



The Imperative to Cease Hostilities and Respect Humanitarian Space in Gaza

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The Israeli military has been attacking one of the most densely populated areas in the world, the Gaza Strip, unrelentingly since the evening of May 10. The death toll is now over 219 Palestinians including 63 children and 35 women. Many Palestinians in Gaza, including aid workers, have reported that this is the most intense attack from Israel they have ever experienced, far surpassing the intensity of the 50 days war in 2014. Rockets fired from Gaza by Palestinian armed groups have indiscriminately targeted Israeli civilians, killing 12 Israelis, including two children.

Hostilities between Israeli armed forces and Palestinian armed groups erupted following a series of trigger events and longer term pressure that has been building for some time: Israel's attacks on, and provocation of peaceful worshipers in Al-Aqsa Mosque during the Holy Month of Ramadan; the looming forcible transfer of Palestinians in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah, 14 years of an aberrant siege of Gaza, and 53 years of military occupation. The violence and hostilities ripping across the region are in part a devastating result of decades of oppression and injustice against the Palestinian people. The prolonged occupation continues to deny Palestinians their inalienable right to self-determination, political independence and territorial integrity.

The Israeli air strikes have forced civilians in Gaza to flee their homes in search of safer places. According to UNRWA, there are now 75,000 internally displaced persons in Gaza, including 47,000 seeking protection in 58 UNRWA schools across Gaza. This is all taking place within the COVID-19 pandemic in which Gaza is facing an already fragile health sector and alarming lack of essential medicine and basic medical equipment.

The NGO community has also been directly impacted as air strikes have damaged offices and project sites, destroyed assets, and traumatized staff. In some cases NGO offices have been directly targeted without warning. Humanitarian staff have lost loved ones and families have been forced to split up, flee targeted residential neighborhoods, and take shelter with extended family and friends.

While there is no legal controversy about the prohibition breached by deliberate or indiscriminate rocket attacks launched from Gaza against civilians in Israel, it does not absolve Israel from observing distinction, proportionality, and precaution in its attacks. Importantly, Israel should refrain from launching an attack that is expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, and damage to civilian objects which would be excessive to a direct and concrete military advantage. We have witnessed civilians and civilian objects attacked by Israel, including those subject to special protection; concerns are mounting as to the necessity of attacks, their proportionality, and whether all feasible precautions in the choice of means and methods of attack are observed. Calls made by AIDA and its members for humanitarian access,

de-confliction, and humanitarian pauses should be viewed as an expression of humanitarian exigency that the parties cannot arbitrarily, capriciously, or unlawfully reject.

The Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA) condemns the killing of Palestinian and Israeli civilians and calls for an immediate ceasefire and the opening of humanitarian space and action. It is imperative that the international community calls on Israel and Palestinian armed groups to take immediate steps to cease hostilities in Gaza, excessive use of force in the West Bank, destruction of property and forcible transfer, and ensure respect for IHL. Third states must not only remind Israel and Palestinian armed groups of their obligation to respect the rules of IHL, but also ensure they act accordingly or face meaningful consequences and lawful countermeasures.

AIDA calls on all armed parties to immediately cease hostilities and allow for Humanitarian operations to commence. Until a ceasefire is reached, **AIDA calls on Israel for the immediate opening of Kerem Shalom crossing for the entry of fuel and emergency humanitarian relief items as well as the creation of Humanitarian Corridors for the safe delivery of assistance inside Gaza.** AIDA also calls on Israel to open Erez crossing to allow the evacuation of non-essential international staff and the entry of critical international staff to coordinate and deliver humanitarian assistance.