Weapons and Technology Kill Civilians in Gaza Strip](#)
- [Tel Aviv Warns Gazans to Brace for Military Escalation](#)
- [Top UN Official Proposes Mission to Examine War Crimes in Gaza](#)

Jerusalem, Jan 10, (RHC).- Evidence has emerged proving that Israel has been using controversial white phosphorus shells during its offensive in Gaza, despite official denials by Tel Aviv. There is also evidence that the rounds have injured Palestinian civilians, causing severe burns. The use of white phosphorus against civilians is prohibited under international law.

According to a story published by The Times UK, stockpiles of white phosphorus (WP) shells have been identified from high-resolution images taken of Israeli artillery units on the Israeli-Gaza border this week.

The pale blue 155mm rounds are clearly marked with the designation M825A1, an American-made WP munition. The shell is an improved version with a more limited dispersion of the phosphorus, which ignites on contact with oxygen, and is being used by the Israeli gunners to create a smoke screen on the ground.

The rounds, which explode into a shower of burning white streaks, were first identified by The Times last weekend when they were fired over Gaza at the start of Israel's ground offensive.

There are now reports that Palestinian civilians have been injured by the bombs, which burn intensely. Hassan Khalass, a doctor at al-Shifa hospital in Gaza City, told The Times that he had been dealing with patients who he suspected had been burnt by white phosphorus. Muhammad Azayzeh, an emergency medical technician in Gaza City, said: "The burns are very unusual. They don't look like burns we have normally seen. They are third-level burns that we can't seem to control."

Victims with embedded WP particles in their flesh have to have the affected areas flushed with water. Particles that cannot be removed with tweezers are covered with a saline-soaked dressing. Nafez Abu Shaban, the head of the burns unit at al-Shifa hospital, said: "I am not familiar with phosphorus but many of the patients wounded in the past weeks have strange burns. They are very deep and not like burns we used to see."

When The Times reported earlier this week that Israeli troops appeared to be firing WP shells to create a thick smoke camouflage for units advancing into Gaza, an Israeli military spokesman denied the use of phosphorus and said that Israel was using only the weapons that were allowed under international law.

Rows of the pale blue M825A1 WP shells were photographed on January 4th on the Israeli side of the Israel-Gaza border. Another

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Council Resolution I  
Ceasefire](#)

picture showed the same munitions stacked up behind an Israeli self-propelled howitzer. Confronted with the latest evidence, an Israeli military spokesperson insisted that the M825A1 shell was not a WP type. She told reporters: "This is what we call a quiet shell -- it is empty, it has no explosives and no white phosphorus. There is nothing inside it."

### **U.S. Weapons and Technology Kill Civilians in Gaza Strip**

The U.S. weapons systems used by Israel in its attacks on Gaza - including F-16 fighter planes, Apache helicopters, tactical missiles and a wide range of munitions - have been provided by Washington mostly as outright military grants, according to a story by Inter Press Service, IPS.

A recently released report shows that the administration of U.S. President George W. Bush alone has provided over 21 billion dollars in U.S. security assistance over the last eight years -- including 19 billion dollars in direct military aid as freebies.

A briefing released by the Arms and Security Initiative of the New York-based New America Foundation, says: "Israel's intervention in the Gaza Strip has been fueled largely by U.S. supplied weapons paid for with U.S. tax dollars." The report goes on to note: "The Bush administration has been unwilling to use its considerable influence -- as Israel's major military and political backer -- to dissuade the government in Tel Aviv from its pattern of claiming self-defense while perpetrating collective punishment, human rights violations and undertaking massively disproportionate attacks that harm and kill civilians."

Frida Berrigan, senior program associate at the New America Foundation, told IPS that besides military aid, the United States has contracted more than 22 billion dollars in arms sales to Israel in 2008 alone, including a proposed deal for 75 F-35 Joint Strike Fighters, nine C-130J-30 military transport aircraft and four combat ships.

The two-week military onslaught has resulted in the deaths of nearly 800 Palestinians, including more than 300 civilians, mostly victims of U.S. weaponry. In comparison, the Israeli death toll is about seven soldiers and four civilians, primarily due to "friendly fire", or victims of rocket attacks by Hamas.

Mouin Rabbani, contributing editor at the Washington-based Middle East Report, says the intimacy of the U.S.-Israeli military relationship, and the frequency with which Israel launches wars, means that the Israeli military also performs the function of testing newly-developed weapons systems in actual warfare, which is of value to both Israel and the United States.

Tracing historical links, Rabbani said Israel replaced South Vietnam as the primary recipient of U.S. foreign military aid in the 1970s and has maintained that status ever since. He said that Israel is also permitted to participate in various U.S. weapons development programmes, meaning that in addition to weapons deliveries it benefits enormously from the transfer of military technologies.

