

Human rights group accuses Israel of apparent war crimes in Gaza assault



Palestinians in Gaza sit in the ruins of a house that destroyed in Israeli air raids [File: Mohammed Salem/Reuters]

New York, July 27 (RHC)-- Human Rights Watch has accused the Israeli military of carrying out attacks that “apparently amount to war crimes” during an 11-day offensive on the Gaza Strip that began on May 10.

The international human rights organisation issued its conclusions on Tuesday after investigating three Israeli air raids that it said killed 62 Palestinian civilians. It concluded that “there were no evident military targets in the vicinity” of the attacks.

The report also accused Palestinian armed groups of apparent war crimes by launching more than 4,000 unguided rockets and mortars at Israeli population centres. Such attacks, it said, violate “the prohibition against deliberate or indiscriminate attacks against civilians.”

The report focused on Israeli actions during the fighting, and the group said it would issue a separate report on the actions of Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups in August. “Israeli forces carried out attacks in Gaza in May that devastated entire families without any apparent military target nearby,” said Gerry Simpson, associated crisis and conflict director at HRW on the organisation’s website.

He said Israel’s “consistent unwillingness to seriously investigate alleged war crimes”, coupled with Palestinian rocket fire at Israeli civilian areas, underscored the importance of an ongoing investigation into both sides by the International Criminal Court (ICC).

There was no immediate reaction to the report by the Israeli military, which has repeatedly said its attacks were aimed at military targets in Gaza.

Hamas, which governs the Gaza Strip, fired rockets towards Israel after the latter ignored an ultimatum demanding Israel stand down its security forces from the Al Aqsa Mosque compound in occupied East Jerusalem after days of violence against Palestinian protesters.

Israeli security forces had been violently suppressing demonstrations against Israel’s raids and attacks on worshippers in the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound, and the threatened expulsion of dozens of Palestinian families in favour of Jewish settlers in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood.

In all, Hamas fired more than 4,000 rockets and mortars towards Israel, while Israel says it struck more than 1,000 targets linked to the armed groups in Gaza.

According to Gaza’s health ministry, some 260 people were killed in Gaza, including at least 67 children and 39 women. Twelve civilians, including two children, were killed in Israel, along with one soldier.

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