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Today's UN vote adopting key recommendations of the Goldstone report on the conflict in Gaza and southern Israel earlier this year is vitally important for ensuring that those, on both sides, who committed war crimes and other violations of international law will now be held to account, said Amnesty International.

"Both Israel and Hamas in Gaza have been served due notice, in this defining General Assembly resolution, that they must immediately conduct credible, independent investigations into the alleged grave violations of human rights and humanitarian law committed during the conflict, said Yvonne Terlingen, Head of Amnesty International's Office at the UN today.

"The clock is now running and we urge both parties to act without further delay. The UN has spoken up today for accountability and for an end to the cycle of impunity that has for so long obstructed the search for peace and justice between Israelis and Palestinians."

The UN General Assembly resolution, based on the findings of the UN Fact Finding Mission led by Justice Goldstone, which concluded that both Israeli and Palestinian forces committed war crimes and possibly crimes against humanity, was adopted by a large majority: 114 states voted in favour, 18 voted against and 44 abstained. The USA and 7 European Union (EU) states voted against the resolution while Russia abstained.

"We deeply regret that the USA and the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Slovakia voted against the resolution and failed to support the need for accountability, justice and human rights that are so vital for victims of abuses in this conflict" said Terlingen.

The resolution calls on the UN Secretary-General to transmit Judge Goldstone's report to the Security Council, which has powers to refer the situation in Gaza to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court if Israel and Hamas prove unable or unwilling to conduct independent investigations that meet international standards. It also calls on the UN Secretary-General to present a progress report to the General Assembly in three months' time.

"We urge the UN Secretary-General to now appoint independent experts in human rights and international humanitarian law to assess whether any investigations that are conducted by Israel and Hamas meet the required international standard", said Terlingen.

The findings of the Goldstone report echo those of an Amnesty International team that investigated alleged violations in Gaza and southern Israel during and in the immediate aftermath of the conflict, in which hundreds of Palestinian civilians, including some 300 children, and three Israeli civilians were killed.

"Almost one year on, those who suffered war crimes and other gross violations of their rights, are still waiting for justice", said Amnesty International. "It is our fervent hope that today's UN General Assembly resolution will act as a catalyst to make justice and reparation a reality for the victims on both sides."

Background

Those voting against the resolution were: Australia, Canada, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, the Netherlands, Palau, Panama, Poland, Slovakia, Macedonia, Ukraine and the USA.

Those abstaining were: Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroun, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Ethiopia, Fiji, France, Finland, Georgia, Greece, Iceland, Japan, Kenya, Latvia, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Monaco, Montenegro, New Zealand, Norway, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Samoa, San Marino, Spain, Swaziland, Sweden, Tonga, Uganda, United Kingdom, and Uruguay.

All other countries voted in favour of the resolution - including EU member states Cyprus, Ireland, Malta, Portugal and Slovenia - except States that were absent. Switzerland, a depositary of the Fourth Geneva Conventions mentioned in the resolution, also voted in favour.

Absent were Bhutan, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Honduras, Kiribati, Madagascar, Sao Tome Principe, Seychelles, Togo, Turkmenistan, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.