Rabbani pointed out that given the level of U.S. military assistance to Israel, the deployment of these weapons in the current onslaught against the Gaza Strip, and U.S. political support for Israel during this crisis, Palestinians could be forgiven for insisting the U.S. shares direct responsibility.

Asked by Inter Press Service if there would a change in policy under an Obama administration, Rabbani said: "I don't see any indication that things are set to change once Obama takes office."

### **Tel Aviv Warns Gazans to Brace for Military Escalation**

The Israeli air force has dropped leaflets on the Gaza Strip warning residents that it plans to escalate its two-week-old offensive. The notice says Israel is about to begin a "new phase" of the military offensive, warning that it will "escalate" an operation that already has killed nearly 800 Palestinians.

The Israeli army said Saturday that it has dropped the fliers throughout Gaza. It says the notices are meant as a "general warning."

Israeli forces pounded dozens of targets and edged closer to Gaza City on Saturday while southern Israel came under renewed rocket fire after one of its quietest nights in the two-week offensive against Hamas. In the day's bloodiest incident, an Israeli tank shell landed outside a home in the northern Gaza town of Jebaliya, killing nine people as they sat outside in their garden.

Flames and smoke could be seen rising into the sky over Gaza City on Saturday. In Rafah, a woman was reportedly killed by a Israeli airstrike in the southern town.

Israel has come under international criticism for the rising number of civilians killed in the fighting. Paramedics said the nine casualties in Jebaliya were from the same family and included two children and two women.

Tel Aviv's attacks on Gaza have continued, despite a UN Security Council resolution calling for an immediate and durable cease-fire that would lead to the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza. Israel has dismissed the resolution passed Thursday as impractical.

Some of the heaviest fighting Saturday occurred on the strategic coastal road north of Gaza City, according to Palestinian security officials. Israeli forces moved to within about one mile of the city before pulling back slightly.

The brutal military offensive has caused extensive damage throughout Gaza, fueling fears of an impending humanitarian crisis. The United Nations estimates two-thirds of Gaza's 1.4 million people are without electricity, and half don't have running water.

The civilian death toll has drawn heavy criticism of Israel from international aid groups and triggered anger throughout the Islamic world and elsewhere. There have been daily protests in the Middle East and in Europe.

Earlier this week, more than 40,000 people demonstrated in Oslo, Norway, denouncing the attack on Gaza. According to Al Jazeera, other rallies were held in Venezuela, Tehran, Khartoum and Sarajevo. In Canada, more than 30 activists occupied the Israeli consulate in Montreal. The action came one day after a group of Jewish Canadian women occupied the Israeli consulate in Toronto.

Other protests are taking place in major U.S. cities, targetting Israeli consulates and government buildings. On Friday, a mass march and rally was held in Chicago at the Israeli consulate in that U.S. city.

Despite the freezing weather conditions, thousands marched to demand an end to Tel Aviv's war crimes. Among the demands: Stop the U.S./Israeli War on Gaza! End the Occupation Now! Free Palestine! Stop U.S. Aid to Israel!

### **Top UN Official Proposes Mission to Examine War Crimes in Gaza**

The top United Nations human rights official has proposed a mission to assess violations and possible war crimes committed by both Israel and Hamas in the Gaza conflict, and called for immediate implementation of a ceasefire.

High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay told a special session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva: "The situation is intolerable. The ceasefire called for by the UN Security Council must be implemented immediately. The violence must stop."

Ms. Pillay stressed unequivocally that international human rights law must apply in all circumstances and at all times, and strongly urged the parties to the conflict "to fulfil their obligations under international humanitarian law to collect, care for and evacuate the wounded and to protect and respect health workers, hospitals, and medical units and ambulances. Accountability must be ensured for violations of international law," she said, suggesting that the Human Rights Council should consider authorizing a mission to assess violations committed by both sides in the conflict in order to establish the relevant facts and ensure accountability.

The head of the UN Human Rights Council recalled that violations of international humanitarian law may constitute war crime for which individual criminal responsibility may be invoked. She also called on the parties to the conflict to allow the deployment of independent human rights monitors in both Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory to document any violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

The special session was called in response to a request by Egypt on behalf of the Arab Group and the African Group, Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

A joint statement by the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) said the terrible suffering of the civilian population in the Gaza Strip and the south of Israel demanded the Council's urgent attention.

The statement says that nothing less than ending the violence would be effective to improve the situation. In addition to those killed and wounded, thousands of Palestinians had been displaced, but there was no safe haven for them as had been shown by the incident at an UNRWA school, where Israeli shells killed 43 people and injured over 100, according to the statement.

PERIODICO 26

| Editor - in - Chief: Leonardo Mastrapa | Editor: Maryla García | Webmaster: Reynaldo López |