

AI Index: PRE 01/076/2009
23 February 2009

Israel/Occupied Palestinian Territories: Evidence of misuse of US-weapons reinforces need for arms embargo

Both Israel and Hamas used weapons supplied from abroad to carry out attacks on civilians, Amnesty International said today as it released fresh evidence on the munitions used during the three-week conflict in Gaza and southern Israel and called on the UN to impose a comprehensive arms embargo.

“Israeli forces used white phosphorus and other weapons supplied by the USA to carry out serious violations of international humanitarian law, including war crimes. Their attacks resulted in the death of hundreds of children and other civilians and massive destruction of homes and infrastructure,” said Donatella Rovera who headed Amnesty International’s fact-finding mission to southern Israel and Gaza. “At the same time, Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups fired hundreds of rockets that had been smuggled in or made of components from abroad at civilian areas in Israel. Though far less lethal than the weaponry used by Israel, such rocket firing also constitutes a war crime and caused several civilian deaths.”

Even before the three-week conflict, those who armed the two sides will have been aware of the pattern of repeated misuse of weapons by the parties. They must take some responsibility for the violations perpetrated with the weapons they have supplied and should immediately cease further transfers.

“As the major supplier of weapons to Israel, the USA has a particular obligation to stop any supply that contributes to gross violations of the laws of war and of human rights. The Obama Administration should immediately suspend US military aid to Israel,” said Malcolm Smart, Director for the Middle East.

For many years the USA has been the major supplier of conventional arms to Israel. Under a 10-year agreement to 2017, the USA is due to provide \$30 billion in military aid to Israel, a 25 percent increase compared to the period preceding the Bush administration.

“To a large extent, Israel’s military offensive in Gaza was carried out with weapons, munitions and military equipment supplied by the USA and paid for with US taxpayers’ money,” said Malcolm Smart.

In Gaza, as the fighting ended Amnesty International researchers found fragments and components from munitions used by the Israeli Army - including many that are US-made - littering school playgrounds, in hospitals and in people’s homes. They included artillery and tank shells, mortar fins and remnants from Hellfire and other airborne missiles and large F-16 delivered bombs, as well as still smouldering highly incendiary white phosphorus remains.

They also found remnants of a new type of missile, seemingly launched from unmanned drones, which explodes large numbers of tiny sharp-edged metal cubes, each between 2mm and 4mm square in size. These lethal purpose-made shrapnel had penetrated thick metal doors and were embedded deep in concrete walls,

and are clearly designed to maximize injury.

In southern Israel, Amnesty International also saw the remains of “Qassam”, Grad, and other indiscriminate rockets fired by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups against civilian areas. These unsophisticated weapons are either smuggled into Gaza clandestinely or constructed there from components secretly brought in from abroad. They cannot be aimed accurately and stand no comparison with the weaponry deployed by Israel but they have caused several deaths of Israeli civilians, injured others and damage to civilian property.

“We urge the UN Security Council to impose an immediate and comprehensive arms embargo on Israel, Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups until effective mechanisms are found to ensure that munitions and other military equipment are not used to commit serious violations of international law,” said Malcolm Smart. “In addition all states should suspend all transfers of military equipment, assistance and munitions to Israel, Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups until there is no longer a substantial risk of human rights violations. There must be no return to business as usual, with the predictably devastating consequences for civilians in Gaza and Israel.”