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Israel/Occupied Territories: An end to closures and the introduction of international human rights observers are a vital necessity

Amnesty International today renewed its call for international observers, an end to closures and respect for international humanitarian law in the Israeli Occupied Territories. The call follows a 10-day visit to Israel and the Occupied Territories in September by Amnesty International delegates and recent killings of Palestinians and an Israeli woman settler.

The closures represent the punishment of all Palestinians in the Occupied Territories in the name of security, commented the delegates.

Basic foodstuffs and water are not getting through and Palestinians have died as access to hospitals becomes increasingly difficult," said delegates. "The closures are ineffective in stopping killers who can pass on foot. They are simply increasing poverty and despair and creating a population which sees no future and no possibility for a better life.

During the visit, delegates drove along almost-deserted roads where every turning to a Palestinian village was blocked by earth or concrete blocks. They travelled in Palestinian taxis which made tortuous detours of several kilometres to avoid a kilometre of road banned to Palestinians.

In relation to killings since the 18 September cease-fire, delegates stressed that the killing of civilians, Palestinians or Israelis, was absolutely prohibited by international law.

Amnesty International delegates witnessed reckless Israeli shooting which was not in response to any Palestinian attacks. On 16 September the Israeli army shot in the direction of delegates from Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch as they were examining the sites of recently destroyed houses 100 metres from the border with Egypt. There was no fire from Palestinian areas at the time.

On the following day, 17 September, near Erez checkpoint, Israeli soldiers fired throughout the day in the direction of taxis collecting Palestinians and those crossing the border with Israel. Amnesty International delegates were among those caught up in the firing. Again, there appeared to have been no prior Palestinian fire.

"It is imperative that international observers with a human rights monitoring component be introduced into the Occupied Territories in order to ensure that international humanitarian law is respected and every killing is investigated," Amnesty International said.

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