NEWS RELEASE

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER
Occupied Palestinian Territory

UN Human Rights Office in Occupied Palestinian Territory

Ramallah

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UN Human Rights Office in Occupied Palestinian Territory warns Israeli strikes are placing civilians at serious risk in Deir Al Balah, Middle Gaza

The UN Human Rights Office in Occupied Palestinian Territory is deeply concerned that Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) have placed civilian lives at serious risk by ordering residents from various parts of Middle Gaza to relocate to Deir Al Balah – while continuing to conduct airstrikes on the city.

On 28 and 31 December 2023, and again on 6 and 8 January 2024, the Israeli Defence Forces urged residents of most populated areas of Middle Gaza, such as Al Bureij and Al Nuseirat, to evacuate to known shelters in Deir Al Balah. However, Israeli strikes and ground battles in those areas were ongoing, while strikes on Deir Al Balah itself intensified. The UN Human Rights Office has received reports that during the last ten days, four individual strikes in Deir Al Balah killed more than 40 Palestinians. It is clear – as the UN has repeatedly stressed – that there is no safe place in Gaza.

The operations of Al Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir Al Balah, the only functioning hospital in Middle Gaza, have also been severely restricted by Israeli strikes and sniper shootings. The hospital was reportedly sheltering thousands of displaced persons in Deir al Balah. The severity of the situation has led many medical staff to take the difficult decision to evacuate the hospital, despite the high need for medical care resulting from the continuing strikes. Today, 10 January, IDF strikes reportedly hit a residential building in front of the hospital, as well as an ambulance vehicle belonging to the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS). The strikes reportedly killed 13 Palestinians. PRCS has stated that four among the fatalities were ambulance crew members.

Hospitals enjoy special protection under international humanitarian law because of their life-saving function for the wounded and sick – they must be respected and protected.

Israel Defense Forces must take immediate measures to protect civilians in line with its obligations under international law. Forcing the relocation of civilians in no way absolves the IDF from its obligations under IHL to protect civilians in carrying out military operations.

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