UN rights office calls for accountability for latest ‘horrific’ West Bank killing



© UNRWA/Kazem Abu Khalaf | The movement of Palestinians is restricted in the West Bank including through the use of checkpoints. (file)

By Daniel Johnson

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The perpetrators of a deadly rampage targeting a Palestinian village in the occupied West Bank must face justice to deter future attacks, the UN human rights office, OHCHR, insisted on Friday.

Echoing widespread condemnation internationally and within Israel of the attack reportedly by Israeli settlers on the village of Jit on Thursday which left a Palestinian man dead and about a dozen injured, OHCHR spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani described the incident as "horrific".

She noted that **the killing "was not an isolated attack"**, in reference to years of violence directed at Palestinian communities by Israeli settlers, maintaining that it was "the direct consequence" of Israel's policy of occupation.

Settler impunity

"We have been reporting for the past years about settlers attacking Palestinian communities in their land in the West Bank with impunity and this really is the crux of the matter, the impunity that the perpetrators of such actions have been enjoying," Ms. Shamdasani said.

According to latest OHCHR monitoring, **609 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank including East Jerusalem** since Hamas-led terror attacks on Israel on 7 October**.**

This number includes **146 children, eight women and at least four people with disabilities**.

"Clearly this needs to stop and key to this will be accountability for the perpetrators," the OHCHR spokesperson insisted.

"There have been attacks by settlers, by Israeli security forces as well against Palestinians in the West Bank and by and large we are seeing impunity", she continued.

"There have been very few investigations but even in those cases, most of the times these do not conclude with justice for the victims and for the perpetrators. **There are reports of Israeli security forces standing by as attacks take place. There are even reports of weapons being distributed to the settlers.** So, there is clearly a State responsibility in this regard.

Shrinking ‘humanitarian zone’ in Gaza

Meanwhile in Gaza, new evacuation orders from the Israeli military on Friday threatened to uproot communities once again in eastern Deir al Balah, northern Khan Younis, western Gaza City and other areas, humanitarians warned.

The Israeli Defense Forces announced the latest orders via airdropped fliers, mobile phone messages, ahead of action against Hamas activity in the areas slated for evacuation, in response to rocket attacks into Israel.

Responding to the development on Friday, the UN agency for Palestine refugees, UNRWA , said that the evacuation orders applied to areas “even inside the so-called ‘humanitarian zone’ where people have struggled to find space to shelters.

Gazans "**remain trapped in an endless nightmare of death and destruction** on a staggering scale", the UN agency said in an online post.

Relief beyond reach



As mediators prepared to meet for a second day in Doha to push for a ceasefire in Gaza and the release of all hostages abducted on 7 October, UN aid teams warned that Gazans continue to suffer debilitating aid shortages.

"Hostilities and recurrent evacuations orders are driving a seemingly endless cycle of displacement and making it increasingly difficult for people to access the humanitarian assistance they need to survive after 10 months of war," said the UN aid coordination office, OCHA , in an update on the emergency.

Echoing reports that the relatives of Gazans killed in the war have been unable to give them appropriate burial, OCHA noted that **grieving families "have no time to mourn, as they are themselves facing death, pain, hunger and thirst** on a daily basis. Each day has been described as being a struggle to simply survive."

A report from an inter-agency team that secured access to Khan Younis on Thursday reported how displaced families struggled to get by from day to day.

"They had to make their own shelter with whatever fabric, pieces of wood, carton they found. Children are attacked by rodents and insects at night due to poor shelter conditions."

The same assessment team noted that in addition to the difficulty of reaching markets along with the lack of food and high prices, families said that owing to the absence of cleaning and hygiene products, "they are getting skin infections, particularly affecting their children".

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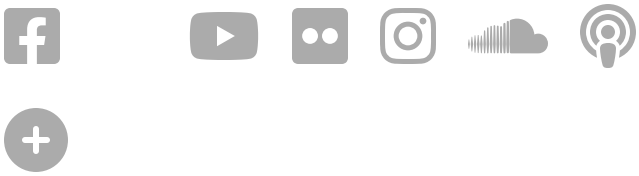
As the number of Palestinians killed in Gaza passes the dark milestone of 40,000, UN rights chief Volker Türk called on Thursday for an end to the killing “once and for all” and the release of all hostages while negotiators prepared to meet in Qatar to renew efforts to halt the conflict and avert a wider war.

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