

Amnesty says Israel has chilling disregard for life in occupied West Bank



The Nour Shams refugee camp in the occupied West Bank has been a target of repeated raids by Israeli forces, who regularly kill, wound and detain Palestinians during these operations [Raneen Sawafta/Reuters]

New York, February 6 (RHC)-- Israel has unleashed illegal lethal force against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, carrying out unlawful killings and displaying “a chilling disregard for Palestinian lives”, Amnesty International says.

The human rights organisation said in a report released on Monday that Israel’s actions in the territory have intensified during its war on Gaza and its military and other bodies are committing numerous illegal acts of violence that amount to clear violations of international law.

The world’s eyes are mostly on the Gaza Strip, where the Israeli military has killed more than 27,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, since the start of the war on October 7. But Israeli forces are also carrying out unlawful killings in occupied Palestinian territories, Amnesty said in the report.

The document was compiled with remote interviews with witnesses, first responders and local residents as well as verified videos and photos. “Under the cover of the relentless bombardment and atrocity crimes in Gaza, Israeli forces have unleashed unlawful lethal force against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank, carrying out unlawful killings and displaying a chilling disregard for Palestinian lives,” said Erika Guevara-Rosas, Amnesty International’s director of global research, advocacy and policy.

“These unlawful killings are in blatant violation of international human rights law and are committed with impunity in the context of maintaining Israel’s institutionalized regime of systematic oppression and domination over Palestinians.”

Palestinians in the West Bank were already experiencing deadly Israeli raids on a regular basis even before the war, but there has been an explosive increase in the number of Israeli attacks since October.

According to figures by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Israel killed at least 507 Palestinians in the occupied West Bank in 2023, including at least 81 children, making it the deadliest year since the organisation started recording casualties in 2005.

UN numbers also show that 299 Palestinians were killed from the start of the war until the end of 2023, a 50 percent increase compared with the first nine months of the year. At least 61 more Palestinians, including 13 children, were killed by Israeli forces in January, the UN said.

Amnesty International’s analysis of a 30-hour-long Israeli raid on the Nour Shams refugee camp in Tulkarem that took place on October 19 demonstrates the tactics employed by the Israeli military.

In that raid, Israeli soldiers used a large number of military vehicles and soldiers to storm more than 40 homes. They destroyed personal belongings, drilled holes in walls for sniper outposts, cut off water and electricity to the refugee camp, and used bulldozers to destroy public roads, electricity networks and water infrastructure. By the end of the raid, they had killed 13 Palestinians, including six children, four of them under the age of 16, and had arrested 15 Palestinians.

One Israeli border police officer was killed after an improvised explosive device was used against a military convoy. Among those killed during the raid was an unarmed 15-year-old named Taha Mahamid, whom Israeli forces shot dead in front of his house as he came out to check whether Israeli forces had left the area, Amnesty said.

“They did not give him a chance,” said Fatima, Taha’s sister. “In an instant, my brother was eliminated. Three bullets were fired without any mercy. The first bullet hit him in the leg. The second in his stomach. Third in his eye. There were no confrontations. ... There was no conflict.”

Taha’s father, Ibrahim, tried to carry his son to safety while unarmed but was shot and suffered serious internal injuries.

“This unnecessary use of lethal force should be investigated as possible war crimes of wilful killing and wilfully causing great suffering or serious injury to body or health,” Amnesty said.

But that was not the end of the Israeli operation for the family. About 12 hours after Taha’s killing, the Israeli military stormed his family’s home and locked his family members, including three children, in a room under the supervision of a soldier for about 10 hours.

They also drilled holes in the walls of two rooms to position snipers overlooking the neighbourhood. One witness said the soldiers searched the house, beating a member of the family, and one was seen urinating on the doorstep.

The extensive damage done by Israeli bulldozers to the narrow streets of the refugee camp meant that ambulances could not get through, hampering medical evacuation of the injured.

Amnesty also documented instances in which Israeli forces directly opened fire on ambulances and medical staff. The obstruction of medical assistance to Palestinians by Israeli forces is now “routine practice”, the human rights organisation said.

It documented one instance in which Israeli soldiers prevented ambulances from reaching victims who ended up bleeding to death. “The victims were later collected by an Israeli military ambulance, and their bodies have yet to be returned to their families,” Amnesty said.

The organisation also documented how the Israeli military cracks down on peaceful Palestinian protests held in solidarity with the people of Gaza, firing live bullets and tear gas canisters into crowds.

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