

One crime does not justify another. The attack against civilians in Gaza must end

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Gaza has been under Israeli aerial bombardment for 12 days now, with hardly any breaks. So far, Israeli planes have dropped thousands of tons of explosives on Gaza's residents.

This is not the first time Israel has bombed the Gaza Strip in this way. This illegal and immoral policy was employed in previous rounds of fighting, during which thousands were killed, including entire families, thousands more were injured, and tens of thousands were left homeless. This time, however, Israel has taken its policy to new extremes, announcing in advance it was out for revenge on Hamas. Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has promised that sites where Hamas makes preparations or hides will be turned to rubble and told Gaza residents: "Get out now. We will be everywhere and with all our might," while the IDF Spokesperson stressed: "The emphasis is on damage, not accuracy."

The results are horrifying. There is nowhere to hide in Gaza, and local residents have no way to protect themselves. There are no bomb shelters, no safe rooms, no safe spaces. There are no alarms that warn them to escape. All they can do is wait in fear and terror and hope they won't get hit. Hundreds of thousands have already left their homes in a desperate attempt to protect themselves and their families, and still, nowhere in Gaza is safe. People have been killed while fleeing. They have been killed in the places they fled to, where they have found refuge. More than 3,000 people have been killed so far, including dozens of families that have been wiped off the face of the planet, all at once, inside their homes.

The death toll keeps rising by the day, and many are buried under the rubble with no hope of being rescued, due to the lack of suitable equipment, Israel's incessant bombing and the sheer number of people trapped. Bodies pile up faster than they can be buried. Some have been moved to refrigerator trucks. Others have been buried in mass graves.

Those still alive are facing an unfathomable reality. Israel has ordered more than a million people to evacuate their homes, under constant bombing and in the middle of a war, the implication clearly being that those who do not evacuate are putting their own lives at risk. The evacuation order applied to hospitals as well, but with patients and wounded in their care and families sheltering on their premises, they could not and, therefore, refused to comply.

Left with no alternative, hundreds of thousands did obey and are now displaced. Some of them remain in the streets. Others have found shelter in other people's homes or inside schools. Refugee sites are overcrowded, and living conditions in them are untenable. There are not enough blankets and clothes for everyone, and proper sanitation and hygiene are impossible to maintain, raising grave concerns over disease outbreaks.

The closure of Gaza's crossings has created a shortage of food, diesel and other fuels, medicines and basic medical equipment. Food lines are getting longer, as desperate families try to purchase what

little food is left. Israel has cut off the power it sells the Gaza Strip, and, unable to obtain fuel due to Israel's blockage, the local power plant has also stopped working. Without power, water and sewage systems have also been shut down, leaving residents without access to water. In these conditions, hospitals, already collapsing as they are inundated with the wounded, are barely able to function.

Gaza's roughly two million residents are living a terrifying nightmare: relentless air strikes against which there is no defense; a total collapse of infrastructure; entire residential neighborhoods wiped out; hundreds of thousands displaced, many of whom no longer have homes to return to; no power, water, food or medicine. The Gaza Strip is closed on all sides, and there is nowhere to run. None of this is an aberration or a mistake. The horrifying reality in the Gaza Strip is a direct result of a stated Israeli policy.

Targeting civilians is prohibited, no matter the circumstances, and no objective in the world can justify it: not the shocking crimes committed by Hamas in Israeli communities near the Gaza border, not an all-out war on terror, not the desire to replace the Hamas regime in the Gaza Strip. That is also why there is absolutely no justification for the war crimes Israel has been committing in the Gaza Strip for the past 12 days.

Israel makes the claim that, unlike Hamas, it does not deliberately target civilians. It has made this claim in previous rounds of fighting, too. However, setting aside the fact that this time around, top officials openly said Israel was going to bomb Gaza indiscriminately, the claim was baseless in previous rounds as well. By now, Israel has to know - the policy of air strikes, as implemented in one of the world's most densely populated areas, where about two million people are besieged, cannot but result in thousands of deaths and massive destruction. This is what happened in previous rounds of fighting Israel has engaged in in the Gaza Strip, and this is what is happening now. "We didn't know" is an argument that crumbles in the face of reality.

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P.S.

• B'Tselem. 19 October 2023:

https://www.btselem.org/gaza_strip/20231019_one_crime_does_not_justify_another_he_attack_against_civilians_in_gaza_must_end

• Israel's regime of apartheid and occupation is inextricably bound up in human rights violations. B'Tselem strives to end this regime, as that is the only way forward to a future in which human rights, democracy, liberty and equality are ensured to all people, both Palestinian and Israeli, living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.