



Press release

## **Première Urgence Internationale condemns the excessive use of force against demonstrators in the Gaza Strip**

*103 Palestinians, including 12 children, have been killed so far by Israeli forces in Gaza in occasion of the 'Great March of Return' protests that started on 30 March. Gazans have been protesting to claim their right to return – over 70% of the population is registered as refugees, and against the blockade, that is suffocating their right to life, work and access basic services such as health and education since 11 years. The protests have been planned to continue until 15 May, as this date marks the 70 years of Nakba, when around 750,000 Palestinians were forced to leave their home.*

The demonstrations that took place on Monday 14 May, on the same day of the ceremony to celebrate the US embassy move from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, saw the highest number of casualties so far, with 61 Palestinians killed and over 2,700 injured, according to the Ministry of Health in Gaza. Up to this date, 12,271 have been injured, including 3,598 by live ammunition<sup>1</sup>. At least 21 Palestinians went through limb amputation, due to the near impossibility of obtaining a medical referral for surgery outside of the Gaza Strip. On 14 May the first Israeli casualty was also reported, as a soldier was lightly wounded.

Not only medical personnel are struggling to cope with the extremely high number of wounded and the poor equipment and lack of drugs, but they have also been targeted by the Israeli Forces' violent response to the demonstrations. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 211 attacks against health workers have been recorded and 25 ambulances were damaged. Besides access to health services, also freedom of the press has seriously been endangered, as two journalists died of their wounds after being shot while working and wearing a press vest, and at least 7 were injured by live fire on 14 May.

Première Urgence Internationale also calls on safe access to land and livelihoods in the area along the border fence with Israel, the so called Access Restricted Area, where the demonstrations and shootings on civilians have been taken place but where also 35% of Gaza's agricultural lands resides. A first assessment conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture last week shows that the crops of around 119 farmers were affected by the demonstrations and Israeli retaliation, causing a loss of approximately 127,000 USD. « Excessive use of force deployed by Israeli Forces have once again affected Gazans' access to their livelihoods, as a farmer was killed by live fire on the first day of the protests while working in his field, and another one

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/fifty-five-palestinians-killed-and-thousands-injured-gaza>

injured », commented Rossella Urru, Première Urgence Internationale's Head of Mission in the occupied Palestinian territory. « Access to livelihoods and basic services should be guaranteed at any time independently of the ongoing political and security crisis ».

Première Urgence Internationale joins AIDA, a network of a network of more than 80 INGOs operating in the occupied Palestinian territory, in condemning the excessive use of force. « According to international law, lethal fire may only be used in circumstances where threat to life is imminent. Israeli forces are obliged to exercise restraint and refrain from excessive use of force, and respect Palestinians' right to life, health and freedom of assembly. Targeting medical personnel is a breach of International Humanitarian Law and is considered a War Crime under the Rome Statute. Preventing injured persons from accessing treatment is a violation of their right to health, and amounts to collective punishment. AIDA calls on third states to condemn Israel's unlawful killings and to step up their pressure on Israel to immediately halt its practice of using live ammunition against unarmed demonstrators ».

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**Première Urgence Internationale** is a Non-Governmental humanitarian agency operating in the occupied Palestinian territory since 2002 and implementing humanitarian protection programmes in Gaza. Première Urgence Internationale has been constantly supporting fundamental rights of population in accordance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law (IHRL). More information on [www.premiere-urgence.org](http://www.premiere-urgence.org).