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Israel/Occupied Territories: Deliberate attacks a war crime

Deliberate attacks by Israeli forces against civilian property and infrastructure in the Gaza Strip violate international humanitarian law and constitute war crimes, Amnesty International said today.

"Israel must now take urgent measures to remedy the long-term damage it has caused and immediately restore the supply -- at its own cost -- of electricity and water to the Palestinian population in the affected areas," urged the organization. "As the occupying power, Israel is bound under international law to protect and safeguard the basic human rights of the Palestinian population."

The deliberate destruction of the Gaza Strip's only electricity power station, water networks, bridges, roads and other infrastructure is a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention and has major and long-term humanitarian consequences for the 1.5 million inhabitants of the Gaza Strip.

Almost half of Gaza's inhabitants are now without electricity and water supplies have also been cut in several areas both by the lack of electricity, necessary to operate the water pumps used to extract and deliver water, and by the destruction of water mains as a result of the bombings of bridges and roads.

The extensive damage caused by Israeli artillery and air strikes against these facilities in recent days is estimated at several millions of US dollars and will require months of work to repair. Unless alternative emergency measures are promptly put in place to restore electricity and water supply the consequences could be dire for the health of the Palestinian population.

In a statement the Israeli army said that it had: "...*carried out an aerial attack on an electricity transformer station south of Gaza city...*" and that "*The IDF will continue to employ all means at its disposal against Palestinian terrorist infrastructure in the Gaza Strip in order to ensure the quick and safe return home of Corporal Gilad Shalit.*"

The destruction by Israeli forces of bridges and roads is slowing down, but not preventing movement between different areas of the Gaza Strip. It is likely to cause severe restrictions on movement during the rainy season in a few months time. At present, it causes disruption to Palestinians civilians, who have to take long detours to reach their workplace, but it does not prevent the movements of armed groups – Israel's stated objective.

As the tension between Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) and armed groups continues to mount, there is growing concern for the safety of the civilian population. High numbers of Palestinian bystanders, including women and children, have been killed and injured by Israeli artillery shelling and air strikes in

recent weeks and months. This situation looks set to worsen in light of the end of the unilateral cease-fire which the armed wing of Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups had been observing since last year.

"The hostage-taking of Corporal Gilad Shalit, and the killing of Eliyahu Asheri, the 18 year old settler, by Palestinian armed groups violate fundamental principles of international law. Corporal Gilad Shalit should be released immediately and unharmed."

"Both sides to this current stand-off should refrain from taking actions which violate international law and should take steps to provide redress for the abuses they have committed. The international community, also has an obligation under the Geneva Conventions, to act," said Amnesty International.

Notes to Editors

According to the Fourth Geneva Convention, "collective penalties and likewise all measures of intimidation or of terrorism are prohibited" (article 33) as is the destruction of private or public property, "except where such destruction is rendered absolutely necessar by military operations" (Article 53). The Convention requires all states party to it to search for and ensure the prosecution of perpetrators of the war crime of "causing extensive destrucdtion ... not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly". "Intentionally directing attacks against civilian objects" is also a war crime under Article 8 (b) (ii) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

For further information please see: <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMDE150582006>.
and <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGMDE150602006>.

Public Document

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