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Occupied Palestinian Territories - Israel: HI calls on immediate ceasefire

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ARMED VIOLENCE REDUCTION | EMERGENCY | PALESTINE | PUBLISHED ON NOVEMBER 9TH 2023



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HI has released on 6 November 2023 a new report, “Impact of explosive weapons in Gaza”, which reiterates the need for an immediate ceasefire due to the dramatic impact of armed violence on civilians since the start of hostilities in the Gaza Strip and Israel.

The use of explosive weapons with immense destructive force is killing and injuring thousands of civilians and creating a humanitarian crisis of significant proportions. The overwhelming impact of weapons employed is causing severe damage to crucial civilian infrastructure, resulting in the unavailability of essential services for civilians. Victims and survivors in this conflict already face long-term challenges, psychological harm, and social and economic hardship - HI calls on the parties to the conflict to end the use of explosive weapons in populated areas and to immediately facilitate humanitarian access.

[Download HI's report “Impact of explosive weapons in Gaza” \(PDF file\)](#)

A devastating humanitarian situation

The consequences of armed violence are enormous, not only in terms of immediate deaths, but also in terms of a significant number of wounded and a deep and lasting humanitarian crisis.

Since October 7th, more than 10,300 Palestinians have been killed – including at least 3,900 children – and more than 25,000 have been injured in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health*. There are around 2,200 persons reported missing in Gaza – including 1,270 children – most are trapped under the rubble. According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, 73% of fatalities are children, women, and the elderly.

Since the start of the hostilities, 258 school buildings have sustained damage, representing more than 51% of all schools in the Gaza Strip. Approximately 1.5 million individuals in Gaza are internally displaced, seeking refuge either in UNRWA schools, hospitals, churches, or with host families.

This data reveals the severe impact of armed violence. Both air-launched and ground-launched explosive weapons are being used extensively against civilians in Gaza, resulting in a humanitarian catastrophe. The consequences are devastating, directly killing and injuring civilians, destroying infrastructure including homes, schools, hospitals and forcing entire communities to flee their homes.



In parallel, since October 7th, approximately 1,400 Israelis have been killed and 5,400 Israelis have been injured by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups, the vast majority of them on the first day of the conflict. Armed violence has also increased in the West Bank, as at least 150 Palestinians have been killed and 2,300 injured by Israeli forces or settlers since October 7th**

A systematic and indiscriminate impact on civilians

Gaza is one of the most densely populated areas in the world. The use of explosive weapons has caused severe destruction of vital civilian infrastructure, including water and sanitation, telecommunications, electricity, housing, schools, and hospitals. In addition to the immediate need for emergency medical care and rehabilitation, affected communities face longer-term challenges in accessing psychological support. The bombing of populated areas kills and seriously injures civilians who are not involved in the conflict, causing widespread long-term suffering.

Moreover, war-induced displacement disrupts stable living conditions, making this population particularly vulnerable. Forced displacement has a negative impact on the well-being of civilians, both immediately and in the long term, causing severe psychological distress in children, exacerbating existing mental health problems and potentially causing new ones. Persons with disabilities face additional barriers in such environments, with limited accessibility and shelter exacerbating their already difficult circumstances.

“In addition to the armed violence, we are very concerned about the increase in health crises. The overcrowded conditions in shelters continue to expose IDPs to serious health and protection risks and have a significant impact on their psychological well-being. Damage to water and sanitation infrastructure has added to public health concerns. Cases of acute respiratory infections, diarrhea and chickenpox have already been reported among those seeking refuge in UNRWA shelters,” explains Noor BIMBASHI, Advocacy Officer – HI Program Palestine.

The difficulties faced in assisting people injured in this conflict are due to a number of factors, but it is very important to highlight the environment in which explosive weapons are used and the complex domino effects that these weapons create when used in populated areas. In towns, cities and other areas populated by civilians, explosive weapons damage or destroy vital civilian infrastructure such as hospitals and other health facilities, reducing access to emergency medical care for the casualty and the wider conflict-affected population.

HI interventions in Gaza

HI has been working in Palestine since 1996 and is responding to the emergency. Since 7 October, HI staff and volunteers have reached 90 out of 91 shelters in the south, carried out victim assessments for some 4,222 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and provided 1,106 people with assistive devices, wound dressings and non-food items.

In addition, HI organised more than 20 recreational activities for some 18,000 IDPs – particularly children – and 74 group Explosive Ordnance Risk Education sessions, reaching 4,305 children and their caregivers in the shelters. HI also sent preventive messages about the threat posed by the use of explosive weapons in open conflict and urban settings, reaching 500,000 people via SMS.

HI is calling on all parties to the conflict to stop the use of explosive weapons in densely populated areas such as Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory. HI is also supporting #CeasefireNow, an open call for an immediate ceasefire in the Gaza Strip and Israel to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe and further loss of innocent lives and ensure humanitarian aid can be delivered rapidly and safely.

Armed Violence Reduction at HI

HI's comprehensive approach to Armed Violence Reduction includes four main technical expertise: Explosive Ordnance Disposal, Risk Education, Victim Assistance, and Conflict Transformation. HI is a unique actor in the humanitarian mine action sector because of its dual expertise in mine action and inclusion. Our comprehensive approach to AVR means we do not only survey and clear contaminated land, provide Conflict Preparedness & Protection (CPP), and Risk Education on the threat posed by Explosive Ordnance (EORE), but we also support victims to promote universal access to services (health, rehabilitation, education, economic inclusion etc.) and utilize the space created to discuss instruments of violence to transform conflicts at the community level.

* Daily report, Ministry of Health Palestine, published on November 7th, 2023.

** Flash update available at <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/hostilities-gaza-strip-and-israel-flash-update-31>

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