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## **Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territories: Killings of civilians must cease**

Israeli military air strikes and artillery attacks on the Gaza Strip are being carried out with reckless disregard for civilian life, Amnesty International said today.

"Israeli military attacks over the past few days have killed more than 75 Palestinians in Gaza, including at least 10 children, and other unarmed civilian bystanders not involved in the confrontations" said Malcolm Smart, director of Amnesty International's Middle East and North Africa Programme. "Israel has a legal obligation to protect the civilian population of Gaza. Such attacks are disproportionate and go beyond lawful measures which Israeli forces may take in response to rocket attacks by Palestinian armed groups."

Amnesty International called again on Palestinian armed groups to immediately cease firing rockets at towns and villages in southern Israel.

"It is high time that the leaders of Hamas and the Palestinian Authority (PA) took effective steps to prevent and punish attacks on civilians in Israel, but their failure to do so does not make it legitimate for the Israeli authorities to launch reckless air and artillery strikes which wreak such death and destruction among Palestinian civilians," said Malcolm Smart.

In the past two months alone Israeli forces have killed close to 200 Palestinians in Gaza, around one third of whom were unarmed civilian bystanders. They included some 15 children. Hundreds of other civilians have been injured, many maimed for life.

In the same period, one Israeli civilian was killed and several were injured by rockets fired by Palestinian armed groups from Gaza into Sderot and other areas in southern Israel.

"We condemn all attacks on civilians, but unlawful attacks by one side cannot justify violations by the other. Israel's attacks this week display a degree of disproportion and recklessness which has so often characterized Israeli military attacks in the Occupied Palestinian Territories in recent years," said Malcolm Smart.

"At the same time, the Palestinian armed groups who launch frequent rocket attacks from Gaza into nearby Israeli towns not only show a callous disregard for the lives of Israeli civilians but also expose the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip to the danger of Israeli attacks."

This latest cycle of killings and destruction comes at a time when the 1.5 million inhabitants of Gaza are confronting a humanitarian crisis as a result of the increasingly stringent blockade imposed by Israel on Gaza. Hospitals and medical facilities, already struggling to cope with shortages of electricity, fuel, equipment and spare parts due to the Israeli blockade, are struggling to cope with the new influx of casualties

caused by Israeli attacks in the last few days. With Gaza's borders sealed, many patients in dire need of medical care which is not available in Gaza cannot be transferred to hospitals abroad and risk losing their lives.

All unlawful attacks must stop - Israeli forces must put an immediate end to disproportionate attacks and collective punishment in Gaza and Palestinian armed groups must immediately stop the barrage of rockets into southern Israel.