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Israel/Occupied Territories: The spiral of revenge must stop immediately

After a series of suicide bombings against Israeli civilians and two days of Israeli air attacks on Palestinian towns in Gaza and the West Bank, Amnesty International called today for an end to the killings of civilians in Israel and the Occupied Territories.

In response to horrific suicide bombings by Hamas, Israel has bombed Palestinian towns, targeting the Palestinian security services. Two Palestinians were killed and scores were injured in air attacks. Three other Palestinians were also reportedly killed since Monday including as a result of Israeli tank shelling. The Israeli authorities have also closed every Palestinian town and village, in effect cutting off the population from the outside world.

"A policy of reprisals against the entire population for attacks by armed groups violates international human rights and humanitarian law standards", said Amnesty International.

Today, representatives of the countries in the world that have ratified the Geneva Conventions are meeting in Geneva to reaffirm the principles of the Fourth Geneva Convention which binds the 189 state parties to respect and ensure respect for its provisions, including protecting the lives, dignity and property of civilians in occupied territory.

Israel -- which, like the United States, will not attend today's meeting focussing on the Occupied Territories -- has ratified the Geneva Conventions and is bound by their provisions.

"The international community must not stand by while the cycle of abuses continues to escalate," Amnesty International said. "International observers with a strong, transparent and public mandate to monitor the respect of international humanitarian law and human rights should be sent to the Occupied Territories immediately," the organization added.

Amnesty International insisted that the appropriate response to human rights abuses or violations of international humanitarian law, such as the suicide bombings, should be to bring to justice anyone reasonably suspected of having committed or ordered them, in proceedings which meet international fair trial standards.

"Bombing police stations and closing roads in reprisal prevents the police and courts from functioning. It undermines the Palestinian Authority's ability to carry out its duty to bring to justice any perpetrators of human rights abuses or violations under its jurisdiction," commented Amnesty International.

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