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Israel and the Occupied Territories: Civilians' lives must be respected

Amnesty International condemned indiscriminate killings of civilians following four days of clashes in Israel and the Occupied Territories which have left at least 35 Palestinian civilians dead and hundreds of others injured.

"The dead civilians, among them young children, include those uninvolved in the conflict and seeking safety," the human rights organization said, "The loss of civilian life is devastating and this is compounded by the fact that many appear to have been killed or injured as a result of the use of excessive or indiscriminate force."

"Israeli security forces appear to have used indiscriminate lethal force on many occasions when their lives were not in danger," Amnesty International said, "We have been saying for years that Israel is killing civilians unlawfully by firing at them during demonstrations and riots. International standards clearly state that governments should develop as broad as possible a range of non-lethal incapacitating weapons and that firearms are a last resort."

On 29 September, hundreds of Israeli police and border guards entered the Aqsa Mosque compound after Friday prayers, apparently in response to stone-throwing by Palestinians. Israeli security forces opened fire on civilians indiscriminately, resulting in the death of at least five Palestinians and the injury of dozens of others.

Clashes between Israeli security forces and Palestinian demonstrators broke out all over the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as well as in Israel since Friday. There have also been armed confrontations between the Israeli and Palestinian security forces. The Israeli army has used rubber-coated metal bullets and admitted using live ammunition on some occasions. Israeli helicopter gunships apparently killed a 10-year-old boy on the roof of a house in Nablus on 1 October, and shot at buildings in Gaza.

"This excessive and indiscriminate use of force is in contravention of international human rights standards which state that police and security forces may only use firearms in extreme circumstances, when life is in danger and other means are ineffective. These standards apply in all situations, including in times of emergency." Amnesty International said.

"Civilian deaths will continue unless the Israeli authorities take this message to heart."

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